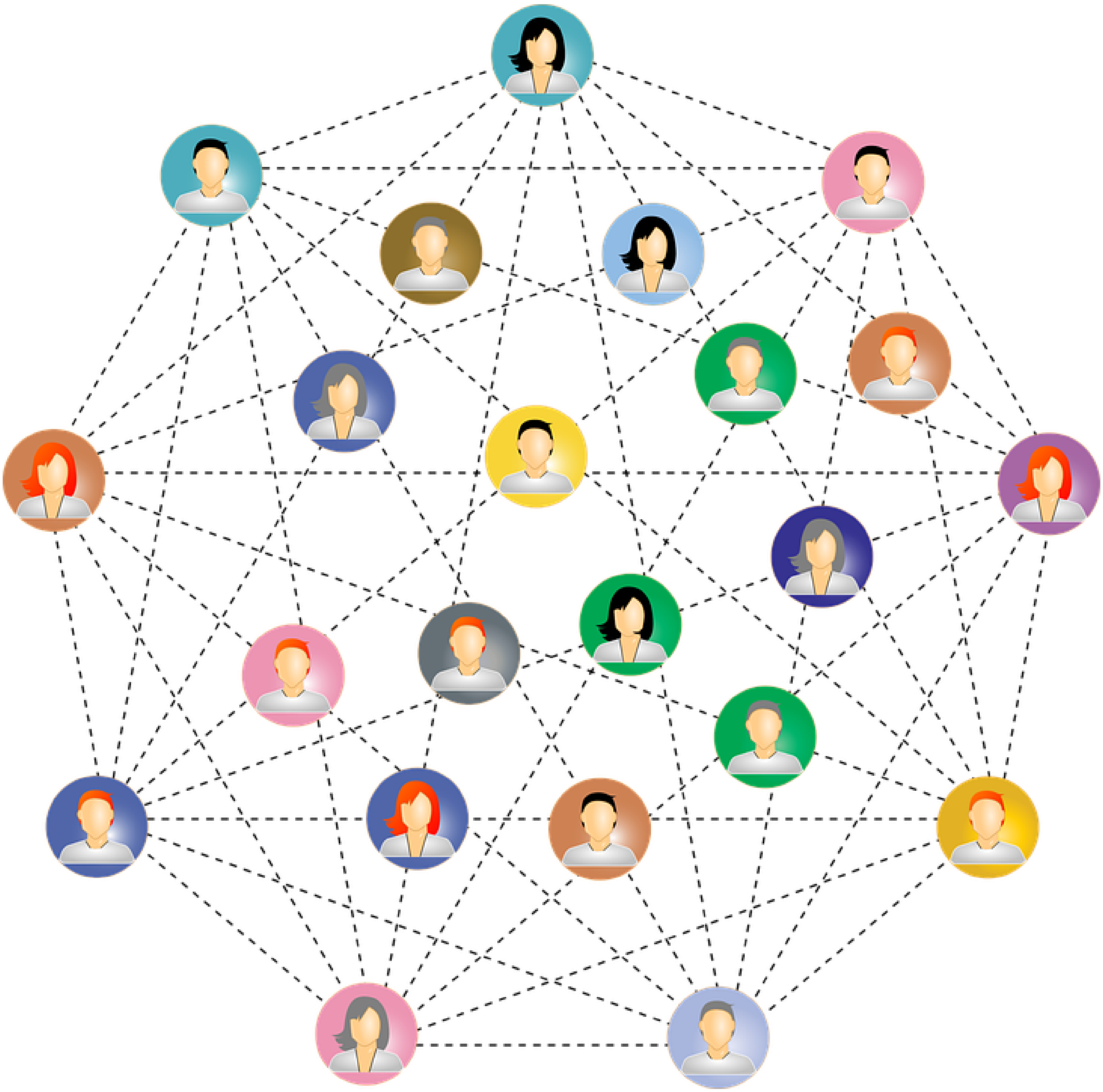
Psychology of Human Relations



By Stevy Scarbrough, PhD

Psychology of Human Relations

By Stevy Scarbrough, PhD (Published 2023)

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WELCOME TO *PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN RELATIONS*

Welcome Dear Reader!

I hope you find this textbook to be a useful and engaging resource for your journey of self-discovery. Understanding human relations is a valuable skill for anyone entering into the job market. The aim of this textbook is to aid readers in understanding their own behaviors and the behaviors of others with the intent of engaging in positive interactions in personal and professional spaces.

I was motivated to develop this textbook as a resource for my Psychology of Human Relations courses as I was unable to find a free open educational resource (OER) already available in human relations that emphasized the practical application of psychological concepts and also addressed the ways in which culture and diversity impact human relations, to help students engage in positive interactions with others in their personal and professional lives. With the rising costs of textbooks making education less affordable, I believe it is imperative to find ways to aid students in being able to further their education. Thus, I was excited to receive support from Open Oregon Educational Resources to edit together this textbook from several existing OER resources that had insights to offer from the disciplines of Psychology, Business, Communication, and Sociology. This information in this textbook is digitally and freely accessible and will undergo regular updates to remain current and relevant. Please reach out to me with any feedback that may help improve this textbook and make it more accessible for readers. Thank you for choosing to develop your human relations skills! I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
Stevy

Textbook Organization

This textbook contains 10 chapters to fit the format of the Oregon quarter system, with each term consisting of 10 weeks of instruction and a final exam week. While the chapter order is designed to flow from learning about the self to learning about how to interact with others, the chapters can be taught in a different order from how they are organized. The first two chapters, Self- Concept and Cultural Diversity, provide a solid foundation of concepts related to knowing the self and understanding differences. I would recommend that these two chapters are taught first as all other chapters tie back to these in different ways. Chapters 3-6 focus on learning about the self through behavioral change, personality, emotions, and perception. Chapters 7-10 focus on learning about interacting with others through interpersonal communication, stress, conflict resolution, and workplace success. Accompanying activities are included for each chapter in the appendix. All activities have been developed by me and hold a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license. You are welcome to use and remix them for non-commercial purposes as long as you make them available to everyone as well.

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Chapter 1: Self-Concept

Human Relations can be defined as relations with or between people. The study of human relations is particularly interested in how people relate with others in workplace settings. Throughout this text, we will explore various topics that will help us understand ourselves and how to relate with others in personal and professional contexts.

To understand and develop strong human relations skills, you will begin by learning more about how you view yourself. In this chapter you will explore the question "Who am I?" as you learn about the psychological concepts of identity, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and how they inform your overall self-concept. This will provide you with a strong foundation to build upon in subsequent chapters. First, you will examine your self-concept.

1.1 Understanding the Self

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.
- Apply self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy to personal experiences.
- Compare and contrast how social and family influences, culture, and media influence self-perception.

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks he or she is. If I said, “Tell me who you are,” your answers would be clues as to how you see yourself, your self-concept. Each person has an overall self-concept that might be encapsulated in a short list of overarching characteristics that he or she finds important. But each person’s self-concept is also influenced by context, meaning we think differently about ourselves depending on the situation we are in. In some situations, personal characteristics, such as our abilities, personality, and other distinguishing features, will best describe who we are. You might consider yourself laid back, traditional, funny, open minded, or driven, or you might label yourself a leader or a thrill seeker. In other situations, our self-concept may be tied to group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a member of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, a Southerner, or a member of the track team (Figure 1.1).

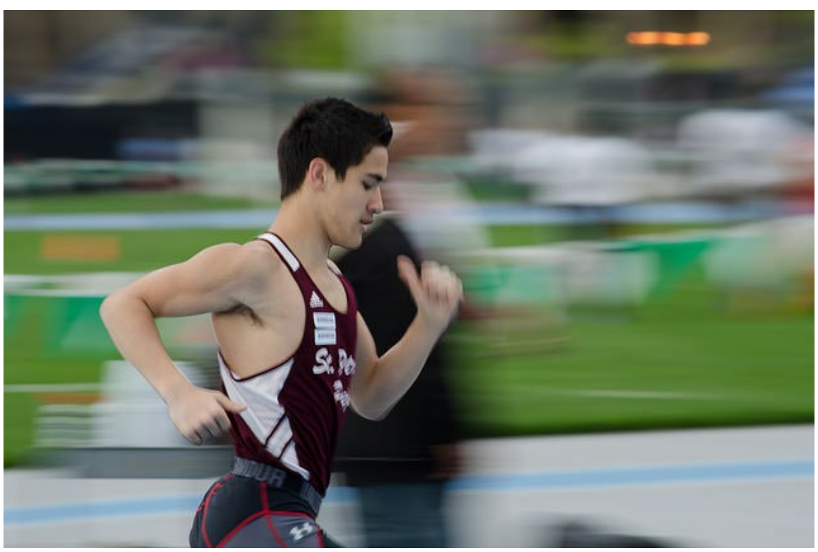

Figure 1.1 Men are more likely than women to include group memberships in their self-concept descriptions.– In Control – Stefano Ravalli – CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Our self-concept is also formed through our interactions with others and their reactions to us. The concept of the **looking glass self** explains that we see ourselves reflected in other people's reactions to us and then form our self-concept based on how we believe other people see us (Cooley, 1902). This reflective process of building our self-concept is based on what other people have actually said, such as "You're a good listener," and other people's actions, such as coming to you for advice. These thoughts evoke emotional responses that feed into our self-concept. For example, you may think, "I'm glad that people can count on me to listen to their problems."

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. **Social comparison theory** states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference (Hargie, 2011). In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn't appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

We also engage in social comparison based on similarity and difference. Since self-concept is context specific, similarity may be desirable in some situations and difference more desirable in others. Factors like age and personality may influence whether or not we want to fit in or stand out. Although we compare ourselves to others throughout our lives, adolescent and teen years usually bring new pressure to be similar to or different from particular reference groups. Think of all the cliques in high school and how people voluntarily and involuntarily broke off into groups based on popularity, interest, culture, or grade level. Some kids in your high school probably wanted to fit in with and be similar to other people in the marching band but be different from the football players. Conversely, athletes were probably more apt to compare themselves, in terms of similar athletic ability, to other athletes rather than kids in show choir. But social comparison can be complicated by perceptual influences. As we learned earlier, we organize information based on similarity and difference, but these patterns don't always hold true. Even though students involved in athletics and students involved in arts may seem very different, a dancer or singer may also be very athletic, perhaps even more so than a member of the football team. As with other aspects of perception, there are positive and negative consequences of social comparison.

We generally want to know where we fall in terms of ability and performance as compared to others, but what people do with this information and how it affects self-concept varies. Not all people feel they need to be at the top of the list, but some won't stop until they get the high score on the video game or set a new school record in a track-and-field event. Some people strive to be first chair in the clarinet section of the orchestra, while another person may be content to be second chair. The education system promotes social comparison through grades and rewards such as honor rolls and dean's lists. Although education and privacy laws prevent teachers from displaying each student's grade on a test or paper for the whole class to see, teachers do typically report the aggregate grades, meaning the total number of As, Bs, Cs, and so on. This doesn't violate anyone's privacy rights, but it allows students to see where they fell in the distribution.

This type of social comparison can be used as motivation. The student who was one of only three out of twenty-three to get a D on the exam knows that most of her classmates are performing better than she is, which may lead her to think, "If they can do it, I can do it." But social comparison that isn't reasoned can have negative effects and result in negative thoughts like "Look at how bad I did. Man, I'm stupid!" These negative thoughts can lead to negative behaviors, because we try to maintain internal consistency, meaning we act in ways that match up with our self-concept. So, if the student begins to question her academic abilities and then incorporates an assessment of herself as a "bad student" into her self-concept, she may then behave in ways consistent with that, which is only going to worsen her academic performance. Additionally, a student might be comforted to learn that he isn't the only person who got a D and then not feel the need to try to improve, since he has company. You can see in this example that evaluations we place on our self-concept can lead to cycles of thinking and acting. These cycles relate to self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are components of our self-concept.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept. While self-concept is a broad description of the self, self-esteem is a more specifically an evaluation of the self (Byrne, 1996). If I again prompted you to "Tell me who you are," and then asked you to evaluate (label as good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable) each of the things you listed about yourself, I would get clues about your self-esteem (Figure 1.2). Like self-concept, self-esteem has general and specific elements. Generally, some people are more likely to evaluate themselves positively while others are more likely to evaluate themselves negatively (Brockner, 1988). More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our life span and across contexts.

Figure 1.2 Self-esteem varies throughout our lives, but some people generally think more positively of themselves and some people think more negatively. [trophy] – RHiNO NEAL – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

How we judge ourselves affects our communication and our behaviors, but not every negative or positive judgment carries the same weight. The negative evaluation of a trait that isn't very important for our self-concept will likely not result in a loss of self-esteem. For example, I am not very good at drawing. While I appreciate drawing as an art form, I don't consider drawing ability to be a very big part of my self-concept. If someone critiqued my drawing ability, my self-esteem wouldn't take a big hit. I do consider myself a good teacher, however, and I have spent and continue to spend considerable time and effort on improving my knowledge of teaching and my teaching skills. If someone critiqued my teaching knowledge and/or abilities, my self-esteem would definitely be hurt. This doesn't mean that we can't be evaluated on something we find important. Even though teaching is very important to my self-concept, I am regularly evaluated on it. Every semester, I am evaluated by my students, and every year, I am evaluated by my dean, department chair, and colleagues. Most of that feedback is in the form of constructive criticism, which can still be difficult to receive, but when taken in the spirit of self-improvement, it is valuable and may even enhance our self-concept and self-esteem. In fact, in professional contexts, people with higher self-esteem are more likely to work harder based on negative feedback, are less negatively affected by work stress, are able to handle workplace conflict better, and are better able to work independently and solve problems (Brockner, 1988). Self-esteem isn't the only factor that contributes to our self-concept; perceptions about our competence also play a role in developing our sense of self.

Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy refers to the judgments people make about their ability to perform a task within a specific context (Bandura, 1997). Judgments about our self-efficacy influence our self-esteem, which influences our self-concept. The following example also illustrates these interconnections (Figure 1.3).

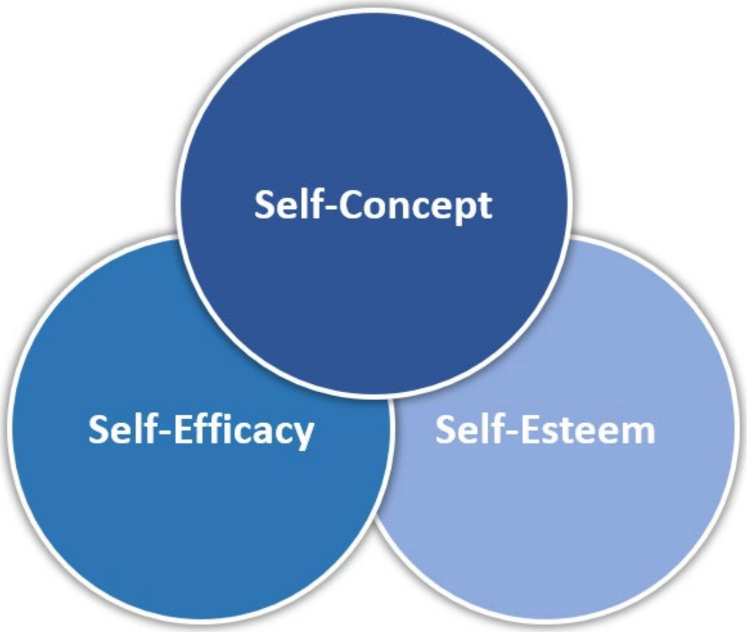

Figure 1.3 Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept. Self-Concept, Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem – Stevy.Scarbrough – CC BY-SA 4.0

Pedro did a good job on his first college speech. During a meeting with his professor, Pedro indicates that he is confident going into the next speech and thinks he will do well. This skill-based assessment is an indication that Pedro has a high level of self-efficacy related to public speaking. If he does well on the speech, the praise from his classmates and professor will reinforce his self-efficacy and lead him to positively evaluate his speaking skills, which will contribute to his self-esteem. By the end of the class, Pedro likely thinks of himself as a good public speaker, which may then become an important part of his self-concept. Throughout these points of connection, it's important to remember that self-perception affects how we communicate, behave, and perceive other things. Pedro's increased feeling of self-efficacy may give him more confidence in his delivery, which will likely result in positive feedback that reinforces his self-perception. He may start to perceive his professor more positively since they share an interest in public speaking, and he may begin to notice other people's speaking skills more during class presentations and public lectures. Over time, he may even start to think about changing his major to communication or pursuing career options that incorporate public speaking, which would further integrate being "a good public speaker" into his self-concept. You can hopefully see that these interconnections can create powerful positive or negative cycles. While some of this process is under our control, much of it is also shaped by the people in our lives.

The verbal and nonverbal feedback we get from people affect our feelings of self-efficacy and our self-esteem. As we saw in Pedro's example, being given positive feedback can increase our self-efficacy, which may make us more likely to engage in a similar task in the future (Hargie, 2011). Obviously, negative feedback can lead to decreased self-efficacy and a declining interest in engaging with the activity again. In general, people adjust their expectations about their abilities based on feedback they get from others. Positive feedback tends to make people raise their expectations for themselves and negative feedback does the opposite, which ultimately affects behaviors and creates the cycle. When feedback from others is different from how we view ourselves, additional cycles may develop that impact self-esteem and self-concept.

Self-discrepancy theory states that people have beliefs about and expectations for their actual and potential selves that do not always match up with what they actually experience (Higgins, 1987). To understand this theory, we have to understand the different "selves" that make up our self-concept, which are the actual, ideal, and ought selves. The actual self consists of the attributes that you or someone else believes you *actually* possess. The ideal self consists of the attributes that you or someone else *would like you* to possess. The ought self consists of the attributes you or someone else believes you *should* possess.

These different selves can conflict with each other in various combinations. Discrepancies between the actual and ideal/ought selves can be motivating in some ways and prompt people to act for self-improvement (Figure 1.4). For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so. Discrepancies between the ideal and ought selves can be especially stressful. For example, many professional women who are also mothers have an ideal view of self that includes professional success and advancement. They may also have an ought self that includes a sense of duty and obligation to be a full-time mother. The actual self may be someone who does OK at both but doesn't quite live up to the expectations of either. These discrepancies do not just create cognitive unease—they also lead to emotional, behavioral, and communicative changes.

When we compare the actual self to the expectations of ourselves and others, we can see particular patterns of emotional and behavioral effects. When our actual self doesn't match up with our own ideals of self, we are not obtaining our own desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection including disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration. For example, if your ideal self has no credit card debt and your actual self does, you may be frustrated with your lack of financial discipline and be motivated to stick to your budget and pay off your credit card bills.

Figure 1.4 People who feel that it's their duty to recycle but do not actually do it will likely experience a discrepancy between their actual and ought selves. Recycle – Matt Martin – CC BY-NC 2.0

When our actual self doesn't match up with other people's ideals for us, we may not be obtaining significant others' desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection including shame, embarrassment, and concern for losing the affection or approval of others. For example, if a significant other sees you as an "A" student and you get a 2.8 GPA your first year of college, then you may be embarrassed to share your grades with that person.

When our actual self doesn't match up with what we think other people think we should obtain, we are not living up to the ought self that we think others have constructed for us, which can lead to feelings of agitation, feeling threatened, and fearing potential punishment. For example, if your parents think you should follow in their footsteps and take over the family business, but your actual self wants to go into the military, then you may be unsure of what to do and fear being isolated from the family.

Finally, when our actual self doesn't match up with what we think we should obtain, we are not meeting what we see as our duties or obligations, which can lead to feelings of agitation including guilt, weakness, and a feeling that we have fallen short of our moral standard (Higgins, 1987). For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so due to the guilt of reading about the increasing number of animals being housed at the facility.

The following is a review of the four potential discrepancies between selves:

- **Actual vs. own ideals.** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining our desires and hopes, which leads to feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration.
- **Actual vs. others' ideals.** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining significant others' desires and hopes for us, which leads to feelings of shame and embarrassment.
- **Actual vs. others' ought.** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting what others see as our duties and obligations, which leads to feelings of agitation including fear of potential punishment.
- **Actual vs. own ought.** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting our duties and obligations, which can lead to a feeling that we have fallen short of our own moral standards.

Influences on Self-Perception

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

Social and Family Influences

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

Parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self (Hargie, 2011). In the past few years, however, there has been a public discussion and debate about how much positive reinforcement people should give to others, especially children. The following questions have been raised: Do we have current and upcoming generations that have been overpraised? Is the praise given warranted? What are the positive and negative effects of praise? What is the end goal of the praise? Let's briefly look at this discussion and its connection to self-perception.

Figure 1.5 Some experts have warned that overpraising children can lead to distorted self-concepts. participation award – Rain0975 – CC BY-ND 2.0

Whether praise is warranted or not is very subjective and specific to each person and context, but in general there have been questions raised about the potential negative effects of too much praise. Motivation is the underlying force that drives us to do things. Sometimes we are intrinsically motivated, meaning we want to do something for the love of doing it or the resulting internal satisfaction. Other times we are extrinsically motivated, meaning we do something to receive a reward or avoid punishment. If you put effort into completing a short documentary for a class because you love filmmaking and editing, you have been largely motivated by intrinsic forces. If you complete the documentary because you want an "A" and know that if you fail your parents will not give you money for your spring break trip, then you are motivated by extrinsic factors. Both can, of course, effectively motivate us. Praise is a form of extrinsic reward, and if there is an actual reward associated with the praise, like money or special recognition, some people speculate that intrinsic motivation will suffer. But what's so good about intrinsic motivation? Intrinsic motivation is more substantial and long-lasting than extrinsic motivation and can lead to the development of a work ethic and sense of pride in one's abilities. Intrinsic motivation can move people to accomplish great things over long periods of time and be happy despite the effort and sacrifices made. Extrinsic motivation dies when the reward stops. Additionally, too much praise can lead people to have a misguided sense of their abilities. College professors who are reluctant to fail students who produce failing work may be setting those students up to be shocked when their supervisor critiques their abilities or output once they get into a professional context (Hargie, 2011).

There are cultural differences in the amount of praise and positive feedback that teachers and parents give their children. For example, teachers give less positive reinforcement in Japanese and Taiwanese classrooms than do teachers in US classrooms. Chinese and Kenyan parents do not regularly praise their children because they fear it may make them too individualistic, rude, or arrogant (Wierzbicka, 2004). So, the phenomenon of overpraising isn't universal, and the debate over its potential effects is not resolved.

Research has also found that communication patterns develop between parents and children that are common to many verbally and physically abusive relationships. Such patterns have negative effects on a child's self-efficacy and self-esteem (Morgan & Wilson, 2007). As you'll recall from our earlier discussion, attributions are links we make to identify the cause of a behavior. In the case of aggressive or abusive parents, they are not as able to distinguish between mistakes and intentional behaviors, often seeing honest mistakes as intended and reacting negatively to the child. Such parents also communicate generally negative evaluations to their child by saying, for example, "You can't do anything right!" or "You're a bad girl." When children do exhibit positive behaviors, abusive parents are more likely to use external attributions that diminish the achievement of the child by saying, for example, "You only won because the other team was off their game." In general, abusive parents have unpredictable reactions to their children's positive and negative behavior, which creates an uncertain and often scary climate for a child that can lead to lower self-esteem and erratic or aggressive behavior. The cycles of praise and blame are just two examples of how the family as a socializing force can influence our self-perceptions. Culture also influences how we see ourselves.

Culture

How people perceive themselves varies across cultures. For example, many cultures exhibit a phenomenon known as the **self-enhancement bias**, meaning that we tend to emphasize our desirable qualities relative to other people (Loughnan et al., 2011). But the degree to which people engage in self-enhancement varies. A review of many studies in this area found that people in Western countries such as the United States were significantly more likely to self-enhance than people in countries such as Japan. Many scholars explain this variation using a common measure of cultural variation that claims people in individualistic cultures are more likely to engage in competition and openly praise accomplishments than people in collectivistic cultures. The difference in self-enhancement has also been tied to economics, with scholars arguing that people in countries with greater income inequality are more likely to view themselves as superior to others or want to be perceived as superior to others (even if they don't have economic wealth) in order to conform to the country's values and norms. This holds true because countries with high levels of economic inequality, like the United States, typically value competition and the right to boast about winning or succeeding, while countries with more economic equality, like Japan, have a cultural norm of modesty (Loughnan, 2011).

Race also plays a role in self-perception. For example, positive self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to be higher in African American adolescent girls than Caucasian girls (Stockton et al., 2009). In fact, more recent studies have discounted much of the early research on race and self-esteem that purported that African Americans of all ages have lower self-esteem than whites. Self-perception becomes more complex when we consider biracial individuals—more specifically those born to couples comprising an African American and a white parent (Bowles, 1993). In such cases, it is challenging for biracial individuals to embrace both of their heritages, and social comparison becomes more difficult due to diverse and sometimes conflicting reference groups. Since many biracial individuals identify as and are considered African American by society, living and working within a black community can help foster more positive self-perceptions in these biracial individuals. Such a community offers a more nurturing environment and a buffer zone from racist attitudes but simultaneously distances biracial individuals from their white identity. Conversely, immersion into a predominantly white community and separation from a black community can lead biracial individuals to internalize negative views of people of color and perhaps develop a sense of inferiority.

Gender intersects with culture and biracial identity to create different experiences and challenges for biracial men and women. Biracial men have more difficulty accepting their potential occupational limits, especially if they have white fathers, and biracial women have difficulty accepting their black features, such as hair and facial features. All these challenges lead to a sense of being marginalized from both ethnic groups and interfere in the development of positive self-esteem and a stable self-concept (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6 Biracial individuals may have challenges with self-perception as they try to integrate both racial identities into their self-concept. End of Summer Innocence – Javcon117 – CC BY-SA 2.0

There are some general differences in terms of gender and self-perception that relate to self-concept, self-efficacy, and envisioning ideal selves. As with any cultural differences, these are generalizations that have been supported by research, but they do not represent all individuals within a group. Regarding self-concept, men are more likely to describe themselves in terms of their group membership, and women are more likely to include references to relationships in their self-descriptions. For example, a man may note that he is a Tarheel fan, a boat enthusiast, or a member of the Rotary Club, and a woman may note that she is a mother of two or a loyal friend.

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Regarding self-efficacy, men tend to have higher perceptions of self-efficacy than women (Hargie, 2011). In terms of actual and ideal selves, men and women in a variety of countries both described their ideal self as more masculine (Best & Thomas, 2004). As was noted earlier, gender differences are interesting to study but are very often exaggerated beyond the actual variations. Socialization and internalization of societal norms for gender differences accounts for much more of our perceived differences than do innate or natural differences between genders. These gender norms may be explicitly stated—for example, a mother may say to her son, “Boys don’t play with dolls”—or they may be more implicit, with girls being encouraged to pursue historically feminine professions like teaching or nursing without others actually stating the expectation.

Media

The representations we see in the media affect our self-perception. The vast majority of media images include idealized representations of attractiveness. Despite the fact that the images of people we see in glossy magazines and on movie screens are not typically what we see when we look at the people around us in a classroom, at work, or at the grocery store, many of us continue to hold ourselves to an unrealistic standard of beauty and attractiveness. Movies, magazines, and television shows are filled with beautiful people, and less attractive actors, when they are present in the media, are typically portrayed as the butt of jokes, villains, or only as background extras (Patzer, 2008). Aside from overall attractiveness, the media also offers narrow representations of acceptable body weight.

Researchers have found that only 12 percent of prime-time characters are overweight, which is dramatically less than the national statistics for obesity among the actual US population (Patzer, 2008). Further, an analysis of how weight is discussed on prime-time sitcoms found that heavier female characters were often the targets of negative comments and jokes that audience members responded to with laughter. Conversely, positive comments about women's bodies were related to their thinness. In short, the heavier the character, the more negative the comments, and the thinner the character, the more positive the comments. The same researchers analyzed sitcoms for content regarding male characters' weight and found that although comments regarding their weight were made, they were fewer in number and not as negative, ultimately supporting the notion that overweight male characters are more accepted in media than overweight female characters. Much more attention has been paid in recent years to the potential negative effects of such narrow media representations. The following "Getting Critical" box explores the role of media in the construction of body image.

In terms of self-concept, media representations offer us guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable and valued or not valued in our society. Mediated messages, in general, reinforce cultural stereotypes related to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and class. People from historically marginalized groups must look much harder than those in the dominant groups to find positive representations of their identities in media. As a critical thinker, it is important to question media messages and to examine who is included and who is excluded.

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

Summary

- Our self-concept is the overall idea of who we think we are. It is developed through our interactions with others and through social comparison that allows us to compare our beliefs and behaviors to others.
- Our self-esteem is based on the evaluations and judgments we make about various characteristics of our self-concept. It is developed through an assessment and evaluation of our various skills and abilities, known as self-efficacy, and through a comparison and evaluation of who we are, who we would like to be, and who we should be (self-discrepancy theory).
- Socializing forces like family, culture, and media affect our self-perception because they give us feedback on who we are. This feedback can be evaluated positively or negatively and can lead to positive or negative patterns that influence our self-perception and then our communication.

Discussion Questions

1. Compare and contrast self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Provide examples of each.
2. Choose one of the socializing forces discussed (family, culture, or media) and identify at least one positive and one negative influence that it/they have had on your self-concept and/or self-esteem.
3. Discuss some ways that you might strategically engage in self-presentation to influence the impressions of others in academic, professional, personal, or civic contexts.

Remix/Revisions Featured in this Section

- Editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of 2.3 Perceiving and Presenting Self (Communication in the Real World – University of Minnesota)
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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1.2 Exploring Identity

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Compare and contrast personal, social, and cultural identities.
- Apply personal, social, and cultural identities to personal experiences.

"Who am I?" This question has been the central plot of many coming-of-age movies, such as The Breakfast Club (1985), Superbad (2007), Love, Simon (2018), Booksmart (2019), etc. In these movies, and in our own lives, we have grappled with how to answer this question. According to Erickson's (1968) Psychosocial Theory of Development, adolescents enter a stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion, in which they explore and experiment with their identities, seeking to answer the question, "Who am I?" **Identity** exploration is about determining a sense of self and figuring out who also shares similar affiliations or social roles (APA).

Identity is marked by similarity, that is of the people like us, and by difference, of those who are not. How do we know which people are the same as us? What information do we use to categorize others and ourselves? What is often important is a *symbol*, like a badge, a team scarf, a newspaper, the language we speak, or perhaps the clothes we wear. Sometimes it is obvious. A badge can be a clear public statement that we identify with a particular group. Sometimes it is more subtle, but symbols and representations are important in marking the ways in which we share identities with some people and distinguish ourselves as different from others. In the rest of this section, we will examine the various types of identities that we develop and which identities we choose for ourselves and those that are chosen for us.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Recall from our earlier discussion of self-concept that we develop a sense of who we are based on what is reflected back on us from other people. Our parents, friends, teachers, and the media help shape our identities. While this happens from birth, most people in Western societies reach a stage in adolescence where maturing cognitive abilities and increased social awareness led them to begin to reflect on who they are. This begins a lifelong process of thinking about who we are now, who we were before, and who we will become (Tatum, B. D., 2000).

Our identities make up an important part of our self-concept and can be broken down into three main categories: personal, social, and cultural identities (Table 1.1). We must avoid the temptation to think of our identities as constant. Instead, our identities are formed through processes that started before we were born and will continue after we are gone; therefore, our identities aren't something we achieve or complete.

Table 1.1 Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Personal	Social	Cultural
Reader	Book Club Member	Female
Animal Lover	Honor Society Member	Multiracial
Introverted	Psychology Teacher	Buddhist
Gamer	E-Sports Team Member	Straight

Two related but distinct components of our identities are our personal and social identities (Spreckels, J. & Kotthoff, H., 2009). **Personal identities** include the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences. For example, I consider myself a puzzle lover, and you may identify as a fan of hip-hop music.
Our **social identities** are the components of self that are derived from involvement in social groups with which we are interpersonally committed.

Figure 1.7 Pledging a fraternity or sorority is an example of a social identity. IMG_2749 – Adaenn – CC BY-NC 2.0

For example, we may derive aspects of our social identity from our family or from a community of fans for a sports team. Social identities differ from personal identities because they are externally organized through membership. Our membership may be voluntary (Greek organization on campus) or involuntary (family) and explicit (we pay dues to our labor union) or implicit (we purchase and listen to hip-hop music). There are innumerous options for personal and social identities. While our personal identity choices express who we are, our social identities align us with particular groups. Through our social identities, we make statements about who we are and who we are not.

Personal identities may change often as people have new experiences and develop new interests and hobbies. A current interest in online video games may give way to an interest in graphic design. Social identities do not change as often because they take more time to develop, as you must become interpersonally invested. For example, if an interest in online video games leads someone to become a member of a MMORPG, or a massively multiplayer online role-playing game community, that personal identity has led to a social identity that is now interpersonal and more entrenched.

Cultural identities are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting (Yep, G. A., 2002). Since we are often a part of them since birth, cultural identities are the least changeable of the three. The ways of being and the social expectations for behavior within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (Collier, M. J., 1996). For example, think of how ways of being and acting have changed for African Americans since the civil rights movement. Additionally, common ways of being and acting within a cultural identity group are expressed through communication. In order to be accepted as a member of a cultural group, members must be acculturated, essentially learning and using a code that other group members will be able to recognize. We are acculturated into our various cultural identities in obvious and less obvious ways. We may literally have a parent or friend tell us what it means to be a man or a woman. We may also unconsciously consume messages from popular culture that offer representations of gender.

Any of these identity types can be ascribed or avowed. **Ascribed identities** are personal, social, or cultural identities that are placed on us by others, while **avowed identities** are those that we claim for ourselves (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Sometimes people ascribe an identity to someone else based on stereotypes. You may see a person who likes to read science-fiction books, watches documentaries, has glasses, and collects Star Trek memorabilia and label him or her a nerd. If the person doesn't avow that identity, it can create friction, and that label may even hurt the other person's feelings. But ascribed and avowed identities can match up. To extend the previous example, there has been a movement in recent years to reclaim the label *nerd* and turn it into a positive, and a nerd subculture has been growing in popularity. For example, MC Frontalot, a leader in the nerdcore hip-hop movement, says that being branded a nerd in school was terrible, but now he raps about "nerdy" things like blogs to sold-out crowds (Shipman, 2007). We can see from this example that our ascribed and avowed identities change over the course of our lives, and sometimes they match up and sometimes not.

Although some identities are essentially permanent, the degree to which we are aware of them, also known as salience, changes. The intensity with which we avow an identity also changes based on context. For example, an African American may not have difficulty deciding which box to check on the demographic section of a survey. But if an African American becomes president of her college's Black Student Union, she may more intensely avow her African American identity, which has now become more salient. If she studies abroad in Africa her junior year, she may be ascribed an identity of American by her new African friends rather than African American. For the Africans, their visitor's identity as American is likely more salient than her identity as someone of African descent. If someone is biracial or multiracial, they may change their racial identification as they engage in an identity search. One intercultural communication scholar writes of his experiences as an “Asianlatinoamerican” (Yep, 2002). He notes repressing his Chinese identity as an adolescent living in Peru and then later embracing his Chinese identity and learning about his family history while in college in the United States. This example shows how even national identity fluctuates. Obviously one can change nationality by becoming a citizen of another country, although most people do not.

Throughout modern history, cultural and social influences have established dominant and nondominant groups (Allen, 2011). **Dominant identities** historically had and currently have more resources and influence while **nondominant identities** historically had and currently have less resources and influence. It is important to remember that these distinctions are being made at the societal level, not the individual level. There are obviously exceptions, with people in groups considered nondominant obtaining more resources and power than a person in a dominant group. However, the overall trend is that difference based on cultural groups has been institutionalized, and exceptions do not change this fact. Because of this uneven distribution of resources and power, members of dominant groups are granted privileges while nondominant groups are at a disadvantage. The main nondominant groups must face various forms of institutionalized discrimination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. As we will discuss later, privilege and disadvantage, like similarity and difference, are not “all or nothing.” No two people are completely different or completely similar, and no one person is completely privileged or completely disadvantaged.

Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

We can get a better understanding of current cultural identities by unpacking how they came to be. By looking at history, we can see how cultural identities that seem to have existed forever actually came to be constructed for various political and social reasons and how they have changed over time. Communication plays a central role in this construction. As we have already discussed, our identities are relational and communicative; they are also constructed. Social constructionism is a view that argues the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relationship to social, cultural, and political contexts (Allen, 2011). In this section, we’ll explore how the cultural identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability have been constructed in the United States. There are other important identities that could be discussed, like religion, age, nationality, and class. Although they are not given their own section, consider how those identities may intersect with the identities discussed next.

Race

Would it surprise you to know that human beings, regardless of how they are racially classified, share 99.9 percent of their DNA? This finding by the Human Genome Project asserts that race is a social construct, not a biological one (Figure 1.8). The American Anthropological Association agrees, stating that race is the product of "historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (Allen, 2011). Therefore, we will define race as a socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that has been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others.

Figure 1.8 There is actually no biological basis for racial classification among humans, as we share 99.9 percent of our DNA. friends – Evelyn – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Race didn't become a socially and culturally recognized marker until European colonial expansion in the 1500s. As Western Europeans traveled to parts of the world previously unknown to them and encountered people who were different from them, a hierarchy of races began to develop that placed lighter skinned Europeans above darker skinned people. At the time, newly developing fields in natural and biological sciences took interest in examining the new locales, including the plant and animal life, natural resources, and native populations. Over the next three hundred years, science that we would now undoubtedly recognize as flawed, biased, and racist legitimated notions that native populations were less evolved than white Europeans, often calling them savages. In fact, there were scientific debates as to whether some of the native populations should be considered human or animal. Racial distinctions have been based largely on phenotypes, or physiological features such as skin color, hair texture, and body/facial features. Western "scientists" used these differences as "proof" that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen, 2011). Even though there is a consensus among experts that race is social rather than biological, we can't deny that race still has meaning in our society and affects people as if it were "real."

Discussing race in the United States is difficult for many reasons. One is due to uncertainty about language use. People may be frustrated by their perception that labels change too often or be afraid of using an “improper” term and being viewed as racially insensitive. It is important, however, that we not let political correctness get in the way of meaningful dialogues and learning opportunities related to difference.

Racial classifications used by the government and our regular communication about race in the United States have changed frequently, which further points to the social construction of race. Currently, the primary racial groups in the United States are African American, Asian American, European American, Latino/a, and Native American, but a brief look at changes in how the US Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn’t always been the case (Table 1.2). In the 1900s alone, there were twenty-six different ways that race was categorized on census forms (Allen, 2011). The way we communicate about race in our regular interactions has also changed, and many people are still hesitant to discuss race for fear of using “the wrong” vocabulary.

The five primary racial groups noted previously can still be broken down further to specify a particular region, country, or nation. For example, Asian Americans are diverse in terms of country and language of origin and cultural practices. While the category of Asian Americans can be useful when discussing broad trends, it can also generalize among groups, which can lead to stereotypes. You may find that someone identifies as Chinese American or Korean American instead of Asian American. In this case, the label further highlights a person’s cultural lineage. We should not assume, however, that someone identifies with his or her cultural lineage, as many people have more in common with their US American peers than a culture that may be one or more generations removed.

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an *N* for Negro. Later she referred to herself as *colored* because that’s what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term *black* had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word *black,* and the slogan “black is beautiful” was commonly used. Brenda Allen acknowledges the newer label of *African American* but notes that she still prefers *black*. The terms *colored* and *Negro* are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some, it is not to others. Currently, the terms *African American* and *black* are frequently used, and both are considered acceptable. The phrase *people of color* is acceptable for most and is used to be inclusive of other racial minorities. If you are unsure what to use, you could always observe how a person refers to themself, or you could ask for their preference. In any case, a competent communicator defers to and respects the preference of the individual.

Table 1.2 Racial Classifications in the US Census

Year(s)	Development
1790	No category for race
1800s	Race was defined by the percentage of African "blood." *Mulatto* was one black and one white parent, *quadroon* was one-quarter African blood, and *octoroon* was one-eighth.
1830-1940	The term *color* was used instead of *race*.
1900	Racial categories included white, black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Census takers were required to check one of these boxes based on visual cues. Individuals did not get to select a racial classification on their own until 1970.
1950	The term *color* was dropped and replaced by *race*.
1960, 1970	Both *race* and *color* were used on census forms.
1980-2010	*Race* again became the only term.
2000	Individuals were allowed to choose more than one racial category for the first time in census history.
2010	The census included fifteen racial categories and an option to write in races not listed on the form.
2020*	The census added write in options to the White, Black or African American, and American Indian or Alaska Native racial categories to provide specific origins. There are 15 racial categories listed in total, with the option to select multiple categories.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 71–72. * From Marks (2021).

The history of immigration in the United States also ties to the way that race has been constructed. The metaphor of the "melting pot" has been used to describe the immigration history of the United States but doesn't capture the experiences of many immigrant groups (Allen, 2011). Generally, immigrant groups who were white, or light skinned, and spoke English were better able to assimilate, or melt into the melting pot. But immigrant groups that we might think of as white today were not always considered so. Irish immigrants were discriminated against and even portrayed as black in cartoons that appeared in newspapers. In some Southern states, Italian immigrants were forced to go to black schools, and it wasn't until 1952 that Asian immigrants were allowed to become citizens of the United States. All this history is important, because it continues to influence communication among races today.

Gender

When we first meet a newborn baby, we ask whether it's a boy or a girl. This question illustrates the importance of gender in organizing our social lives and our interpersonal relationships. A Canadian family became aware of the deep emotions people feel about gender and the great discomfort people feel when they can't determine gender when they announced to the world that they were not going to tell anyone the gender of their baby, aside from the baby's siblings. Their desire for their child, named Storm, to be able to experience early life without the boundaries and categories of gender brought criticism from many (Davis & James, 2011). Conversely, many parents consciously or unconsciously "code" their newborns in gendered ways based on our society's associations of pink clothing and accessories with girls and blue with boys.

While it's obvious to most people that colors aren't gendered, they take on new meaning when we assign gendered characteristics of masculinity and femininity to them. Just like race, gender is a socially constructed category. While it is true that there are biological differences between who we label male and female, the meaning our society places on those differences is what actually matters in our day-to-day lives. And the biological differences are interpreted differently around the world, which further shows that although we think gender is a natural, normal, stable way of classifying things, it is actually not. There is a long history of appreciation for people who cross gender lines in Native American and South-Central Asian cultures, to name just two.

You may have noticed I use the word *gender* instead of *sex*. That is because **gender** is an identity based on internalized cultural notions of masculinity and femininity that is constructed through communication and interaction. There are two important parts of this definition to unpack. First, we internalize notions of gender based on socializing institutions. Then we attempt to construct that gendered identity through our interactions with others, which is our gender expression. Sex is based on biological characteristics, including external genitalia, internal sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones (Wood, 2005). While the biological characteristics between men and women are obviously different, it is the meaning that we create and attach to those characteristics that makes them significant. The cultural differences in how that significance is ascribed are evidence that "our way of doing things" is arbitrary. For example, cross-cultural research has found that boys and girls in most cultures show both aggressive and nurturing tendencies, but cultures vary in terms of how they encourage these characteristics between genders. In a group in Africa, young boys are responsible for taking care of babies and are encouraged to be nurturing (Wood, 2005).

Gender has been constructed over the past few centuries in political and deliberate ways that have tended to favor men in terms of power. And various academic fields joined in the quest to "prove" there are "natural" differences between men and women. While the "proof" they presented was credible to many at the time, it seems blatantly sexist and inaccurate today. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, scientists who measure skulls, also known as craniometrists, claimed that men were more intelligent than women because they had larger brains. Leaders in the fast-growing fields of sociology and psychology argued that women were less evolved than men and had more in common with “children and savages” than adult (white) males (Allen, 2011). Doctors and other decision makers like politicians also used women’s menstrual cycles as evidence that they were irrational, or hysterical, and therefore couldn’t be trusted to vote, pursue higher education, or be in a leadership position. These are just a few of the many instances of how knowledge was created by seemingly legitimate scientific disciplines that we can now clearly see served to empower men and disempower women. This system is based on the ideology of patriarchy, which is a system of social structures and practices that maintains the values, priorities, and interests of men as a group (Wood, 2005). One of the ways patriarchy is maintained is by its relative invisibility. While women have been the focus of much research on gender differences, males have been largely unexamined. Men have been treated as the “generic” human being to which others are compared. But that ignores that fact that men have a gender, too. Masculinities studies have challenged that notion by examining how masculinities are performed.

There have been challenges to the construction of gender in recent decades. Since the 1960s, scholars and activists have challenged established notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The women’s rights movement in the United States dates back to the 1800s, when the first women’s rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood, 2005). Although most women’s rights movements have been led by white, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women’s rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the early women’s rights movement had class and education privilege, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much-noted extemporaneous speech at a women’s rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Wood, 2005) Her speech highlighted the multiple layers of oppression faced by black women.

Feminism as an intellectual and social movement advanced women’s rights and our overall understanding of gender. Feminism has gotten a bad reputation based on how it has been portrayed in the media and by some politicians. When I teach courses about gender, I often ask my students to raise their hand if they consider themselves feminists. I usually only have a few, if any, who do. I’ve found that students I teach are hesitant to identify as a feminist because of connotations of the word. However, when I ask students to raise their hand if they believe women have been treated unfairly and that there should be more equity, most students raise their hand. Gender and communication scholar Julia Wood has found the same trend and explains that a desire to make a more equitable society for everyone is at the root of feminism. She shares comments from a student that capture this disconnect (Wood, 2005):

> I would never call myself a feminist, because that word has so many negative connotations. I don't hate men or anything, and I'm not interested in protesting. I don't want to go around with hacked-off hair and no makeup and sit around bashing men. I do think women should have the same kinds of rights, including equal pay for equal work. But I wouldn't call myself a feminist.

It's important to remember that there are many ways to be a feminist and to realize that some of the stereotypes about feminism are rooted in sexism and homophobia, in that feminists are reduced to "men haters" and often presumed to be lesbians. The feminist movement also gave some momentum to the transgender rights movement.

Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression do not match the gender they were assigned by birth. Transgender people may or may not seek medical intervention like surgery or hormone treatments to help match their physiology with their gender identity. The term *transgender* includes other labels such as *transsexual*, *transvestite*, *cross-dresser*, and *intersex*, among others. Terms like *hermaphrodite* and *she-male* are not considered appropriate. As with other groups, it is best to allow someone to self-identify first and then honor their preferred label (Figure 1.9). If you are unsure of which pronouns to use when addressing someone, you can use gender-neutral language or you can use the pronoun that matches with how they are presenting. If someone has long hair, make-up, and a dress on, but you think their biological sex is male due to other cues, it would be polite to address them with female pronouns, since that is the gender identity they are expressing.

Gender as a cultural identity has implications for many aspects of our lives, including real-world contexts like education and work. Schools are primary grounds for socialization, and the educational experience for males and females is different in many ways from preschool through college. Although not always intentional, schools tend to recreate the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in society. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, there are communicative elements present in school that support this (Allen, 2011). For example, teachers are more likely to call on and pay attention to boys in a classroom, giving them more feedback in the form of criticism, praise, and help. This sends an implicit message that boys are more worthy of attention and valuable than girls. Teachers are also more likely to lead girls to focus on feelings and appearance and boys to focus on competition and achievement. The focus on appearance for girls can lead to anxieties about body image. Gender inequalities are also evident in the administrative structure of schools, which puts males in positions of authority more than females. While females make up 75 percent of the educational workforce, only 22 percent of superintendents and 8 percent of high school principals are women. Similar trends exist in colleges and universities, with women only accounting for 26 percent of full professors. These inequalities in schools correspond to larger inequalities in the general workforce. While there are more women in the workforce now than ever before, they still face a glass ceiling, which is a barrier for promotion to upper management. Many of my students have been surprised at the continuing pay gap that exists between men and women. In 2010, women earned about seventy-seven cents to every dollar earned by men (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011). To put this into perspective, the National Committee on Pay Equity started an event called Equal Pay Day. In 2011, Equal Pay Day was on April 11. This signifies that for a woman to earn the same amount of money a man earned in a year, she would have to work more than three months extra, until April 11, to make up for the difference (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011).

Sexuality

While race and gender are two of the first things we notice about others, sexuality is often something we view as personal and private. Although many people hold a view that a person's sexuality should be kept private, this isn't a reality for our society. One only needs to observe popular culture and media for a short time to see that sexuality permeates much of our public discourse.

Sexuality relates to culture and identity in important ways that extend beyond sexual orientation (Figure 1.9), just as race is more than the color of one's skin and gender is more than one's biological and physiological manifestations of masculinity and femininity. Sexuality isn't just physical; it is social in that we communicate with others about sexuality (Allen, 2011). Sexuality is also biological in that it connects to physiological functions that carry significant social and political meaning like puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy. Sexuality connects to public health issues like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Sexuality is at the center of political issues like abortion, sex education, and gay and lesbian rights.

The most obvious way sexuality relates to identity is through sexual orientation. **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's primary physical and emotional sexual attraction and activity. The terms we most often use to categorize sexual orientation are *heterosexual* or *straight*, *gay*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual*. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term *sexual preference* has been used previously, *sexual orientation* is more appropriate, since *preference* implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term *homosexual* can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. As you will see in the timeline that follows, the medical community has a recent history of "treating homosexuality" with means that most would view as inhumane today. Many people prefer a term like *gay*, which was chosen and embraced by gay people, rather than *homosexual*, which was imposed by a then discriminatory medical system.

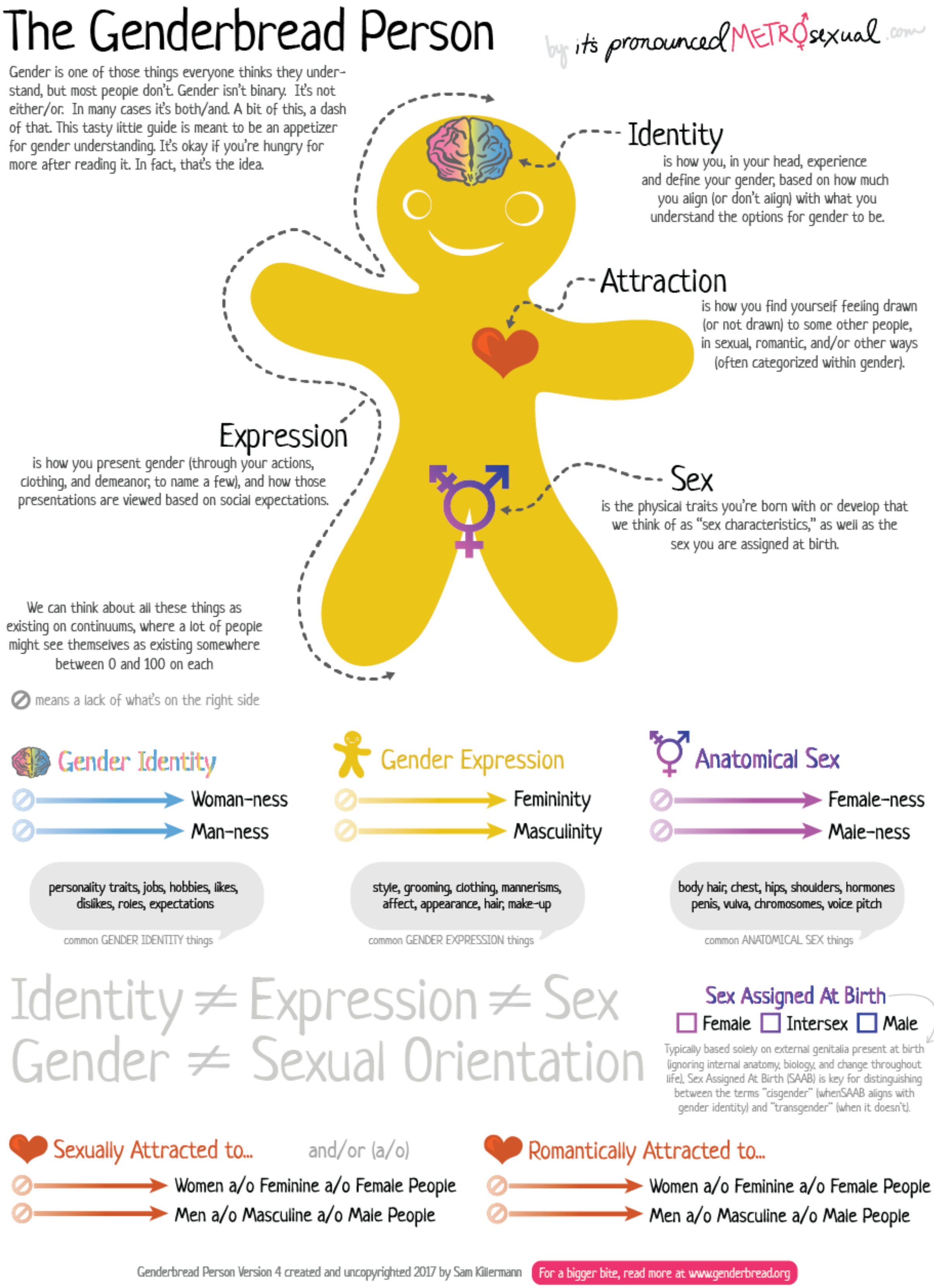

Figure 1.9 The Genderbread Person is a model to help differentiate various terms related to gender and sexuality. [The Genderbread Person](#) – [Sam Killerman](#) – [Uncopyright](#)

The gay and lesbian rights movement became widely recognizable in the United States in the 1950s and continues on today, as evidenced by prominent issues regarding sexual orientation in national news and politics. National and international groups like the Human Rights Campaign advocate for rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) communities. While these communities are often grouped together within one acronym (GLBTQ), they are different. Gays and lesbians constitute the most visible of the groups and receive the most attention and funding. Bisexuals are rarely visible or included in popular cultural discourses or in social and political movements. Transgender issues have received much more attention in recent years, but transgender identity connects to gender more than it does to sexuality. Last, *queer* is a term used to describe a group that is diverse in terms of identities but usually takes a more activist and at times radical stance that critiques sexual categories. While *queer* was long considered a derogatory label, and still is by some, the queer activist movement that emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s reclaimed the word and embraced it as a positive. As you can see, there is a diversity of identities among sexual minorities, just as there is variation within races and genders.

As with other cultural identities, notions of sexuality have been socially constructed in different ways throughout human history. Sexual orientation didn't come into being as an identity category until the late 1800s. Before that, sexuality was viewed in more physical or spiritual senses that were largely separate from a person's identity. Table 1.3 "Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication" (below) traces some of the developments relevant to sexuality, identity, and communication that show how this cultural identity has been constructed over the past 3,000 years.

Table 1.3 Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	**Development**
1400 BCE–565 BCE	During the Greek and Roman era, there was no conception of sexual orientation as an identity. However, sexual relationships between men were accepted for some members of society. Also at this time, Greek poet Sappho wrote about love between women.
533	Byzantine Emperor Justinian makes adultery and same-sex sexual acts punishable by death.
1533	Civil law in England indicates the death penalty can be given for same-sex sexual acts between men.
1810	Napoleonic Code in France removes all penalties for any sexual activity between consenting adults.
1861	England removes death penalty for same-sex sexual acts.

Year(s)	Development
1892	The term *heterosexuality* is coined to refer a form of "sexual perversion" in which people engage in sexual acts for reasons other than reproduction.
1897	Dr. Magnus Hirschfield founds the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. It is the first gay rights organization.
1900–1930	Doctors "treat" homosexuality with castration, electro-shock therapy, and incarceration in mental hospitals.
1924	The first gay rights organization in the United States, the Chicago Society for Human Rights, is founded.
1933–44	Tens of thousands of gay men are sent to concentration camps under Nazi rule. The prisoners are forced to wear pink triangles on their uniforms. The pink triangle was later reclaimed as a symbol of gay rights.
1934	The terms *heterosexuality* and *homosexuality* appear in Webster's dictionary with generally the same meaning the terms hold today.
1948	American sexologist Alfred Kinsey's research reveals that more people than thought have engaged in same-sex sexual activity. His research highlights the existence of bisexuality.
1969	On June 27, patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fight back as police raid the bar (a common practice used by police at the time to harass gay people). "The Stonewall Riot," as it came to be called, was led by gay, lesbian, and transgender patrons of the bar, many of whom were working class and/or people of color.
1974	The American Psychiatric Association removes its reference to homosexuality as a mental illness.
1999	The Vermont Supreme Court rules that the state must provide legal rights to same-sex couples. In 2000, Vermont becomes the first state to offer same-sex couples civil unions.
2003	The US Supreme Court rules that Texas's sodomy law is unconstitutional, which effectively decriminalizes consensual same-sex relations.
2011	The US military policy "Don't Ask Don't Tell" is repealed, allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly.

Year(s)	Development
2015	The US Supreme Court legalized marriage equality nationally in the case Obergefell v. Hodges.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 117–25; and University of Denver Queer and Ally Commission, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer History," *Queer Ally Training Manual*, 2008.

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity, because we follow a medical model of disability that places disability as an individual and medical rather than social and cultural issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Allen, 2011). An impairment is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological" (Allen, 2011). This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people's life activities are limited and the relational aspect of disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there isn't an impairment, then the label of *disabled* can have negative impacts, as this label carries social and cultural significance. People are tracked into various educational programs based on their physical and cognitive abilities, and there are many cases of people being mistakenly labeled disabled who were treated differently despite their protest of the ascribed label. Students who did not speak English as a first language, for example, were—and perhaps still are—sometimes put into special education classes.

Ability, just as the other cultural identities discussed, has institutionalized privileges and disadvantages associated with it. Ableism is the system of beliefs and practices that produces a physical and mental standard that is projected as normal for a human being and labels deviations from it abnormal, resulting in unequal treatment and access to resources. Ability privilege refers to the unearned advantages that are provided for people who fit the cognitive and physical norms (Allen, 2011). I once attended a workshop about ability privilege led by a man who was visually impaired. He talked about how, unlike other cultural identities that are typically stable over a lifetime, ability fluctuates for most people. We have all experienced times when we are more or less able.

Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period of time also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you've experienced a short-term disability or not, the majority of us will become less physically and cognitively able as we get older.

Statistically, people with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the United States, with an estimated 20 percent of people five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen, 2011). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number could continue to increase, as we have thousands of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with physical disabilities or psychological impairments such as posttraumatic stress disorder (Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.10 As recently disabled veterans integrate back into civilian life, they will be offered assistance and accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. 110518-M-EC403-102 - Wounded Warrior Regiment – CC BY-NC 2.0

As disability has been constructed in US history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to "political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm." They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the "scientific" category of "feeblemindedness," which led them to be institutionalized (Carlson, 2001). Arguments supporting racial inequality and tighter immigration restrictions also drew on notions of disability, framing certain racial groups as prone to mental retardation, mental illness, or uncontrollable emotions and actions. See Table 1.4 for a timeline of developments related to ability, identity, and communication. These thoughts led to a dark time in US history, as the eugenics movement sought to limit reproduction of people deemed as deficient.

During the early part of the 1900s, the eugenics movement was the epitome of the move to rehabilitate or reject people with disabilities (Allen, 2005). This was a brand of social engineering that was indicative of a strong public support in the rationality of science to cure society's problems (Allen, 2011). A sterilization law written in 1914 "proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially inadequate," which included the "feebleminded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and dependent" (Lombardo, 2011). During the eugenics movement in the United States, more than sixty thousand people in thirty-three states were involuntarily sterilized (Allen, 2011). Although the eugenics movement as it was envisioned and enacted then is unthinkable today, some who have studied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s have issued warnings that a newly packaged version of eugenics could be upon us. As human genome mapping and DNA manipulation become more accessible, advanced genetic testing could enable parents to eliminate undesirable aspects or enhance desirable characteristics of their children before they are born, creating "designer children" (Spice, 2005).

Table 1.4 Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
400 BCE	The Greeks make connections between biology, physiology, and actions. For example, they make a connection between epilepsy and a disorder of the mind but still consider the source to be supernatural or divine.
30–480	People with disabilities are viewed with pity by early Christians and thought to be so conditioned because of an impurity that could possibly be addressed through prayer.
500–1500	As beliefs in the supernatural increase during the Middle Ages, people with disabilities are seen as manifestations of evil and are ridiculed and persecuted.
1650–1789	During the Enlightenment, the first large-scale movements toward the medical model are made, as science and medicine advance and society turns to a view of human rationality.
1900s	The eugenics movement in the United States begins. Laws are passed to sterilize the "socially inadequate," and during this time, more than sixty thousand people were forcibly sterilized in thirty-three states.
1930s	People with disabilities become the first targets of experimentation and mass execution by the Nazis.
1970s	The independent living movement becomes a prominent part of the disability rights movement.
1990	The Americans with Disabilities Act is passed through Congress and signed into law.

Source: Maggie Shreve, "The Movement for Independent Living: A Brief History," *Independent Living Research Utilization*, accessed October 14, 2011, http://ilru.org/html/publications/infopaks/IL_paradigm.doc.

Much has changed for people with disabilities in the United States in the past fifty years. The independent living movement (ILM) was a part of the disability rights movement that took shape along with other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The ILM calls for more individual and collective action toward social change by people with disabilities. Some of the goals of the ILM include reframing disability as a social and political rather than just a medical issue, a shift toward changing society rather than just rehabilitating people with disabilities, a view of accommodations as civil rights rather than charity, and more involvement by people with disabilities in the formulation and execution of policies relating to them (Longmore, 2003). As society better adapts to people with disabilities, there will be more instances of inter-ability communication taking place.
Interability communication is communication between people with differing ability levels; for example, a hearing person communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or a person who doesn't use a wheelchair communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair. Since many people are unsure of how to communicate with a person with disabilities, following are the "Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities" to help you in communicating with persons with disabilities:

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign-language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
6. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing

so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.

8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people who are deaf can read lips. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Summary

- Each of us has personal, social, and cultural identities.
  - Personal identities are components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connect to our individual interests and life experiences.
  - Social identities are components of self that are derived from our involvement in social groups to which we are interpersonally invested.
  - Cultural identities are components of self based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for our thoughts and behaviors.
- The social constructionist view of culture and identity states that the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relation to social, cultural, and political contexts.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability are socially constructed cultural identities that developed over time in relation to historical, social, and political contexts.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe a situation in which someone ascribed an identity to you that didn't match with your avowed identities. Why do you think the person ascribed the identity to you? Were there any stereotypes involved?
2. How do you see sexuality connect to identity in the media? Why do you think the media portrays sexuality and identity the way it does?
3. Think of an instance in which you had an interaction with someone with a disability. Would knowing the "Ten Commandments for Communicating with People with Disabilities" have influenced how you communicated in this instance? Why or why not?

Remix/Revisions Featured in this Section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix combining 8.1 Foundations of Culture and Identity and 8.2 Exploring Specific Cultural Identities (Communication in the Real World – University of Minnesota).
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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Chapter 2: Cultural Diversity

What is the right way to eat a hot dog? If you are from New York, you might top your hot dog with spicy brown mustard and onions or sauerkraut. If you are from Chicago, you might top your hot dog with sweet onions, pickle spears, tomato, relish, and hot peppers. If you are from Houston, you might top your hot dog with chili, cheese, and jalapenos. Reading this list, you might think some of these sound good or maybe you wouldn't eat any of these toppings on your hot dogs.

In this chapter, you will learn about cultural diversity. We will discuss how culture impacts our values, beliefs, behaviors (even our hot dog topping preferences), and how diversity of culture influences our workplace. This will provide you with useful tools to engage with others in your personal and professional life who may be different from you.

2.1 Culture and Diversity

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain material versus nonmaterial culture
- Define diversity and identify many aspects of diversity
- Differentiate between surface diversity and deep diversity, and explain the relationship between the two
- Define and apply principles of cultural competency

Introduction to Culture

What are the rules when you pass an acquaintance at school, work, in the grocery store, or in the mall? Generally, we do not consider all of the intricacies of the rules of behavior. We may simply say, "Hello!" and ask, "How was your weekend?" or some other trivial question meant to be a friendly greeting. Rarely do we physically embrace or even touch the individual. In fact, doing so may be viewed with scorn or distaste, since as people in the United States we have fairly rigid rules about personal space. However, we all adhere to various rules and standards that are created and maintained in culture. These rules and expectations have meaning, and there are ways in which you may violate this negotiation. Consider what would happen if you stopped and informed everyone who said, "Hi, how are you?" exactly how you were doing that day, and in detail. You would more than likely violate rules of culture and specifically greeting. Perhaps in a different culture the question would be more literal, and it may require a response. Or if you are having coffee with a good friend, perhaps that question warrants a more detailed response. These examples are all aspects of **culture**, which is the ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Unpacking the definition, we can see that culture shouldn't be conceptualized as stable and unchanging. Culture is "negotiated," it is dynamic, and cultural changes can be traced and analyzed to better understand why our society is the way it is. This definition also points out that culture is learned, which accounts for the importance of socializing institutions like family, school, peers, and the media that we learned about in Module 1. Culture is patterned in that there are recognizable widespread similarities among people within a cultural group. There is also deviation from and resistance to those patterns by individuals and subgroups within a culture, which is why cultural patterns change over time. Last, this definition acknowledges that culture influences our beliefs about what is true and false, our attitudes including our likes and dislikes, our values regarding what is right and wrong, and our behaviors. It is from these cultural influences that our identities are formed.

Humans are social creatures. Since the dawn of Homo sapiens, people have grouped together into communities in order to survive. Living together, people form common habits and behaviors—from specific methods of childrearing to preferred techniques for obtaining food. In modern-day Paris, many people shop daily at outdoor markets to pick up what they need for their evening meal, buying cheese, meat, and vegetables from different specialty stalls. In the United States, the majority of people shop once a week at supermarkets, filling large carts to the brim. How would a Parisian perceive U.S. shopping behaviors that Americans take for granted?

Almost every human behavior, from shopping to marriage to expressions of feelings, is learned. In the United States, people tend to view marriage as a choice between two people, based on mutual feelings of love. In other nations and in other times, marriages have been arranged through an intricate process of interviews and negotiations between entire families. To someone raised in the United States, arranged marriages may seem strange or even wrong. Conversely, someone whose marriage was arranged might be perplexed with the idea of people choosing their own spouse without guidance from others. In both cases, a person from one culture may have misconceptions about the customs of the other. In other words, the way in which people view marriage depends largely on what they have been taught.

Behavior based on learned customs is not a bad thing. Being familiar with unwritten rules helps people feel secure and "normal." Most people want to live their daily lives confident that their behaviors will not be challenged or disrupted. But even an action as seemingly simple as commuting to work evidences a great deal of cultural propriety.

Take the case of going to work on public transportation. Whether people are commuting in Dublin, Cairo, Mumbai, or San Francisco, many behaviors will be the same, but significant differences also arise between cultures. Typically, a passenger will find a marked bus stop or station, wait for his bus or train, pay an agent before or after boarding, and quietly take a seat if one is available. But when boarding a bus in Cairo, passengers might have to run, because buses there often do not come to a full stop to take on patrons. Dublin bus riders would be expected to extend an arm to indicate that they want the bus to stop for them. And when boarding a commuter train in Mumbai, passengers must squeeze into overstuffed cars amid a lot of pushing and shoving on the crowded platforms. That kind of behavior would be considered the height of rudeness in the United States, but in Mumbai it reflects the daily challenges of getting around on a train system that is taxed to capacity (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 How would a visitor from the suburban United States act and feel on this crowded Tokyo train? Crowded Train – Hanenosuke – CC BY-SA 2.0

In this example of commuting, culture consists of thoughts (expectations about personal space, for example) and tangible things (bus stops, trains, and seating capacity). **Material culture** refers to the objects or belongings of a group of people. Metro passes and bus tokens are part of material culture, as are automobiles, stores, and the physical structures where people worship. **Nonmaterial culture**, in contrast, consists of the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society. Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked, and physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas. A metro pass is a material object, but it represents a form of nonmaterial culture, namely, capitalism, and the acceptance of paying for transportation. Clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry are part of material culture, but the appropriateness of wearing certain clothing for specific events reflects nonmaterial culture. A school building belongs to material culture, but the teaching methods and educational standards are part of education's nonmaterial culture. These material and nonmaterial aspects of culture can vary subtly from region to region. As people travel farther afield, moving from different regions to entirely different parts of the world, certain material and nonmaterial aspects of culture become dramatically unfamiliar. What happens when we encounter different cultures? As we interact with cultures other than our own, we become more aware of the differences and commonalities between others' worlds and our own.

Cultural Universals

Often, a comparison of one culture to another will reveal obvious differences. But all cultures also share common elements. **Cultural universals** are patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies. One example of a cultural universal is the family unit: every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live together in one household. In these cultures, young adults continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse's household, or they may remain and raise their nuclear family within the extended family's homestead. In the United States, by contrast, individuals are expected to leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit that consists of parents and their offspring. Other cultural universals include customs like funeral rites, weddings, and celebrations of births. However, each culture may view the ceremonies quite differently.

Anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world. Murdock found that cultural universals often revolve around basic human survival, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter, or around shared human experiences, such as birth and death or illness and healing. Through his research, Murdock identified other universals including language, the concept of personal names, and, interestingly, jokes. Humor seems to be a universal way to release tensions and create a sense of unity among people (Murdock 1949). Humor is considered necessary to human interaction because it helps individuals navigate otherwise tense situations.

Ethnocentrism

Although human societies have much in common, cultural differences are far more prevalent than cultural universals. For example, while all cultures have language, analysis of conversational etiquette reveals tremendous differences. In some Middle Eastern cultures, it is common to stand close to others in conversation. Americans keep more distance and maintain a large "personal space." Additionally, behaviors as simple as eating and drinking vary greatly from culture to culture. Some cultures use tools to put the food in the mouth while others use their fingers. If your professor comes into an early morning class holding a mug of liquid, what do you assume they are drinking? In the U.S., it's most likely filled with coffee, not Earl Grey tea, a favorite in England, or Yak Butter tea, a staple in Tibet.

Some travelers pride themselves on their willingness to try unfamiliar foods, like the late celebrated food writer Anthony Bourdain (1956-2017)(Figure 2.2). Often, however, people express disgust at another culture's cuisine. They might think that it's gross to eat raw meat from a donkey or parts of a rodent, while they don't question their own habit of eating cows or pigs. Such attitudes are examples of **ethnocentrism**, which means to evaluate and judge another culture based on one's own cultural norms. Ethnocentrism is believing your group is the correct measuring standard and if other cultures do not measure up to it, they are wrong. As sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906) described the term, it is a belief or attitude that one's own culture is better than all others. Almost everyone is a little bit ethnocentric. A high level of appreciation for one's own culture can be healthy. A shared sense of community pride, for example, connects people in a society. But ethnocentrism can lead to disdain or dislike of other cultures and could cause misunderstanding, stereotyping, and conflict.

Figure 2.2 Anthony Bourdain hosted my food shows travelling around the world trying different foods. Chef Anthony Bourdain in Singapore – Cheryl Chia – CC BY 2.0

When people find themselves in a new culture, they may experience disorientation and frustration, also referred to as **culture shock**. In addition to the traveler's biological clock being 'off', a traveler from Chicago might find the nightly silence of rural Montana unsettling, not peaceful. Now, imagine that the 'difference' is cultural. An exchange student from China to the U.S. might be annoyed by the constant interruptions in class as other students ask questions—a practice that is considered rude in China. Perhaps the Chicago traveler was initially captivated with Montana's quiet beauty and the Chinese student was originally excited to see a U.S.- style classroom firsthand. But as they experience unanticipated differences from their own culture, they may experience ethnocentrism as their excitement gives way to discomfort and doubts about how to behave appropriately in the new situation. According to many authors, international students studying in the U.S. report that there are personality traits and behaviors expected of them. Black African students report having to learn to 'be Black in the U.S.' and Chinese students report that they are naturally expected to be good at math. In African countries, people are identified by country or kin, not color. Eventually, as people learn more about a culture, they adapt to the new culture for a variety of reasons.

Culture shock may appear because people aren't always expecting cultural differences. Anthropologist Ken Barger (1971) discovered this when he conducted a participatory observation in an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic. Originally from Indiana, Barger hesitated when invited to join a local snowshoe race. He knew he would never hold his own against these experts. Sure enough, he finished last, to his mortification. But the tribal members congratulated him, saying, "You really tried!" In Barger's own culture, he had learned to value victory. To the Inuit people, winning was enjoyable, but their culture valued survival skills essential to their environment: how hard someone tried could mean the difference between life and death. Over the course of his stay, Barger participated in caribou hunts, learned how to take shelter in winter storms, and sometimes went days with little or no food to share among tribal members. Trying hard and working together, two nonmaterial values, were indeed much more important than winning. During his time with the Inuit tribe, Barger learned to engage in cultural relativism.

Cultural Relativism

Cultural relativism is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the lens of one's own culture. Practicing cultural relativism requires an open mind and a willingness to consider, and even adapt to, new values, norms, and practices.

However, indiscriminately embracing everything about a new culture is not always possible. Even the most culturally relativist people from egalitarian societies—ones in which women have political rights and control over their own bodies—question whether the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan should be accepted as a part of cultural tradition. Social scientists attempting to engage in cultural relativism, then, may struggle to reconcile aspects of their own culture with aspects of a culture that they are studying.

Sometimes when people attempt to address feelings of ethnocentrism and develop cultural relativism, they swing too far to the other end of the spectrum. **Xenocentrism** is the opposite of ethnocentrism, and refers to the belief that another culture is superior to one's own. An exchange student who goes home after a semester abroad or a social scientist who returns from the field may find it difficult to associate with the values of their own culture after having experienced what they deem a more upright or nobler way of living. Xenophobia, on the other hand is an irrational fear or hatred of different cultures.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for people learning about different cultures is the matter of keeping perspective. It is impossible for anyone to overcome all cultural biases. The best we can do is strive to be aware of them. Pride in one's own culture doesn't have to lead to imposing its values or ideas on others. And an appreciation for another culture shouldn't preclude individuals from studying it with a critical eye. This practice is perhaps the most difficult for all social scientists.

High, Low, and Popular Culture

Can you identify the Chief Financial Officer of three major corporations? How about the name of the server at three local hangouts? How many books do you own? How many social media sites do you visit? Is your family listed on the Social Register©? Have you ever heard of the Social Register©? In each pair, one type of knowledge is considered high culture and the other low culture.

The term **high culture** is used to describe the *pattern* of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in the highest or elite class segments of a society. People often associate high culture with intellectualism, political power, and prestige. In America, high culture also tends to be associated with wealth. Events considered high culture can be expensive, formal, and exclusive – attending a ballet, seeing a play, listening to a live symphony performance, or attending a prestigious university. Similarly, **low culture** is associated with the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in the lowest class segments of a society.

The term **popular culture** refers to the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society. Popular culture events might include a parade, a baseball game, or the season finale of a television show. Music, anime, and cosplay are pieces of popular culture. Popular culture is accessible by most and is expressed and spread via commercial and social media outlets such as radio, television, movies, the music industry, publishers, and corporate-run websites. You can share a discussion of favorite football teams with a new coworker or comment on a reality show when making small talk in line at the grocery store. But if you tried to launch into a deep discussion on the classical Greek play *Antigone*, few members of U.S. society today would be familiar with it. Although high culture may be considered by some as superior to popular culture, the lines between high culture and popular culture vary over time and place. Shakespearean plays, considered to be popular culture when they were written, are now part of our society's high culture. Five hundred years from now, will our descendants consider *Dancing with the Stars* as fine performance art?

Subculture and Counterculture

A **subculture** is just what it sounds like—a smaller cultural group within a larger culture. People of a subculture are part of the larger culture but also share a specific identity within a smaller group. Thousands of subcultures exist within the U.S. Ethnic and racial groups share the language, food, and customs of their heritage. Other subcultures are formed through shared experiences (Figure 2.3). Biker culture revolves around an interest in motorcycles. Some subcultures are formed by people who possess traits or preferences that differ from the majority of a society's population. The body modification community embraces aesthetic additions to the human body, such as tattoos, piercings, and certain forms of plastic surgery. But even as members of a subculture band together, they still identify with and participate in the larger society.

In contrast to subcultures, which operate relatively smoothly within the larger society, **countercultures** reject some of the larger culture's norms and values and might actively defy larger society by developing their own set of rules and norms to live by, sometimes even creating communities that operate outside of greater society. Counterculture members are 'against' the dominant ruling culture and want to install their own values. Subculture members may want to change some things but established procedures are followed.

Figure 2.3 Cosplayers are a distinct subculture (a smaller cultural group within the larger culture) in the United States. And within the larger subculture are subgroups, such as this one emulating D.C. Comics characters. Dragon Con 2013 - DC Universe – Pat Loika – CC BY 2.0

Cultural Competence

As a college student, you are likely to find yourself in diverse classrooms, organizations, and – eventually – workplaces. It is important to prepare yourself to be able to adapt to diverse environments. **Cultural competence** can be defined as the ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences and similarities. It involves "(a) the cultivation of deep cultural self-awareness and understanding (i.e., how one's own beliefs, values, perceptions, interpretations, judgments, and behaviors are influenced by one's cultural community or communities) and (b) increased cultural other-understanding (i.e., comprehension of the different ways people from other cultural groups make sense of and respond to the presence of cultural differences)" (Bennett, 2015).

In other words, cultural competency requires you to be aware of your own cultural practices, values, and experiences, and to be able to read, interpret, and respond to those of others. Such awareness will help you successfully navigate the cultural differences you will encounter in diverse environments. Cultural competency is critical to working and building relationships with people from different cultures; it is so critical, in fact, that it is now one of the most highly desired skills in the modern workforce (Bennett, 2015).

We don't automatically understand differences among people and celebrate the value of those differences. Cultural competency is a skill that you can learn and improve upon over time and with practice. What actions can you take to build your cultural competency skills?

Diversity

Cultural diversity is found everywhere in college, in the workplace, in life. It should be respected, appreciated, and celebrated. To be successful as a college student, it is critical that you understand and can describe your own diverse background and how it impacts your view of the world. Being self-aware allows you to identify what makes you who you are while recognizing the differences that exist between you, other students, your professors, and all the members of your community. This section will discuss the factors that make up a person's culture and how one can effectively communicate and work with people who may be different.

"*Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.*"
—Malcolm Forbes, entrepreneur, founder of Forbes magazine

What is Diversity?

Let's start with the basics. What is diversity? Grab a pen and a piece of paper. Quickly jot down how you would define diversity. What's the first thing that came to mind? Take a minute to write your response and then continue reading.

When students from UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health were asked to define diversity, they each recorded their response. You can check out their responses. Take a minute to compare your answers to theirs. Chances are, there were similar themes between your answers and theirs, but your response did not identically match any of the others. This is the perfect way to define diversity.

Each of us are different. Everyone comes with different backgrounds and experiences. Diversity cannot be simply defined by a variety of ethnicities or races. It can also not be simply described as people from different countries or cultures. Instead, diversity encompasses all of these things and more. As we'll use the term here, **diversity** refers to the great variety of human characteristics—ways that we are different even as we are all human and share more similarities than differences. These differences are an essential part of what enriches humanity. Aspects of diversity may be cultural, biological, or personal in nature. Diversity generally involves things that may significantly affect some people's perceptions of others—not just any way people happen to be different. For example, having different tastes in music, movies, or books is not what we usually refer to as diversity.

When discussing diversity, it is often difficult to avoid seeming to generalize about different types of people—and such generalizations can seem similar to dangerous stereotypes. The following descriptions are meant only to suggest that individuals are different from other individuals in many possible ways and that we can all learn things from people whose ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, backgrounds, experiences, and behaviors are different from our own. We have previously discussed in-depth some of the major aspects of diversity including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability. Below is a brief list of additional areas of diversity:

- **Cultural background:** Culture, like ethnicity, refers to shared characteristics, language, beliefs, behaviors, and identity. We are all influenced by our culture to some extent. While ethnic groups are typically smaller groups within a larger society, the larger society itself is often called the “dominant culture.” The term is often used rather loosely to refer to any group with identifiable shared characteristics.
- **Educational background:** Colleges do not use a cookie-cutter approach to admit only students with identical academic skills. A diversity of educational background helps ensure a free flow of ideas and challenges those who might become set in their ways.
- **Age:** While younger students attending college immediately after high school are generally within the same age range, older students returning to school bring a diversity of age. Because they often have broader life experiences, many older students bring different ideas and attitudes to the campus.
- **Geography:** People from different places within the United States or the world often have a range of differences in ideas, attitudes, and behaviors.
- **Political views:** A diversity of political views helps broaden the level of discourse on campuses concerning current events and the roles of government and leadership at all levels.
- **Socioeconomic background:** People’s identities are influenced by how they grow up, and part of that background involves socioeconomic factors. Socioeconomic diversity can contribute to a wide variety of ideas and attitudes.
- **Religion:** For many people, religion is not just a Sunday morning practice but a larger spiritual force that infuses their lives. Religion helps shape different ways of thinking and behaving.

Surface Diversity and Deep Diversity

Surface diversity and deep diversity are categories of personal attributes—or differences in attributes—that people perceive to exist between people or groups of people.

Surface-level diversity refers to differences you can generally observe in others, like ethnicity, race, gender, age, culture, language, etc. You can quickly and easily observe these features in a person. And people often do just that, making subtle judgments at the same time, which can lead to bias or discrimination. For example, if a teacher believes that older students perform better than younger students, they may give slightly higher grades to the older students than the younger students. This bias is based on a perception of the attribute of age, which is surface-level diversity.

Deep-level diversity, on the other hand, reflects differences that are less visible, like personality, attitude, beliefs, and values. These attributes are generally communicated verbally and non-verbally, so they are not easily noticeable or measurable. You may not detect deep-level diversity in a classmate, for example, until you get to know him or her, at which point you may find that you are either comfortable with these deeper character levels, or perhaps not. But once you gain this deeper level of awareness, you may focus less on surface diversity. For example, at the beginning of a term, a classmate belonging to a minority ethnic group whose native language is not English (surface diversity) may be treated differently by fellow classmates in another ethnic group. But as the term gets underway, classmates begin discovering the person's values and beliefs (deep-level diversity), which they find they are comfortable with. The surface-level attributes of language and perhaps skin color become more "transparent" (less noticeable) as comfort is gained with deep-level attributes.

Summary

- The term culture generally describes the shared values, beliefs, norms, language, practices, and artifacts of people.
- Our experience of cultural difference is influenced by our ethnocentrism (judging others using your cultural standards) and Xenocentrism (belief that another culture is superior).
- Cultural competence is the ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences and similarities.
- Surface-level diversity refers to characteristics you can easily observe, while deep-level diversity refers to attributes that are not visible.

Discussion Questions

1. Examine the difference between material and nonmaterial culture in your world. Identify ten objects that are part of your regular cultural experience. For each, then identify what aspects of nonmaterial culture (values, beliefs, norms, language, and practices) that these objects represent. What has this exercise revealed to you about your culture?
2. Do you believe that feelings of ethnocentricity or xenocentric attitudes and practices are prevalent in U.S. culture? Why do you believe this? What issues or events might influence your ideas about these concepts?
3. How do you define diversity? Compare and contrast your answer with others. Do you feel like you left anything out or want to add more to your definition? Were there other definitions that you did not agree with? What do the differences in definitions indicate about diversity?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of adding Diversity and Cultural Competency (Gail Sabo – OER Commons) to What is Culture? (Sociology 3e – Openstax).
- Added and changed some images as well as changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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2.2 Elements of Culture

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Differentiate values, beliefs, and norms
- Explain the significance of symbols and language to a culture
- Explain the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
- Discuss the role of social control within culture

Values and Beliefs

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are values and beliefs. **Values** are ideals, or principles and standards members of a culture hold in high regard. For example, most cultures in any society hold “knowledge” (education) in high regard. Values are deeply embedded and are critical for learning a culture’s **beliefs**, which are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individual cultures in a society have personal beliefs, but they also shared collective values. To illustrate the difference, U.S. citizens may believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is important. In other cultures, success may be tied less to wealth and more to having many healthy children. Values shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don’t accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an **ideal culture**; the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from **real culture**, which reflects what actually happens in a society. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or address these issues. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that the ideal alone is not enough to spare teenagers the potential consequences of having sex.

One of the ways societies strive to maintain its values is through rewards and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a “thank you.” A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People **sanction** unwanted or inappropriate behaviors by withholding support, approval, or permission, or by implementing sanctions. We may think of ‘sanction’ as a negative term, but sanctions are forms of **social control**, ways to encourage conformity to cultural norms or rules. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions. Receiving good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers. Sanctions can also be negative. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label like 'lazy' or to legal sanctions, such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment. Utilizing social control encourages most people to conform regardless of whether authority figures (such as law enforcement) are present.

Values are not static. They change across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective social beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It's rare to see two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the U.S. where that behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations, masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president G.W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. Simple gestures, such as hand-holding, carry great symbolic differences across cultures (Figure 2.4).

a) b)

Figure 2.4 a) In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would US citizens react to these two soldiers? Soldiers Holding Hands - Geordie Mott – CC BY 2.0 b) President George W. Bush of the United States and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia meeting at Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, April 25, 2005. Bush-Abdullah-1 - David Bohrer, White House – Public Domain

Norms

So far, many of the examples in this module have described how people are *expected* to behave in certain situations—for example, buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, also referred to as norms. **Norms** are behaviors that reflect compliance with what cultures and societies have defined as good, right, and important. Most members adhere to them.

Formal norms are established, written rules existing in all societies. They support many **social institutions**, such as the military, criminal justice and healthcare systems, and public schools. We might question what *purpose* these norms serve, *who* creates, benefits, and suffers under these formal norms, and wonder about how a group that benefits interacts. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and "no running" signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are the most strictly enforced. But they are enforced to varying degrees.

For example, private property is highly valued in the U.S. Thieves can be fined, imprisoned, or both. People safeguard valuable possessions by locking their doors, buying a safe, and installing alarm systems on homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it's against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime.

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of **informal norms**—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly— "Kiss your Aunt Edna" or "Use your napkin"—while others are learned by observation, including understanding consequences when someone else violates a norm. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need of written rules and so may be difficult to learn when you are new to or not familiar with the culture.

Although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well. In the U.S., there are informal norms regarding behavior at fast food restaurants. Customers line up to order their food and leave when they are done. They don't sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don't commit even harmless breaches of informal norms.

Norms may be further classified as either mores or folkways. **Mores** (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. They often have a religious foundation. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are protected with laws and other formal sanctions. In most societies, for instance, homicide is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm). But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups.

The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Submitting or publishing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences for violating this norm are often severe and can result in expulsion from school or termination from employment.

Unlike mores, **folkways** are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. We can think of them as 'traditions'—things we do because we 'always have.' They indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, that's not acceptable. In regions in the southern U.S., bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough. Other accepted folkways in the U.S. may include holding the door open for a stranger or giving someone a gift on their birthday. The rules regarding these folkways may change from culture to culture. A folkway in one culture could be extremely rude in another.

Folkways are actions that people everywhere take for granted. People need to act without thinking in order to get seamlessly through daily routines. They can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner, 1906). Folkways might be small actions, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. An important folkway in many cultures is kissing Grandmother on the cheek. Fail to do so and you will likely be scolded.

Symbols and Culture

Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world. **Symbols**—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand that world. They provide communication methods to understanding experiences by conveying recognizable meanings that are shared by societies.

The world is filled with symbols. Sports uniforms, company logos, and traffic signs are symbols. In some cultures, a gold ring is a symbol of marriage. Some symbols are highly functional; stop signs, for instance, provide useful instruction (Figure 2.5). As physical objects, they belong to material culture, but because they function as symbols, they also convey nonmaterial cultural meanings. Some symbols are valuable only in what they represent. Trophies, blue ribbons, or gold medals, for example, represent accomplishments. But many objects have both material and nonmaterial symbolic value.

Symbols often get noticed when they are out of context. Used unconventionally, they convey strong messages. A stop sign placed on the door of a college building makes a political statement, as does a camouflage military jacket worn in an antiwar protest. Together, the semaphore signals for "N" and "D" represent nuclear disarmament—and form the well-known peace sign (Westcott, 2008). Some college students wear pajamas and bedroom slippers to class, clothing that was formerly associated only with privacy and bedtime. By wearing the outfit, students are defying traditional cultural norms.

Figure 2.5 Some road signs are universal. But how would you interpret the signage on the right? a)[Crossing People Sign in Thailand](#) - [Dick Elbers](#) - [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) b) [Traffic sign](#) - [Honza Soukup](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

Some symbols represent only one side of the story and elicit strong emotions, which can lead to social unrest. Their presence is a reminder of a nation's worst times and not something to celebrate. Many of these symbols are targets of vandalism as the destruction of these representations is symbolic. Effigies representing public figures are burned to demonstrate anger at certain leaders. In 1989, crowds tore down the Berlin Wall, a decades-old symbol of the division between East and West Germany, communism, and capitalism. In the U.S. beginning in 2019, statues associated with slavery and the Civil War were removed from state capitols, college campuses, and public parks. In Germany, any display of Hitler or Nazi memorabilia or to deny the Holocaust is illegal.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, one system is common to all: language. Whatever its form, people learn social and cultural norms through it.

Language and Symbols

Language is a system that uses symbols with which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted. Letters (which make up words), pictographs, and hand gestures are all symbols that create a language used for communication. Sign language, for example, requires an intimate knowledge not only of an alphabet but also of signs that represent entire words and the meaning indicated by certain facial expressions or postures. Its grammar differs from the spoken language. As spoken language is different across regions, nations and cultures, and can even differ by the age of the person, so too does sign language.

All language systems contain the same basic elements that are effective in communicating ideas - object, subject, action. A written language system consists of symbols that refer to spoken sound. Taken together, these symbols convey specific meanings. The English language uses a combination of twenty-six letters to create words. These twenty-six letters make up over 600,000 recognized words (OED Online, 2011). We can compare the reliance on tone and inflection to Mandarin Chinese. It contains over 8,000 characters, but the same character may symbolize different concepts depending on the tone used.

English today contains an English and French version for the same concept. For example, in the English version, one eats, but in French version, one dines. In the English version, we meet someone. In the French version, we encounter someone. Americans may be surprised by the inclusion of a 'u' in some spellings of words like 'behaviour' or 'flavour.' Americans have dropped that 'u' that writers of British English include. Billions of people speak English, and there are almost as many pronunciations of it.

Rules for speaking and writing vary even within cultures, most notably by region. Do you eat a grinder, a sub, or a hero/gyro? Do you refer to a can of carbonated liquid as "soda" a "pop" or a "coke"? Is a household entertainment room a "family room," "rec room," or "den"? When leaving a restaurant, do you ask your server for a "check," the "ticket," or your "bill"? Language is constantly evolving and adding new words as societies create new ideas. In this age of technology, many cultures have adapted almost instantly to new nouns such as "e-mail" and "Internet," and verbs such as "downloading," "texting," and "blogging." These would have been considered nonsense words thirty years ago.

Language and Culture

Even while it constantly evolves, language shapes our perception of reality and our behavior. In the 1920s, linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf advanced this idea which became known as **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** or linguistic relativity. It is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language, and therefore understand their world through the cultural meanings embedded in their language. The hypothesis suggests that language shapes thought and thus behavior (Swoyer, 2003). For example, words have attached meanings beyond their definition that can influence thought and behavior. In the U.S. where the number thirteen is associated with bad luck, many high-rise buildings do not have a 13th floor. In Japan, however, the number four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for "death."

Many social scientists believe that language can have a broad and lasting impact on perception. In 2002, Lera Boroditsky and her colleagues conducted experiments on native German and Spanish speakers in English. Unlike English, these languages assign genders to nouns. In German, for example, the word for sun, die Sonne, is feminine, but the word for moon, der Mond, is masculine. The team chose a set of nouns with opposite genders in German and Spanish and asked participants to provide adjectives to describe them. They found that German speakers used more masculine adjectives than Spanish speakers when describing a noun that was grammatically masculine in German but feminine in Spanish. For example, the word for key is masculine in German and feminine in Spanish. German speakers described keys as hard, heavy, jagged, metal, serrated, and useful, while Spanish speakers used the adjectives, golden, intricate, little, lovely, shiny, and tiny. The team concluded that gender perceptions acquired in a person's native language carry forward to how they see the world even when they switch to a language without grammatical genders (Boroditsky, Schmidt, and Phillips, 2002).

Some social scientists also believe the structure of language can have consequences on both individual and group behavior. For example, a series of studies have found that Finland has a significantly higher rate of workplace accidents than Sweden despite the fact that the languages have similar workplace regulations (Salminen & Johansson, 2000). John A. Lucy explained this discrepancy through differences in the structure of these languages. Swedish places a greater emphasis on the timing of movement in three-dimensional space. Consequently, Lucy argued, Swedish factories are physically arranged in a manner that supports the smooth running of the product process. Finnish factories experience frequent disruptions, workers must rush, having more accidents (Lucy, 1997).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been interpreted to suggest that if a word does not exist in a language, then users of that language cannot have the experience. Studies have shown, for instance, that unless people have access to the word "ambivalent," they don't *recognize* having conflicting positive and negative feelings about an issue as 'ambivalence.' However, the hypothesis should not suggest that people do not have conflicting feelings but rather that they interpret the feelings differently.

In addition to using spoken language, people communicate without words. Nonverbal communication is symbolic, and, as in the case of language, is learned through one's culture. Some gestures are nearly universal; some are not. Smiles often indicate positive reinforcement in the U.S., whereas in some cultures it is rude as you do not know the person. A thumbs-up in Russia and Australia is an offensive curse (Passero, 2002). Other gestures vary in meaning depending on the situation and the person. A wave of the hand can mean many things, depending on how it's done and for whom. It may mean "hello," "goodbye," "no thank you," or "I'm royalty." Winks convey a variety of messages, including "We have a secret," "I'm only kidding," or "I'm attracted to you." From a distance, a person may "read" the emotional situation of people just by watching their body language and facial expressions. However, many cultures communicate with lots of physicality, which people outside that culture may interpret as an argument.

Summary

- Values are ideals, or principles and standards members of a culture hold in high regard.
- Beliefs, which are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true.
- Values portray an ideal culture; the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from real culture, which reflects what actually happens in a society.
- Norms are behaviors that reflect compliance with what cultures and societies have defined as good, right, and important.
- Symbols—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand that world.
- Language is a system that uses symbols with which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? Do you agree or disagree with it? Cite examples or research to support your point of view.
2. How would the elimination of a social “norm” influence your culture? Describe the positive and negative effects.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Replaced photos that were no longer available/had broken links
- Added photos with links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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2.3 Diversity in the Workplace

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between social diversity and social progress
- Discuss the benefits and challenges of a diverse workforce

We all have our strengths and our weaknesses, things we excel in and things we struggle with. We have our endearing personality traits and our sometimes-annoying ones. Could you imagine working only with people exactly like you, from the same background, with the same experiences, the same personalities? Probably not. And that's a good thing. Diversity helps to keep things interesting, exciting, and progressing. Interacting with a large variety of individuals can help stimulate your mind and present ideas and opinions you may not have ever discovered on your own.

Recognizing diversity in your daily life can help you to see the world from new and different perspectives. Diversity is an essential part of every organization and it is important to recognize how it influences the workforce (Figure 6.6). Understanding diversity can help us to work better in group or team situations and gives us insight into the behavior of an organization. This section will explore the history, complexity, benefits, and challenges of diversity in the workplace.

Figure 2.6 A diverse workforce helps raise awareness of cultural worldview and attitudes towards cultural differences. BLM Employees at Work - Bureau of Land Management Oregon and Washington – CC BY 2.0

Social Diversity and Social Progress

Let's start with the basics. What is diversity? Grab a pen and a piece of paper. Quickly jot down how you would define diversity. What's the first thing that came to mind? Take a minute to write your response and then continue reading.

When students from UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health were asked to define diversity, they each recorded their response. You can check out their responses. Take a minute to compare your answers to theirs. Chances are, there were similar themes between your answers and theirs, but your response did not identically match any of the others. This is the perfect way to define diversity.

Each of us are different. Everyone comes with different backgrounds and experiences. Diversity cannot be simply defined by a variety of ethnicities or races. It can also not be simply described as people from different countries or cultures. Instead, diversity encompasses all of these things and more. Diversity includes but is not limited to language, religion, marital status, gender, age, socioeconomic status, geography, politics—and the list goes on and on.

Now that we have reviewed diversity, we need to discuss social diversity. You're probably wondering how the two are different. Santana (2018) defines social diversity as a successful community which includes individuals from diverse backgrounds who all contribute to the success of the community by practicing understanding and respect of different ideas and perspectives. Santana explains that successful socially diverse communities are able to work together to achieve common goals.

While the two terms have a lot of similarities, diversity is defined by a variety of differences between individuals whereas social diversity describes how a community, society, or organization utilizes their members' diversity to work towards a common goal. Lastly, we need to define and discuss social progress.

Harvard Business School's Social Progress Index defines social progress as, "the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential." Let's break it down to better understand the many aspects of social progress.

There are many lenses in which to view social progress. For the purpose of this section, we will specifically focus on social progress in the workplace. Let's focus on the last part of the definition, "to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential." Simply put, social progress is the idea of giving people from all backgrounds the opportunity and environment to work towards their goals and success. Now, how is social progress different from social diversity? Social progress should be constantly evolving and changing to ensure people can reach their full potential whereas social diversity is a term that evaluates where a community or organization is currently operating.

History of Social Progress

To completely understand social progress on a global scale, you would have to dedicate your life to studying the ins and outs of cultures and societies around the globe. Since we do not have a lifetime to discuss social progress for the purpose of this course, we will review the history of social progress in America over the last century. Even more specifically, we will discuss the history of social progress in America's workplaces. It is important to examine the history of social progress in order to fully comprehend how times have changed in the past century and also to better recognize opportunities in which we need to evolve and improve.

The Progressive Era began in the late 1800s and focused on both political and ethical reform. Progressives argued that business organizations needed to be more regulated in order to ensure economic opportunity for all. Progressives believed that all people deserved the opportunity to flourish through government regulations controlling workplace environments, hiring practices, unions, child labor, minimum wage, etc. While many of these things will appear to be common sense by today's standards, these were controversial and rebellious ideas in the early 1900s (Figure 6.7).

Figure 2.7 Progressives created reforms in the workplace, government, and education. Progressive Reforms in the 20th Century – Lumen Learning – CC BY 4.0

The Progressive Era created a domino effect of social change. While change has been slow at times, a lot has happened since the start of the 20th century. In 1948 President Truman signed what is believed by many to be the first workplace diversity initiative on record. Executive Order 9981 ordered a desegregation of the armed services. Although it did not prohibit segregation, it did mandate equal treatment and opportunity for all people in the armed services, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Then, in the 1960s, The Civil Rights Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, or sex. This was a huge step in the history of social progress as it drastically changed the number of opportunities available to people from all backgrounds. Next, in 1987, Workforce 2000 was created, discussing factors that would have an impact on the US workforce in the decades to come.

Workforce 2000 was created in the late 1980s and discussed a variety of factors predicted to influence America's workforce by the year 2000. The Workforce 2000 document was authored by the Hudson Institute, an Indianapolis, Indiana company, and sponsored by the United States Department of Labor. Hudson Institute's mission statement is, "to think about the future in unconventional ways" and that is exactly what they did.

Hudson Institute identified four trends they believed would prove to be true by the year 2000. They are as follows:

1. The American economy should grow at a relatively healthy pace
2. Manufacturing will be a much smaller share of the economy in the year 2000
3. The workforce will grow slowly, becoming older, more female, and more disadvantaged
4. The new jobs in service industries will demand much higher skill levels than jobs of today

While all four of these expected trends are interesting on a variety of levels, for the purpose of this class, let's focus on number three and how it helped to identify diversity changes in the workplace.

The report stated that the number of women and minorities entering into the workforce would grow by the year 2000. Some people believed the report suggested the total number of employees per organization would be comprised of more women and minorities than straight white cisgender men. However, the report clearly stated that the overall additions to the workforce would be comprised of more women and minorities rather than the total. Therefore, while they predicted an increase in the number of women and minorities, they did not predict a large overall percentage change in the makeup of organizations. Although the overall change to the workforce would appear to be minor, the trends presented in the report began to change society's way of thinking. Workforce diversity became a topic of conversation both in and out of the workforce, helping to develop the birth of the diversity industry.

Many companies acknowledged a change in workforce demographics were on the horizon; however, very few companies recognized how diversity could positively influence a company's bottom-line. Instead of welcoming the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their newly acquired female and minority employees, they focused on getting them to adapt to the current company majority. In many cases, a company's diversity was only reflected through the way their employees looked, not in the way their employees behaved and operated. Training and development were focused on getting the new employees to adapt to the current way of doing things, instead of training the whole company to view business operations from a variety of new perspectives. While assimilation is important to foster fluidity within an organization, utilizing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of employees can help propel operations and output to the next level. Being able to properly manage diversity, in all aspects of the term, became a new focus for many organizations and opened the door for a new era of diversity training and appreciation.

Since there was a new focus on diversity, specifically for hiring and including women and minorities, some current members of the workforce began to feel ostracized. White males specifically were viewed as a diversity problem, and their issues and concerns were not validated because they were the majority, not the minority. This forced people to revisit the concept of diversity, reminding people that diversity includes all people from all backgrounds and that includes white males. All these new concepts and ideas created discussions that are still being held today. For example, there is still a debate about the importance of including white males in the realm of diversity or solely focusing on the traditionally underrepresented groups. Also, does diversity primarily include ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and age? Or does it also include education, socioeconomic background, and previous experiences? Society and the business world are still working their way through some of these conversations today.

Diversity and social progress continue to be an important focus for companies and the way companies foster diversity continues to develop and grow. In today's workplace, companies can promote diversity through domestic partner benefits, paid maternity/paternity leave, flexible schedules, a range of dress code requirements, etc. At the end of this module, we will discuss strategies and ideas you can use to encourage and promote diversity in the workplace.

While this was just a quick review into the history of social progress, hopefully it gave some insight into how much American organizations have grown and developed over the last century. While there are still changes on the horizon, modern society is more open to diversity and what it can bring to the table.

Complexity of Diversity in the Workplace

As we have discussed, diversity is everywhere, including the workplace. Diversity can be defined on a variety of levels. There are both external and internal factors that need to be considered when discussing diversity. **External diversity** is often displayed in a person's appearance. External diversity can include but is not limited to, gender, age, ethnicity, and sometimes even religion. It is also important to note that even external diversity traits are not always easy to identify as not everyone ages the same or looks the same, even if they're from the same part of the world or expressed their gender in the same way.

Internal diversity, on the other hand, is even more challenging to define and identify. **Internal diversity** includes individual experiences and backgrounds. Internal diversity examples may include how people were raised, where they went to school, previous job experience, etc.

Not every piece of the diversity puzzle can fit neatly into a category. Diversity is extremely complex and incorporates almost every aspect of a person's life. You may find people that are similar to you and have similar core values and beliefs; however, there is no one who is exactly like you because everyone has different experiences throughout their lifetime. Even similar interactions and experiences may have a different effect on each individual who lives it.

The workplace is equally as complex as the rest of society. Once again, the workplace will not identically mirror society but it still experiences similar diversity challenges. We will now examine the benefits and challenges of having a diverse workplace.

Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace

UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center's (GGSC) definition of diversity captures not only that essential element of difference but why it matters. To quote: "'diversity' refers to both an obvious fact of human life—namely, that there are many different kinds of people—and the idea that this diversity drives cultural, economic, and social vitality and innovation.'" From a human resource management standpoint, it's important to note that diversity benefits both the organization and individuals. GGSC cites research indicating that "individuals thrive when they are able to tolerate and embrace the diversity of the world." Of course, the opposite is also true: intolerance undermines our well-being.

Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, and Yee (2018) observe that "While social justice, legal compliance, or maintaining industry-standard employee environment protocols is typically the initial impetus behind these efforts, many successful companies regard I&D [inclusion & diversity] as a source of competitive advantage, and specifically as a key enabler of growth." The authors found that the business case for diversity and inclusion remains compelling, listing the following benefits:

- **Diversity drives business performance.** A more diverse leadership team correlates with financial outperformance.
- **Executive diversity (gender++) matters.** The companies with the highest gender diversity on their executive teams tend to have higher profitability. Additionally, ethnic and cultural diversity of executive also leads to higher profitability."

- **Lack of diversity impairs business results.** Companies that opt out of building a diverse workforce are less likely to be as profitable as companies that work toward a diverse workforce.

Hunt et al. (2018) found that companies with more diversity are better able to attract top talent and increase employee satisfaction, leading to a positive relationship between inclusion and diversity and performance. The following benefits outlined by Reynolds (2019) expand upon these findings:

- **Greater creativity and innovation**—diversity of thought—for example, different experiences, perspectives and cognitive styles—can stimulate creativity and drive innovation.
- **Improved competitive positioning**—"local knowledge"—everything from local laws and customs to connections, language and cultural fluency—can increase the probability of success when entering a new country or region.
- **Improved marketing effectiveness**—having an understanding of the nuances of culture and language is a prerequisite for developing appropriate products and marketing materials. The list of gaffes is endless…and the financial and brand impact of errors can be significant, from a line of Nike Air shoes that were perceived to be disrespectful of Allah to the poor Chinese translation of KFC's "Finger lickin' good tagline: "so tasty, you'll eat your fingers off!"
- **Improved talent acquisition & retention**—this is particularly critical in a competitive job market: embracing diversity not only increases the talent pool, it improves candidate attraction and retention. A Glassdoor survey found that 67% of job seekers indicated that diversity was an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers. Reynolds also cites HR.com research that indicates diversity, including diversity of gender, religion, and ethnicity, improves retention.
- **Increased organizational adaptability**—hiring individuals with a broader base of skills and experience and cognitive styles will likely be more effective in developing new products and services, supporting a diverse client base and will allow an organization to anticipate and leverage market and socio-cultural or political developments/opportunities.
- **Greater productivity**—research has shown that the range of experience, expertise and cognitive styles that are implicit in a diverse workforce improve complex problem-solving, innovation and productivity.
- **Greater personal and professional growth**—learning to work across and leverage differences can be an enriching experience and an opportunity to build a diverse network and develop a range of high-value soft skills including communication, empathy, collaborative problem-solving and multicultural awareness. To that point,

GGSC reports that a study published in Psychological Science found that "social and emotional intelligence rises as we interact with more kinds of people."

Challenges of Diversity in the Workplace

What makes us different can also make it challenging for us to work well together. Challenges to employee diversity are based not only on our differences—actual or perceived—but on what we perceive as a threat. Our micro (e.g., organizational culture) and macro (e.g., socio-political and legal) operating environment can also be challenges for diversity. Long-term economic, social, political and environmental trends are rendering entire industries—and the associated skill sets—obsolete. For many in these industries and many slow-growth occupations, workplace trends seem to represent a clear and present danger.

Buckley and Bachman (2017) state that the U.S. labor market is increasingly dividing into two categories: "highly skilled, well-paid professional jobs and poorly paid, low-skilled jobs." There are relatively fewer middle-skill, moderate-pay jobs—for example, traditional blue-collar or administrative jobs. The idea of a static set of skills for a given occupation is a historical concept. Participation in the future labor force will increasingly require computer and mathematical skills, even at the low-skill end.

Buckley and Bachman (2017) also predict that the workforce of the future will be older ("70 is the new 50"), more diverse and more highly educated stating that "if current trends continue, tomorrow's workforce will be even more diverse than today's—by gender, by ethnicity, by culture, by religion, by sexual preference and identification, and perhaps by other characteristics we don't even know about right now."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) projects that by 2024, less than 60% of the labor force will identify as "white non-Hispanic," down from over 75% in 1994. Hispanic individuals are projected to comprise approximately 20% of the 2024 labor force, African-Americans 13% and Asians 7%. Women are expected to comprise 47% of the 2024 workforce. For many, these economic and demographic shifts represent a radical change. Macro level challenges to diversity include fixed mindsets, economic trends and outdated socio-political frameworks. Reynolds (2019) lists specific challenges to diversity that may be experienced at the organizational level:

- **Complexity.** This is the flip-side of one of diversity's benefits: it's hard work! Reynolds notes that while it might seem easier to work on a homogeneous team, there is a tendency to compromise and "settle for the status quo." Rock, Grant, and Grey (2016) argue that "working on diverse teams produces better outcomes precisely because it's harder."
- **Differences in communication behaviors.** Different cultures have different communication rules or expectations. For example, colleagues from Asian or Native

American cultures may be less inclined to “jump in” or offer their opinions due to politeness or deference as a new member or the only [fill in the blank] on the team.

- **Prejudice or negative stereotypes.** Prejudice, negative assumptions or perceived limitations can negate the benefits of diversity and create a toxic culture. The oversimplifications of stereotypes can be divisive and limiting in the workplace. Additionally, unconscious biases are often more challenging to maintaining workplace diversity.
- **Differences in language and non-verbal communications.** George Bernard Shaw quipped “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Clearly, language differences can be a challenge, including accents and idioms. Translation errors can also occur with non-verbal communication; gestures, eye contact, personal space and greeting customs can be significantly (and disastrously) different across cultures and regions.
- **Complexity & cost of accommodations.** Hiring a non-U.S. citizen may require navigating visas and employment law as well as making accommodations for religious practices and non-standard holidays.
- **Differences in professional etiquette.** Differences in attitudes, behaviors and values ranging from punctuality to the length of the work day, form of address or how to manage conflict can cause tensions.
- **Conflicting working styles across teams.** In addition to individual differences, different approaches to work and team work—for example, the relative value of independent versus collaborative/collective thought and work—can derail progress.

Diversity and the Law

Thus far we have examined the history of social diversity, and addressed the benefits and challenges of having a diverse workforce. The progress that has been made in developing more diverse workplaces has been aided by various laws and policies, some of which were mentioned in discussing the history of social progress. We will now look more closely at the current laws impacting diversity in the workplace.

Employment Legislation

What happens when businesses make decisions that violate laws and regulations designed to protect working Americans? As a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) training manual emphasizes: “Discrimination cost employers millions of dollars every year, not to mention the countless hours of lost work time, employee stress and the negative public image that goes along with a discrimination lawsuit.”

Equal employment opportunity isn’t just the right thing to do, it’s the law. Specifically, it’s a series of federal laws and amendments designed to eliminate employment discrimination. Employment discrimination laws and regulations are enforced by the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**, an agency established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII). The agency's mission is to stop and remedy unlawful employment discrimination. Specifically, the EEOC is charged with "enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information" (Figure 6.8) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Since its creation in 1964, Congress has gradually expanded EEOC powers to include the authority to investigate claims, negotiate settlements and file lawsuits. The agency also conducts outreach and educational programs in an effort to prevent discrimination. Finally, the EEOC provides equal employment opportunity advisory services and technical support to federal agencies.

Figure 2.8 Seal of the office of the US EEOC – U.S. Government – Public Domain

Anti-Discrimination Legislation

The intent of U.S. anti-discrimination legislation is to protect workers from unfair treatment. In brief, illegal discrimination is the practice of making employment decisions based on factors unrelated to performance.

In 1964, the United States Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act. In 1963 when the legislation was introduced, the act only forbade discrimination on the basis of sex and race in hiring, promoting, and firing. However, by the time the legislation was finally passed on July 2, 1964, Section 703 (a) made it unlawful for an employer to "fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges or employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."

Over the years, amendments to the original act have expanded the scope of the law, and today the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces laws that prohibit discrimination based on seven protected categories including age, disability, genetic information, national origin, pregnancy, race, color, religion, and sex. Federal anti-discrimination laws apply to a broad range of employee actions. Specifically, any employment decision – including hiring, compensation, scheduling, performance evaluation, promotion, firing or any other term or condition of employment – that is based on factors unrelated to performance is illegal.

While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not mention the words *affirmative action*, it did authorize the bureaucracy to makes rules to help end discrimination. **Affirmative action** refers to both mandatory and voluntary programs intended to affirm the civil rights of designated classes of individuals by taking positive action to protect them from discrimination. The first federal policy of race-conscious affirmative action emerged in 1967 and required government contractors to set "goals and timetables" for integrating and diversifying their workforce. Similar policies began to emerge through a mix of voluntary practices and federal and state policies in employment and education. These include government-mandated, government-sanctioned, and voluntary private programs that tend to focus on access to education and employment, specifically granting special consideration to historically excluded groups such as racial minorities or women. The impetus toward affirmative action is redressing the disadvantages associated with past and present discrimination. A further impetus is the desire to ensure that public institutions, such as universities, hospitals, and police forces, are more representative of the populations they serve.

In the United States, affirmative action tends to emphasize not specific quotas but rather "targeted goals" to address past discrimination in a particular institution or in broader society through "good-faith efforts . . . to identify, select, and train potentially qualified minorities and women." For example, many higher education institutions have voluntarily adopted policies that seek to increase recruitment of racial minorities. Another example is executive orders requiring some government contractors and subcontractors to adopt equal opportunity employment measures, such as outreach campaigns, targeted recruitment, employee and management development, and employee support programs.

As discussed above, the **EEOC** is the organization charged with implementing Title VII and related anti-discrimination legislation. There are currently seven categories protected under federal law: age, disability, genetic information, national origin, race and color, religion and sex. The EEOC's authority includes enforcing the following federal statutes summarized below. Unless otherwise stated, these laws apply to most employers with at least 15 employees (20 employees for the ADEA), including employment agencies and labor unions.

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The law also makes it illegal to retaliate against a person who has voiced a grievance, filed a charge of discrimination or participated in an investigation or lawsuit. The prohibition against **sexual harassment** falls under Title VII of this act. As defined by the EEOC, "It is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex." Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.
- An amendment to Title VII, The Pregnancy Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination against a woman based on pregnancy, childbirth or a related condition. As in the original law, it also makes retaliation illegal.
- The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA): Prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in compensation for substantially similar work under similar conditions. In essence, men and women doing equal jobs must receive the same pay. Since the EPA's enactment, there has been significant – if slow – progress in achieving pay equity. Although progress has often stalled or reversed, the wage gap has narrowed consistently in recent years. Since 1963, the wage gap has decreased from 58.9% to 80.5% in 2017. For perspective: at this percentage, a woman would need to work through April 10 of the next year to make what a man in an equivalent role earned the prior year.
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA): Prohibits employment discrimination against individuals 40 years of age or older based on age. As with other anti-discrimination legislation, the law makes retaliation illegal.
- Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA): Prohibits discrimination against a qualified person with a disability and requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for applicants and employees with known physical or mental limitations who are otherwise qualified unless that accommodation would pose an "undue hardship" or material impact (significant difficulty or expense) on an employer's business operations. As with other anti-discrimination legislation, the law makes retaliation illegal. This law applies to private sector and state and local government employers only. Disability discrimination protection at the federal level is provided in Sections 501 and 505 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**.** There are three kinds of *reasonable accommodations* defined by the EEOC (29 CFR § 1630.2 – Definitions):

- “modifications or adjustments to a job application process that enable a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for the position such qualified applicant desires; or
- modifications or adjustments to the work environment, or to the manner or circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that position; or
- modifications or adjustments that enable a covered entity’s employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are enjoyed by its other similarly situated employees without disabilities.”

- The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA): Prohibits discrimination against applicants or employees based on an individual’s or his or her family’s genetic information or family medical history (for example, a hereditary disease, disorder or medical condition). As with other anti-discrimination legislation, the law makes retaliation illegal.

Despite the public relations and financial risk of discriminatory hiring practices, charges of workplace discrimination are in the tens of thousands annually. Since 1997, the number of charges has ranged from a low of 75,428 in 2005 to a high of 99,947 in 2011. In fiscal year 2017, the EEOC received 84,254 charges of workplace discrimination charges and obtained $398 million in monetary benefits for victims through a combination of voluntary resolutions and litigation. As was true for the last few years, retaliation was the most frequently filed charge (49%), followed by race (34%), disability (32%), sex (30%) and age (22%). Percentages for the remaining categories range from less than 1% to 10%.

Although retaliation charges are up 3 percentage points from the prior year, 2016 percentages in the remaining top five categories were within a percentage point, with race at 35%, disability at 31%, sex at 29% and age at 23%. Note that percentages add up to more than 100 due to charges alleging multiple bases of discrimination.

Note that state and local laws may provide broader discrimination protections. If in doubt, contact your state department of labor for clarification. Note as well that laws are subject to interpretation. For example, an EEOC notice emphasizes that their interpretation of the Title VII reference to “sex” is broadly applicable to gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. And, further, that “these protections apply regardless of any contrary state or local laws.”

In the Press Release announcing the 2017 data, EEOC Acting Chair Victoria A Lipnic stated that results for the fiscal year demonstrate that “the EEOC has remained steadfast in its commitment to its core values and mission: to vigorously enforce our nation’s civil rights laws.”

EEO Best Practices

As part of its E-Race (Eradicating Racism & Colorism from Employment) Initiative, the EEOC has identified a number of best practices that are applicable broadly, including the following:

Training, Enforcement, and Accountability

Ensure that management—specifically HR managers—and all employees know EEO laws. Implement a strong EEO policy with executive level support. Hold leaders accountable. Also: If using an outside agency for recruitment, make sure agency employees know and adhere to relevant laws; both an agency and hiring organization is liable for violations.

Promote an Inclusive Culture

It's not just enough to talk about diversity and inclusion—it takes work to foster a professional environment with respect for individual differences. Make sure that differences are welcomed. Being the "only" of anything can get tiring, so make sure you're not putting further pressure on people by surrounding them in a culture that encourages conformity. A great way to promote an inclusive culture is to make sure your leadership is diverse and to listen to the voices of minorities.

Develop Communication

Fostering open communication and developing an alternative dispute-resolution (ADR) program may reduce the chance that a miscommunication escalates into a legally actionable EEO claim. If you're not providing a path for employees to have issues resolved, they'll look elsewhere. Additionally, it's essential to protect employees from retaliation. If people think reporting an issue will only make the situation worse, they won't bring it up, which will cause the issue to fester and lead to something worse than it once was.

Evaluate Practices

Monitor compensation and evaluation practices for patterns of potential discrimination and ensure that performance appraisals are based on job performance and accurate across evaluators and roles.

Audit Selection Criteria

Ensure that selection criteria do not disproportionately exclude protected groups unless the criteria are valid predictors of successful job performance and meet the employer's business needs. Additionally, make sure that employment decisions are based on objective criteria rather than stereotypes or unconscious bias.

Make HR Decisions with EEO in Mind

Implement practices that diversify the candidate pool and leadership pipeline. Provide training and mentoring to help employees thrive. All employees should have equal access to workplace networks.

Enforce an Anti-Harassment Policy

Establish, communicate and enforce a strong anti-harassment policy. You should conduct periodic training for all employees and enforce the policy. The policy should include:

- A clear explanation of prohibited conduct, including examples
- Clear assurance that employees who make complaints or provide information related to complaints will be protected against retaliation
- A clearly described complaint process that provides multiple, accessible avenues of complaint
- Assurance that the employer will protect the confidentiality of harassment complaints to the extent possible
- A complaint process that provides a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation
- Assurance that the employer will take immediate and appropriate corrective action when it determines that harassment has occurred

EEO Complaints

If an employee believes they were or are being discriminated against at work based on a protected category, the person can file a complaint with the EEOC or a state or local agency (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). For example, in California, a discrimination claim can be filed either with the state's administrative agency, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) or the EEOC. Workplacefairness.org notes that the "California anti-discrimination statute covers some smaller employers not covered by federal law. Therefore, if your workplace has between 5 and 14 employees (or one or more employees for harassment claims), you should file with the DFEH" (Workplace Fairness). California law also addresses language discrimination—for example, "English-only" policies. In brief, "an employer cannot limit or prohibit employees from using any language in the workplace unless there is a business necessity for the restriction." This section discusses private-sector EEO complaints and enforcement. Federal job applicants and employees follow a different process, linked here: federal EEO complaint process.

Who Should File

If federal EEO law applies your workplace and you believe you were discriminated against at work because of your race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information, you can file a charge of discrimination with the EEOC.

Filing a charge of discrimination involves submitting a signed statement asserting that an employer, union or labor organization engaged in employment discrimination. The claim serves as a request for the EEOC to take remedial action. Note that an individual, organization, or agency is allowed to file a charge on behalf of another person in order to protect that person's identity. A person (or authorized representative) is required to file a Charge of Discrimination with the EEOC prior to filing a job discrimination lawsuit based on EEO laws with the exception of the Equal Pay Act. Under the Equal Pay Act, you are allowed to file a lawsuit and go directly to court.

How to File

To start the process, you can use the EEOC's Public Portal to submit an inquiry or schedule an "intake" interview. The Public Portal landing page also has a FAQ section and Knowledge Base and allows you to find a local office and track your case. The two most frequently accessed articles are linked below:

- What happens during an EEOC intake interview?
- If I submit an online inquiry, does that mean I filed a charge of discrimination?

The second step in the process is to participate in the interview process. The interview allows you to discuss your employment discrimination situation with an EEOC staff member and determine whether filing a charge of discrimination is the appropriate next step for you. The decision of whether to file or not is yours.

The third step in the process, filing a Charge of Discrimination, can be completed through the Public Portal site.

When to File

The general rule is that a charge needs to be filed within 180 calendar days from the day the discrimination took place. Note that this time frame includes weekends and holidays, except for the final day. This time frame is extended to 300 calendar days if a state or local agency enforces a law that prohibits employment discrimination on the same basis. However, in cases of age discrimination, the filing deadline is only extended to 300 days if there is a state law prohibiting age discrimination in employment and a state agency authorized to enforce that law.

If more than one discriminatory event took place, the deadline usually applies to each event. The one exception to this rule is when the charge is ongoing harassment. In that case, the deadline to file is within 180 or 300 days of the last incident. In conducting its investigation, the agency will consider all incidents of harassment, including those that occurred more than 180/300 days earlier.

If you are alleging a violation of the Equal Pay Act, the deadline for filing a charge or lawsuit under the EPA is two years from the day you received the last discriminatory paycheck. This timeframe is extended to three years in the case of willful discrimination. Note that if you have an Equal Pay Act claim, you may want to pursue remedy under both

Title VII and the Equal Pay Act. The EEOC recommends talking to a field staff to discuss your options.

Key point: filing deadlines will generally not be extended to accommodate an alternative dispute resolution process—for example, following an internal or union grievance procedure, arbitration or mediation. These resolution processes may be pursued concurrently with an EEOC complaint filing. The EEOC is required to notify the employer that a charge has been filed against it.

If you have 60 days or less to file a timely charge, refer to the EEOC Public Portal for special instructions or contact the EEOC office closest to you.

Claim Assessment

The EEOC is required to accept all claims related to discrimination. If the EEOC finds that the laws it enforces are not applicable to a claim, that a claim was not filed in a timely manner or that it is unlikely to be able to establish that a violation occurred, the agency will close the investigation and notify the claimant.

Claim Notice

Within 10 days of a charge being filed, the EEOC will send the employer a notice of the charge.

Mediation

In some cases, the agency will ask both the claimant and employer to participate in mediation. In brief, the process involves a neutral mediator who assists the parties in resolving their employment disputes and reaching a voluntary, negotiated agreement. One of the upsides of mediation is that cases are generally resolved in less than three months—less than a third of the time it takes to reach a decision through investigation. For more perspective on mediation, visit the EEOC's Mediation web page.

Investigation

If the charge is not sent to mediation, or if mediation doesn't resolve the charge, the EEOC will generally ask the employer to provide a written response to the charge, referred to as the "Respondent's Position Statement." The EEOC may also ask the employer to answer questions about the claims in the charge. The claimant will be able to log in to the Public Portal and view the position statement. The claimant has 20 days to respond to the employer's position statement.

How the investigation proceeds depends upon the facts of the case and information required. For example, the EEOC may conduct interviews and gather documents at the employer site or interview witnesses and request documentation. If additional instances of discriminatory behavior take place during the investigation process, the charge can be "amended" to include those charges or an EEOC agent may recommend filing a new charge of discrimination. If new events are added to the original charge or a new charge is filed, the new or amended charge will be sent to the employer and the new events will be investigated along with the prior events.

EEOC Decision

Once the investigation has been completed—on average, a ten-month process—the claimant and employer are notified of the result. If the EEOC determines the law may have been violated, the agency will attempt to reach a voluntary settlement with the employer. Barring that, the case will be referred to EEOC's legal staff (or, in some cases, the Department of Justice), to determine whether the agency should file a lawsuit.

Right to Sue

If the EEOC decides not to file suit, the agency will give the claimant a Notice of Right to Sue, allowing the claimant to pursue the case in court. If the charge was filed under Title VII or the ADA, the claimant must have a Notice of Right to Sue from EEOC before filing a lawsuit in federal court. Generally, the EEOC must be allowed 180 days to resolve a charge. However, in some cases, the EEOC will issue a Notice of Right to Sue in less than 180 days.

Final Thoughts on Workplace Diversity

Although decades of advocacy and diversity training have had an impact, the results have been mixed. The upside: Deloitte's research into the current state of inclusion found that 86% of respondents felt they could be themselves most or all of the time at work (Jacobson, 2019). That statistic represents a significant improvement over a relatively short period of time. A survey conducted six years prior found that 61% of "respondents felt they had to hide at least one aspect of who they are" (Deloitte, 2019). At that time, the conclusion was that "most inclusion programs require people to assimilate into the overall corporate culture" and that this need to "cover" directly impacts not only an individual's sense of self but their commitment to the organization (Matuson, 2013).

On the downside, bias remains a constant, with over 60% of respondents reporting bias in their workplace. Deloitte reports that 64% of employees surveyed "felt they had experienced bias in their workplace during the last year" (Deloitte, 2019). Even more disturbing, 61% of those respondents "felt they experienced bias in the workplace at least once a month." The percentages of respondents who indicated that they have observed bias in their workplaces during the last year and observe it on a monthly basis are roughly the same at 64% and 63%, respectively.

Research suggests that bias is now more subtle—for example, an act of "microaggression" rather than overt discrimination. It is, however, no less harmful. Deloitte's 2019 research found that bias impacts not only those who are directly affected, but also those who observe the behavior. Specifically, of those who reported experiencing or observing bias: 86% reported a negative impact on happiness, confidence, and well-being; 70% reported a negative impact on engagement and 68% reported a negative impact on productivity (Deloitte, 2019). Executive coach Laura Gates observes that the price of not addressing corrosive interpersonal behavior is too high. She notes that “if people don’t feel safe, they can’t be creative. If they aren’t creative, they can’t innovate. If they don’t innovate, the business eventually becomes obsolete.”

Although we are generally aware that our perceptions are subjective, we are largely unaware that there can be a disconnect between our conscious thoughts and our unconscious beliefs or biases, primarily a product of socio-cultural conditioning.

Summary

- Understanding diversity can help us to work better in group or team situations and gives us insight into the behavior of an organization.
- The Progressive Era began in the late 1800s and focused on both political and ethical reform.
- External diversity can include but is not limited to, gender, age, ethnicity, and sometimes even religion
- Internal diversity includes individual experiences and backgrounds.
- Equal employment opportunity isn't just the right thing to do, it's the law. Specifically, it's a series of federal laws and amendments designed to eliminate employment discrimination. Employment discrimination laws and regulations are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an agency established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII).

Discussion Questions

1. What challenges have you experienced related to diversity in the workplace?
2. What policies has your workplace implemented to address diversity in the workplace? How well were those policies received? Were the effective?
3. Take a look at the Fortune 500 list and choose any company that has a CEO who is part of a minority group. Then, go to that company's website and determine the diversity of that company's senior team. How did this company do in the current year—did they perform better than in the previous two years? Do they have any space on their careers page dedicated to diversity?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of Employment Legislation (Introduction to Business – Lumen Learning) and EEO Best Practices, EEO Complaints (Human Resources Management – Lumen Learning) added to Introduction to Social Diversity in the Workplace (Organizational Behavior and Human Relations – Lumen Learning).
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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Chapter 3: Behavioral Change

When you think about going to work do you go because you want to be at your workplace or maybe you go because your job provides you with a paycheck? These are questions of what motivates you to work that we will explore in this module.

To continue developing strong human relations skills, we will learn about behavioral changes. In this chapter we will learn about types of motivation, how we can set goals and achieved them, how to improve our mindset and grit. Throughout this chapter, we will engage in activities to apply the human relations concepts we have learned.

3.1 Motivation and Goal Setting

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
- Identify short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals.
- Identify the benefits and rewards of setting goals.

Motivation

Why do we do the things we do? What motivations underlie our behaviors? **Motivation** describes the wants or needs that direct behavior toward a goal. In addition to biological motives, motivations can be **intrinsic** (arising from internal factors) or **extrinsic** (arising from external factors) (Figure 3.1). Intrinsically motivated behaviors are performed because of the sense of personal satisfaction that they bring, while extrinsically motivated behaviors are performed in order to receive something from others.

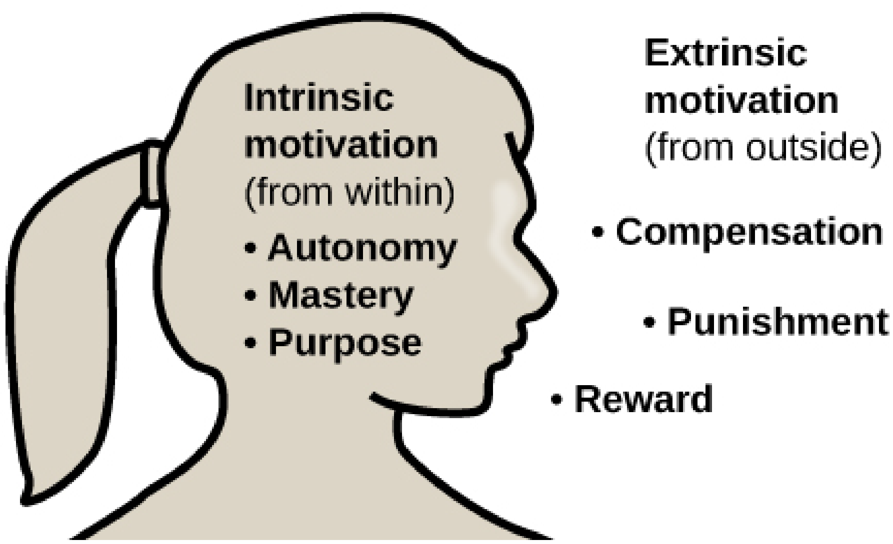

Figure 3.1 Intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual, while extrinsic motivation comes from outside the individual. [Motivation](#) – [Psychology 2e](#) – [CC BY 4.0](#)

Think about why you are pursuing an education. Are you here because you enjoy learning and want to pursue an education to make yourself a more well-rounded individual? If so, then you are intrinsically motivated. However, if you are here because you want to get a college degree to make yourself more marketable for a high-paying career or to satisfy the demands of your parents, then your motivation is more extrinsic in nature.

In reality, our motivations are often a mix of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, but the nature of the mix of these factors might change over time (often in ways that seem counter-intuitive). There is an old adage: "Choose a job that you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life," meaning that if you enjoy your occupation, work doesn't seem like . . . well, work. Some research suggests that this isn't necessarily the case (Daniel & Esser, 1980; Deci, 1972; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999).

According to this research, receiving some sort of extrinsic reinforcement (i.e., getting paid) for engaging in behaviors that we enjoy leads to those behaviors being thought of as work no longer providing that same enjoyment. As a result, we might spend less time engaging in these reclassified behaviors in the absence of any extrinsic reinforcement. For example, Odessa loves baking, so in her free time, she bakes for fun. Oftentimes, after stocking shelves at her grocery store job, she often whips up pastries in the evenings because she enjoys baking. When a coworker in the store's bakery department leaves his job, Odessa applies for his position and gets transferred to the bakery department. Although she enjoys what she does in her new job, after a few months, she no longer has much desire to concoct tasty treats in her free time. Baking has become work in a way that changes her motivation to do it (Figure 3.2). What Odessa has experienced is called the **overjustification effect**—intrinsic motivation is diminished when extrinsic motivation is given. This can lead to extinguishing the intrinsic motivation and creating a dependence on extrinsic rewards for continued performance (Deci et al., 1999).

Figure 3.2 Research suggests that when something we love to do, like baking, becomes our job, our intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to do it may change. A happy baker in Oslo – Thomas Berg – CC-BY-SA 2.0

Other studies suggest that intrinsic motivation may not be so vulnerable to the effects of extrinsic reinforcements, and in fact, reinforcements such as verbal praise might actually increase intrinsic motivation (Arnold, 1976; Cameron & Pierce, 1994). In that case, Odessa's motivation to bake in her free time might remain high if, for example, customers regularly compliment her baking or cake decorating skills.

These apparent discrepancies in the researchers' findings may be understood by considering several factors. For one, physical reinforcement (such as money) and verbal reinforcement (such as praise) may affect an individual in very different ways. In fact, tangible rewards (i.e., money) tend to have more negative effects on intrinsic motivation than do intangible rewards (i.e., praise). Furthermore, the expectation of the extrinsic motivator by an individual is crucial: If the person expects to receive an extrinsic reward, then intrinsic motivation for the task tends to be reduced. If, however, there is no such expectation, and the extrinsic motivation is presented as a surprise, then intrinsic motivation for the task tends to persist (Deci et al., 1999).

In addition, culture may influence motivation. For example, in collectivistic cultures, it is common to do things for your family members because the emphasis is on the group and what is best for the entire group, rather than what is best for any one individual (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). This focus on others provides a broader perspective that takes into account both situational and cultural influences on behavior; thus, a more nuanced explanation of the causes of others' behavior becomes more likely.

In educational settings, students are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation to learn when they feel a sense of belonging and respect in the classroom. This internalization can be enhanced if the evaluative aspects of the classroom are de-emphasized and if students feel that they exercise some control over the learning environment. Furthermore, providing students with activities that are challenging, yet doable, along with a rationale for engaging in various learning activities can enhance intrinsic motivation for those tasks (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Consider Hakim, a first-year law student with two courses this semester: Family Law and Criminal Law. The Family Law professor has a rather intimidating classroom: He likes to put students on the spot with tough questions, which often leaves students feeling belittled or embarrassed. Grades are based exclusively on quizzes and exams, and the instructor posts results of each test on the classroom door. In contrast, the Criminal Law professor facilitates classroom discussions and respectful debates in small groups. The majority of the course grade is not exam-based, but centers on a student-designed research project on a crime issue of the student's choice. Research suggests that Hakim will be less intrinsically motivated in his Family Law course, where students are intimidated in the classroom setting, and there is an emphasis on teacher-driven evaluations. Hakim is likely to experience a higher level of intrinsic motivation in his Criminal Law course, where the class setting encourages inclusive collaboration and a respect for ideas, and where students have more influence over their learning activities.

Goal Setting

Some people are goal-oriented and seem to easily make decisions that lead to achieving their goals, while others seem just to "go with the flow" and accept what life gives them.

While the latter may sound pleasantly relaxed, moving through life without goals may not lead anywhere at all. The fact that you are taking a college course now shows you might be working toward some goal.

A **goal** is a result we intend to reach mostly through our own actions. Things we do may move us closer to or farther away from that result. Studying moves us closer to success in a difficult course, while sleeping through the final exam may completely prevent reaching that goal. It is fairly obvious in an extreme case, yet a lot of college students do not reach their goal of graduating. The problem may be a lack of commitment to the goal, but often students have conflicting goals. Let us look at some examples of how students may experience conflicting goals.

To help his widowed mother, Juan went to work full time after high school but now, a few years later, he is dissatisfied with the kinds of jobs he has been able to get and has begun taking classes toward an Associate's Degree in Computer Science in the evenings. He is often tired after work and his mother would like him to spend more time at home, and his girlfriend also wants to spend more time with him. Sometimes he cuts class to visit his mother or spend time with his girlfriend.

In her senior year of college, Becky has just been elected president of her sorority and is excited about planning a major community service project. She knows she should be spending more time on her senior thesis, but she feels her community project may gain her contacts that can help her find a better job after graduation. Besides, the sorority project is a lot more fun, and she is enjoying the esteem of her position. Even if she does not do well on her thesis, she is sure she will pass.

After an easy time in high school, Morgan is surprised their college classes are so hard. They have enough time to study for their first-year courses, but they also have a lot of friends and fun things to do. Sometimes they are surprised to look up from their computer to see it is midnight already, and they have not even started reading that chapter yet. Where does the time go? When they are stressed, however, they cannot study well, so they tell themself they will get up early and read the chapter before class, and then they turn back to their computer to see who is online.

Sachito was successful in cutting back her hours at work to give her more time for her college classes, but it is difficult for her to get much studying done at home. Her husband has been wonderful about taking care of their young daughter, but he cannot do everything, and lately, he has been hinting more about asking her sister to babysit so that the two of them can go out in the evening the way they used to. Lately, when she has had to study on a weekend, he leaves with his friends, and Sachito ends up spending the day with her daughter—and not getting much studying done.

What do these very different students have in common? Each has goals that conflict in one or more ways. Each needs to develop strategies to meet their other goals without threatening their academic success. And all of them have time management issues to work through, three because they feel they do not have enough time to do everything they want or need to do, and one because even though he has enough time, he needs to learn how to manage it more effectively. For all four of them, motivation and attitude will be important as they develop strategies to achieve their goals.

One way to prevent the problems that arise from conflicting goals is to think about all of your goals and priorities and learn ways to manage your time, your studies, and your social life to best reach your goals. Also, consider whether your goals support your core values that you identified in the previous module. You are more likely to achieve a goal that is aligned directly with your values.

Benefits of Goal Setting

Setting goals can turn your dreams into reality. You may have a dream to one day graduate from college, buy a new car, own your own home, travel abroad, etc. Any of these dreams can be broken down into a detailed goal and personal action plan. For example, maybe you want to buy a home 20 years from now. You will need $40,000 as a down payment. That is a lot of money and may not feel achievable. But, if you break that $40,000 into 20 years, that is $2,000 a year. That sounds more manageable. And if we break it down even more, you can buy that house if you save about $165 a month, or $42 a week, or $6 a day! Can you save $6 a day, maybe by packing your lunch instead of the drive-thru? Our big dream is now an achievable, realistic goal.

Setting goals has many benefits. Goal setting allows you to create a plan to focus on your goal, rather than dreaming about the future. It also reduces anxiety and worry. It is much less anxiety-producing to focus on saving $6 a day than it is to save $40,000. It is also motivating because you will be able to measure your progress and successes. At the end of one year, you will have saved $2,000, which will motivate you to keep saving and maybe even increase your saving goal. You will use your time and resources more wisely, often leading to faster and increased results.

As you think about your own goals, think about more than just being a student. You are also a person with your own values, individual needs, desires, hopes, dreams, and plans. Your long-term goals likely include graduation and a career but may also involve social relationships with others, a romantic relationship, family, hobbies or other activities, where and how you live, and so on. While you are a student you may not be actively pursuing all your goals with the same fervor, but they remain goals and are still important in your life. Think about what goals you would like to achieve academically, vocationally (career), financially, personally, physically, spiritually, and socially.

Types of Goals

There are different types of goals, based on time and topic. Below we will discuss the major types of goals that you may set for yourself.

Long-term Goals

Long-term goals may begin with graduating from college and everything you want to happen thereafter. Often your long-term goals (graduating with an associate's degree) guide your mid-term goals (transferring to a university), and your short-term goals (getting an A on your upcoming exam) become steps for reaching those larger goals. Thinking about your goals in this way helps you realize how even the little things you do every day can keep you moving toward your most important long-term goals. Common long-term goals include things like earning your college degree, owning a home, getting a job in your career area, buying a new car, etc.

Mid-term goals

Mid-term goals involve plans for this school year or your time here at college or goals you want to achieve within the next six months to two years. Mid-term goals are often stepping stones to your long-term goals, but they can also be independent goals. For example, you may have a goal of transferring to university, which is a midterm goal that brings you closer to your long-term goal of getting your Bachelor's degree. Or, you may have a goal to pay off your credit card debt within the next 12 months or to save for a car that you plan to buy next year. When making mid-term goals related to your long-term goals, make a list of accomplishments that will lead you to your final goal.

Short-term goals

Short-term goals focus on today and the next few days and perhaps weeks. Short-term goals expect accomplishment in a short period of time, such as trying to get a bill paid in the next few days or getting an A on your upcoming exam. The definition of a short-term goal need not relate to any specific length of time. In other words, one may achieve (or fail to achieve) a short-term goal in a day, week, month, year, etc. The time frame for a short-term goal relates to its context in the overall timeline that it is being applied. For instance, one could measure a short-term goal for a month-long project in days; whereas one might measure a short-term goal for someone's lifetime in months or in years. Often, people define short-term goals in relation to their mid-term or long-term goals.

An example of how short-term and mid-term goals relate to long-term goals is wanting to earn your Bachelor's degree. If you have a goal of earning your Bachelor's degree in four years, a mid-term goal is getting your Associate's Degree and getting accepted to your top choice University in two years. This can be broken down into a series of short-term goals such as your GPA goal for this term, your goal grade on an upcoming exam, and the amount of time you plan to study this weekend. Every long-term goal can be broken down into smaller steps and eventually lead to the question, “what do I have to do today to achieve my goal?” You will make goals in different areas of life and at different times in your life. At this point in your life, academic goals may take precedence but there are also other areas to consider.

Academic – You clearly already have an academic goal and are actively working on pursuing it. Academic goals may include things like a target GPA, completing your Associate’s Degree or certificate, or transferring to a university. It may also include short-term goals like completing your homework before the weekend.

Career – At this point, your career goals may be closely linked to your academic goals, such as getting a degree or certificate in your chosen career field. You may also have career goals of gaining experience in your field through internships and work experience.

Financial – Your financial goals are often tied to your career goals. You may have a salary goal or you may have the goal of saving for a home, a car, or a vacation. You may also have goals to reduce debt and manage your budget.

Health/Physical – Almost all of us have worked on physical goals. Many people have the goal to lose weight, increasing their exercise, or drinking more water. Other health goals could include establishing a regular sleep schedule, eating more fruits and vegetables, or seeing your doctor regularly. Health goals can also include mental health such as meditating or working to reduce stress and anxiety.

Social/Relationships – Even though it may feel like it sometimes, your life is more than school and work. You should also establish goals for your social relationships. For example, make a goal to stay in contact with a friend who moved, visit your family every week, or to have a date with your significant other once a week. Your social relationships are a vital part of your life and deserve your attention and focus.

Spiritual – Many people have religious goals, such as attending church regularly, practicing daily prayer, or joining a church group. Even if you are not religious, you may have spiritual goals such as time alone to meditate.

Personal/Hobbies – In addition to work and school, you may have hobbies or personal interests that you want to devote time and energy to. Perhaps you have a goal of rebuilding a motorcycle or learning how to knit or sew.

SMART Goals

SMART goals are commonly associated with Peter Drucker’s management by objectives concept. It gives structure and organization to the goal-setting process by establishing defined actions, milestones, objectives and deadlines. Creating SMART goals helps with motivation and focus and keeps you moving forward. Every goal can be made into a SMART goal!

When writing your goals, follow these SMART guidelines (Figure 3.3). You should literally *write* them down because the act of finding the best words to describe your goals helps you think more clearly about them.

Figure 3.3 S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time Based. Goals that you set should meet these five criteria. SMART goals – Dungdm93– CC-BY-SA 4.0

Goals should be SPECIFIC

- What exactly do you want to achieve? Avoid vague terms like "good," and "more." The more **specific** you are, the most likely you are to succeed.
- A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal.
- To set a specific goal, answer the six "W" questions:
    - Who: Who is involved?
    - What: What do I want to accomplish?
    - Where: Identify a location.
    - When: Establish a time frame.
    - Which: Identify requirements and constraints.
    - Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

Example: "I will get a 3.5 GPA this semester so that I can apply to the Surgical Tech Program."

Goals should be MEASURABLE

- Break your goal down into **measurable** elements so you have concrete evidence of your progress.
- Using numbers, quantities or time is a good way to ensure measurability.
- To determine if your goal is measurable, ask…
  - How much?
  - How many?
  - How often?
  - How will I know when it is accomplished?

Example: “I will study 18 hours per week, 3 hours per day for six days a week.”

Goals should be ATTAINABLE

- A goal should be something to strive for and reach for but something that is **achievable and attainable**. For example, completing an Associate’s Degree in one year may not be attainable while working full time with a family.
- Ask yourself if you have the time, money, resources and talent to make it happen
- Weigh the effort, time and other costs your goal will take against the benefits and other priorities you have in life.

Example: “I will complete 9 credit hours this semester while working part-time.”

Goals should be REALISTIC

- Your goal should be **realistic and relevant**. Ask yourself if your goal and timeline is realistic for your life, why is the goal important to you, and what is the objective behind your goal? What makes the goal worthwhile for YOU?
  - Why is this goal important to you? (Make sure your goal aligns with your values.)
  - What are the benefits and rewards of accomplishing this goal?
  - Why will you be able to stay committed in the long-run?
  - Is it something that will still be important to you a month or year from now?

Example: “I will become a Surgical Technician in two years to pursue my interests and values in helping others and provide for my family.”

Goals should be TIME-ORIENTED

- Your goal should have a clear deadline to help you stay accountable and motivated.
- Keep the **timeline** realistic but also a little challenging to create a sense of accountability and avoid procrastination.
- With no deadline, there’s no sense of urgency, which leads to procrastination.

- "Someday," "soon," and "eventually" are not deadlines.
- Be specific with each deadline for each step along the way.

Example: "I will complete the draft of my research paper one-week before the deadline."

Putting Your Goals into Action

Be certain you want to reach the goal. We are willing to work hard and sacrifice to reach goals that we really care about, ones that support our core values. But we are likely to give up when we encounter obstacles if we do not feel strongly about a goal. If you are doing something only because your parents or someone else wants you to, then it is not your own personal goal—and you may not be motivated to accomplish said goal.

Writing down your goals helps you to organize your thoughts and be clear with your goals, ensuring you meet the SMART goal criteria. When you write your goals, state them positively, stating what you *will* do rather than what you will not do. When you focus on doing something, that behavior often increases. On the other hand, when you focus on *not* doing something, that behavior also often increases. For example, if you have a goal to increase your health, you may focus on increasing your water intake to at least 64 ounces per day. This will lead you to think about and drink more water. But, if you focus on *not* drinking soda, you are likely to think about soda all day and end up drinking more.

After you have written down your goal, post it in a visible place to remind you every day of what it is you are working toward. When you see your goal, ask yourself, "Did my choices today help move more toward my goal? Are my actions supporting my goals?" Being reminded of your goal can help you stay motivated and focused. You should also consider sharing your goal with friends, family or classmates. Sharing your goal with supportive people who care about you will help you stay on track. Share your goal with people you know will be encouraging and cheer you on as you work toward your goal. In return, offer the same support for your friends' goals and dreams.

Summary

- Motivation describes the wants or needs that direct behavior toward a goal. In addition to biological motives, motivations can be intrinsic (arising from internal factors) or extrinsic (arising from external factors)
- The overjustification effect occurs when intrinsic motivation is diminished due to the addition of extrinsic motivation.
- A goal is a result we intend to reach mostly through our own actions.
- There are different types of goals, based on time (long-term, mid-term, short-term) and topic (academic, career, financial, health/physical, social/relationships, spiritual, personal/hobbies).
- SMART goals give structure and organization to the goal-setting process by establishing defined actions, milestones, objectives and deadlines. SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic/Relevant, Time-Oriented.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe an example of something you are intrinsically motivated to do and an example of something you are extrinsically motivated to do in your personal life.
2. How might intrinsic and extrinsic motivation be different or similar across cultural groups?
3. What process have you used to set goals for yourself in the past? Were you able to meet those goals?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of motivation from 10.1 Motivation (Psychology 2e – Openstax) and goal setting from Chapter 3: Discover Your Values and Goals (Learning Framework: Effective Strategies for College Success - Austin Community College).
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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3.2 Mindset and Grit

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast a Growth Mindset vs. a Fixed Mindset.
- Describe the concept of GRIT and how to apply it to your college success.

Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

Mindsets (the power of people's beliefs) are ways in which we formulate our thoughts about our abilities, relationships, and personality that influences our behaviors and how we feel (Figure 3.4). Students with a **fixed mindset** believe that their own intelligence and talent are innate traits that don't change. For example, they might say, "I just can't learn math." These students typically worry about not looking smart, get upset by mistakes, and give up sooner on tough tasks. With this mindset, people are more likely to attribute their successes to natural talent. Appearing smart, rather than learning, is more highly valued with this type of mindset in education and in the workplace.

Students with a **growth mindset** believe that ability can change as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice. They frequently say, "Math is hard, but if I keep trying, I can get better at it." Students with a growth mindset see mistakes as ways to learn, embrace challenges, and persist in the face of setbacks (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck 2007). With a growth mindset, a person is more likely to believe that their successes are achieved through determination and hard work, the use of good strategies, and feedback from others. In education and the workplace, learning, rather than appearing smart, is more highly valued with this type of mindset (Dweck, 2006; Dweck 2016).

In an interview for OneDublin.org (Morehead, 2012), Dweck, defined both fixed and growth mindsets:

> "In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it."

A large part of Dweck's research on mindsets has been done in the field of education, and how these mindsets affect a student's performance in the classroom. The growth mindset is clearly the more desirable of the two for students. According to Dweck, individuals with a "growth" theory are more likely to continue working hard despite setbacks. Individuals' theories of intelligence can be affected by subtle environmental cues. For example, children given praise such as "good job, you're very smart" are much more likely to develop a fixed mindset, whereas if given compliments like "good job, you worked very hard" they are likely to develop a growth mindset.

Figure 3.4 Individuals can be placed on a continuum according to their implicit views of where ability comes from. [Young people in conversation](#) – [Alexis Brown](#) – [Unsplash License](#)

While elements of our personality – such as sensitivity to mistakes and setbacks – can make us predisposed towards holding a certain mindset, we are able to develop and reshape our mindset through our interactions (Aldhous, 2008). In multiple studies, Carol Dweck and her colleagues noted that alterations in mindset could be achieved through “praising the process through which success was achieved” (Cimpian, Aree, Markman, & Dweck, 2007), “having [college aged students] read compelling scientific articles that support one view or the other” (Aldhous), or teaching junior high school students “that every time they try hard and learn something new, their brain forms new connections that, over time, make them smarter” (Dweck, 2007). These studies all demonstrate how framing and discussing students’ work and effort play a considerable role in the type of mindset students develop and students’ conceptions of their own ability.

Dweck and Jo Boaler have done extensive research on the topics of fixed and growth mindset. However, studies on mindset depict results that show that there is a disparity in the fixed and growth mindsets of female and male students. In Boaler’s (2013) research, she notes that fixed mindset beliefs lead to inequalities in education and are a main reason for low achievement and participation amongst minorities and female students.

Many women feel as though they are not smart enough nor capable enough to continue in certain subjects, such as STEM areas of academia, stating that, “gender differences in mathematics performance only existed among fixed mindset students" (Boaler, 2013).

Dweck’s research and theory of growth and fixed mindsets has been useful in intervention strategies with at risk students, dispelling negative stereotypes in education held by teachers and students, understanding the impacts of self-theories on resilience, and understanding how process praise can foster a growth mindset and positively impact students’ motivation levels (Veronikas and Shaughnessy, 2004). What students believe about their own intelligence can affect their effort, engagement, motivation, and achievement as measured by test scores, school grades, passing rate in post-secondary education, and other metrics (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck 2007; Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2011; Yeager, Walton, & Cohen, 2013).

Why This Matters: A growth mindset may contribute to better grades in school and a willingness to take on new challenges

1. **Lower Failure Rates:** Low-achieving students at 13 California high schools failed 7% fewer courses and improved their GPAs by .18 grade points after a one-period class designed to boost growth mindset (Yeager, Walton, & Cohen, 2013).
2. **Improved Scores:** When a group of struggling 7th grade students in New York City learned to 1) think of their brains as muscles that grow with exercise and 2) visualize new connections developing within their brains, their motivation and math scores improved at a time when math achievement typically declines (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck 2007).
3. **Increased Effort:** Seventh-grade students receiving growth-mindset feedback (“I’m giving you these comments because I have high standards and know that you can meet them.”) were twice as likely to revise and resubmit an assignment compared to students who received generic feedback (Yeager, Walton, & Cohen, 2013).
4. **More Problems Solved:** Students who saw a growth mindset-related message (e.g., “When you learn a new kind of math problem, you grow your math brain!”) correctly solved 3-5% more online math problems compared to those who didn’t see growth mindset-related messages. The effect carried over to the next math topic the students tackled (Yeager, Walton, & Cohen, 2013).

Students with a fixed mindset often do not realize that they can change their mindset and settle with an attitude that they cannot do better. But with a growth mind set attitude students can do anything they want as long as they work hard and consistent until they reach their goals (Figure 3.5)

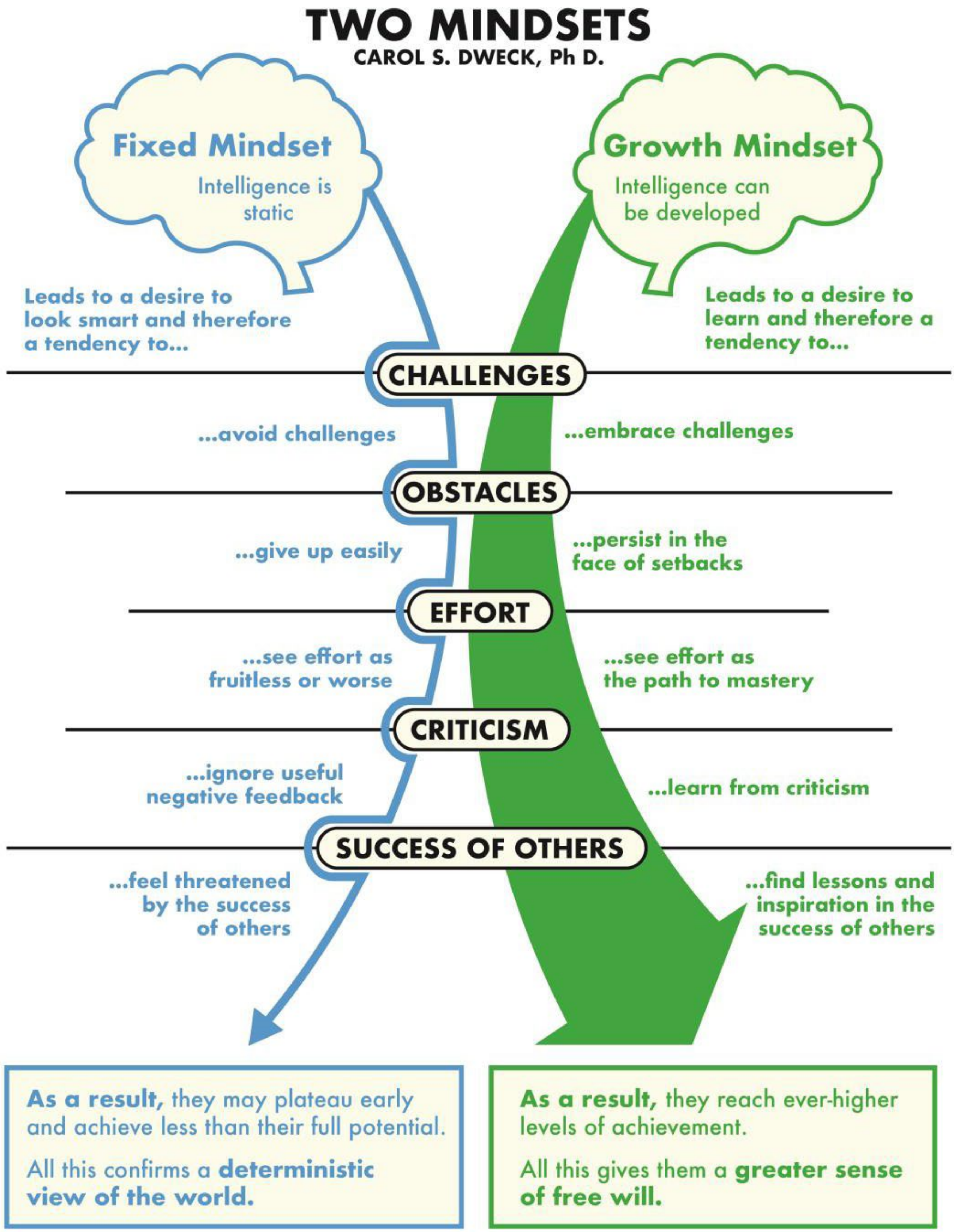

Figure 3.5 Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset. - Ian Joslin - CC BY 4.0

Example of a Fixed Mindset

The following is an example of how a student with a fixed mindset might discuss their struggles in school:

> Since I could remember, I never did well in school and struggled. I felt that there was nothing I could do to change who I was. I was just not smart. I have started and stopped my education many times. I have quit programs and changed majors when it got to be too much. I felt that I could never get far because I simply did not have the intelligence others did. I get frustrated and overwhelmed and the stress gets to me so much that I panic and slip into deep depression.

Here is an example of how a fixed mindset would impact someone struggling with issues in their personal life:

> The past few years of my life have been quite hard in terms of family dynamics, personal and family health struggles, financial hardships, and much more. There have been many times when I wanted to quit school completely and sometimes not even wanted to get out of my house. I had no reason to live as I felt that I was never going to get through all of these challenges in my life. I guess I just have bad luck and failure is my destiny. I can't change anything.

Example of a Growth Mindset

The following is an example of how a student with a growth mindset might discuss their struggles in school:

> I was always on my own. Meaning, I had no one to go to for help. My parents didn't speak or read English well at the time, so I always did my homework on my own, I struggled and felt alone. But something happened in college, and I finally knew that it was o.k. to ask for help and I no longer had to struggle quietly. I began to be disciplined and did my homework, went to class and asked questions. I knew that I might not have been the smartest person, but I understood if I wanted something really bad that I had to work hard for it. Here I am almost done with my Associate degree and getting ready to transfer, something I did not believe would ever happen. My attitude and my mind set has changed to believe that if I want to push myself to get something done, that I can. I never knew I could and I will never give up regardless of what comes my way.

Here is an example of how someone with a growth mindset would handle struggles in their personal life:

> I found myself homeless taking care of my three children. One day I thought to myself how did I get here and how can I change my situation. I got married

young and had children young, my husband was abusive and left us. I could no longer sustain paying my bills and found myself in shelters and on the streets. With so much negative going on in my life, I knew that I needed help. I began to use the community services to help reinvent myself. I needed new skills to find a job, find a place to live and provide an opportunity for my children to have a chance at this life. My priority was their safety and I knew that being on the streets was not safe for them. I wanted to give up at times, but I was reminded that I was not alone. I found my new path and I enrolled in college with a new attitude that gave me hope. I am on my way to a new way of life and I know that I can do it.

Now that you've had a chance to read through examples of fixed and growth mindsets, you should have developed a better understanding of the types of language and thoughts are associated with each. You are now prepared to help shift your own thinking to align with a growth mindset and catch yourself when you express more fixed mindset thinking. Another skillset that will help you with this is GRIT, which we will discuss next.

What is GRIT?

According to Angela Duckworth, author of "GRIT," grit is a combination of passion and perseverance used to achieve a long-term, challenging goal (Figure 3.6). For some, GRIT can be thought of as a combination of guts (courage), resilience (flexibility), initiative (taking action) and tenacity (refusal to give up).

Figure 3.6 Passion and perseverance help people achieve their long-term goals. Stone Push Overcoming Obstacle - Schäferle – Pixabay License

The concept of grit, originally articulated by Duckworth et al. (2007), has developed and expanded in parallel with the field of positive psychology. Indeed Seligman (2011) in his major textbook *"Flourish,"* devoted an entire chapter to the concept. Of course, further research will either lead to the consolidation of the importance of grit, or will suggest there are other more important constructs, such as the longer established concept of resilience (Werner, 1996). In this section, we will look more in depth at the concept of GRIT.

One of the pillars of Psychology has been research into intelligence, which has looked at both theoretical and applied aspects of the concept. Clinical psychologists have relied on various iterations of the intelligence scales originally developed by Wechsler (1955). This is now on its fifth version (Wechsler, 2010; Hubbard and Hare, 2015). Though called the WAIS IV (the first version was called the Wechsler–Bellevue Scale, but the Bellevue Hospital name was dropped from all subsequent versions). However, research began to show certain contradictions that revealed individuals of an equal or lesser IQ were consistently outperforming their "more intelligent" counterparts (Duckworth et al., 2007). Indeed, in many cases, individuals with a lower or average IQ were achieving higher qualifications, obtaining more influential job roles and receiving a higher income (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Subsequently, there was a shift in research focus toward the importance of non-cognitive traits and factors in predicting and measuring achievement and success. Although the concepts such as perseverance, mindsets and goal driven behaviors which are identified to be non-cognitive traits were studied earlier in the field of education (Londoner, 1972; Levy and Dweck, 1998). A greater focus on the importance of these non-cognitive traits in this field was made popular by Angela Duckworth, who was mainly concerned with the concept of grit. This can be divided into two sub-components; perseverance of effort and consistency of interest and the importance of fostering grit to enhance personal achievement and success.

Duckworth et al. (2007, pp. 1087–1088) states that grit involves *"working strenuously towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress."* Also, Duckworth stresses the importance of stamina in grit, and describes a "gritty" individual as somebody who treats their success and achievement as a marathon, rather than a sprint. Prior to Duckworth developing her research into non-cognitive predictors of academic success, educational research had focused on the more traditional measures of academic outcomes and less focus into non-cognitive traits. Thus, the research of Duckworth generated a shift in research focus into predominantly considering non-cognitive traits, such as grit, that showed an individual's character was much more influential to their academic success.

Throughout the last decade of research into the construct of grit and its many applications, it has been recorded that there are certain demographic differences in grit. Certain individuals are said to be more likely to develop grit and persevere in the face of adversity. Grit has been shown to correlate with gender (Flaming and Granato, 2017), with females scoring higher in grit than their male counterparts (Jaeger et al., 2010; Christensen and Knezek, 2014; Aswini and Amrita, 2017) (Figure 3.7); and age (Cupitt and Golshan, 2015).

Figure 3.7 Female students score higher in grit than their male counterparts. Sias Library - Students Studying - Gary Todd – Public Domain

Grit has been posited as a highly influential construct linked to academic success and achievement. It has been found that grit is associated with academic productivity and engagement (Hodge et al., 2017); academic motivation (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014); academic achievement (Pate et al., 2017); perseverance in challenging tasks (Lucas et al., 2015); academic performance (Kelly et al., 2014); amount of hours studying (Cross, 2014); learning strategies (Weisskirch, 2016); task values and goal orientation (Muenks et al., 2017, 2018); the pursuit and attainment of postgraduate training (Palisoc et al., 2017), and the retention of students (Crede et al., 2017). However, there are also some studies suggesting that grit is not a predictor of academic achievement and performance (Ivcevic and Brackett, 2014; Bazelais et al., 2016; Muenks et al., 2017; Palisoc et al., 2017).

Grit is also is strongly related to well-being. It has been shown that grit is positively correlated with happiness (Singh and Jha, 2008); satisfaction and a sense of belonging (Bowman et al., 2015); purpose commitment (Hill et al., 2014); psychological well-being (Goodman et al., 2017); value and self-efficacy (Muenks et al., 2017, 2018); self-esteem (Weisskirch, 2016); a growth mindset (Duckworth et al., 2007; Hochanadel and Finamore, 2015); pursuing engagement and pleasure in life (Von Culin et al., 2014); higher mental health (Sharkey et al., 2017); emotional stability during stressful or negative life events (Blalock et al., 2015); and a sense of meaning in life (Von Culin et al., 2014).

Negative correlations between grit and certain psychological outcomes have also been established. Research has revealed a negative correlation between grit and perceived stress, arguing that "psychological resources, particularly grit, make students less prone to stress." While there is a positive association between perceived academic failure and stress (Lee, 2017). This research suggests that focusing on stress management may reduce perceived academic failure, enhance grit and, in turn, improve academic success and personal achievement.

Perhaps not surprisingly in a time of major neuroscientific advance, recent research has also revealed an association between grit and personal achievement linked to the brain activation of a specific area of the brain. The neural substrate for grit has been identified as being located in the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC) (Figure 3.8), the region also said to be responsible for concepts such as self-regulation, planning, goal-setting, and reflection of past experiences (Wang et al., 2017). However, this structural knowledge regarding the neural basis of grit should not discourage the idea that grit is a construct that can be fostered and built upon.

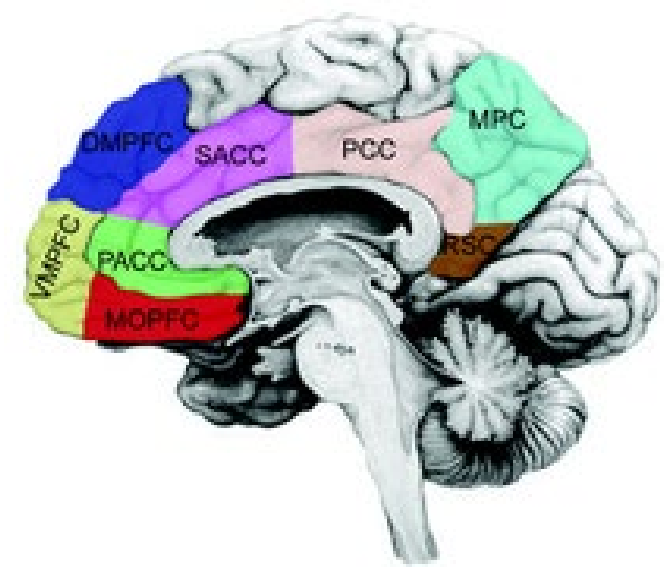

Figure 3.8 Cortical midline structures of the brain. The dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC) is shown in blue. Cortical Midline Structures - Georg Northoff – CC BY 3.0

A growth mindset has been strongly associated with the presence of grit in individuals (Hochanadel and Finamore, 2015) and an academic environment that promotes growth is likely to foster gritty students who will learn to persist through challenges (Duckworth et al., 2007; Hochanadel and Finamore, 2015). As you have read, there are many benefits to possessing grit and developing a growth mindset.

Summary

- Mindsets (the power of people's beliefs) are ways in which we formulate our thoughts about our abilities, relationships, and personality that influences our behaviors and how we feel.
- Students with a fixed mindset believe that their own intelligence and talent are innate traits that don't change. For example, they might say, "I just can't learn math."
- Students with a growth mindset believe that ability can change as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice.
- Grit is a combination of passion and perseverance used to achieve a long-term, challenging goal.
- Grit has been posited as a highly influential construct linked to academic success and achievement.

Discussion Questions

1. Give an example of fixed and growth mindset thinking.
2. Give an example of when you have demonstrated grit. What were you "gritty" about? Do you experience the same level of grittiness for other activities in your life?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of mindset from 1.4 Fixed and Growth Mindset (Student Success – College of the Canyons) and Introduction to Growth Mindset (Transforming Education), grit from All That glitters Is not grit (Kannangara et al., 2018 – Frontiers in Psychology).
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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Student Success. **Authored by**: Graciela Martinez, Anh Nguyen, & Liz Shaker. **Published by:** College of the Canyons. **Located at:** https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JUKf9Y4kWSQ77fDsQIpw3MAeN-Zymnt_
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Chapter 4: Personality

Imagine you are filling out a dating profile. When you are asked to describe yourself, do you include characteristics such as extroverted/introverted, down-to-earth, adventurous, laid back, etc.? Do you discuss the things that are important to you, such as being an honest person, loyalty, speaking up for yourself, being respectful? What about a job interview, do you use descriptors such as hard working, punctual, efficient? Questions such as these on a dating profile or in a job interview are attempting to reveal aspects of your personality. Personality has been a major topic and research area of modern psychology since the early 20th century. Having a good understanding of your own personality is beneficial to how you interact with others.

To further build upon our foundation for understanding human relations we will now examine the role that our personality plays and the personalities of others in our personal and professional experiences. In this chapter you will explore various theoretical perspectives of personality, major trait theories of personality, how values, behaviors, and attitudes affect the workplace, and the influence of culture on personality. To begin, we will look at the definition of personality and the various theoretical perspectives of personality.

4.1 Introduction to Personality

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define personality.
- Compare and contrast Psychodynamic, Learning and Cognitive, Biological, Inherent Drives, and Sociocultural factors that influence personality.

When you first think of personality, what comes to mind? When we refer to certain people as being "personalities," we usually mean they are famous, people like movie stars or your favorite band. When we describe a person as having "lots of personality," we usually mean they are outgoing and fun-loving, the kind of person we like to spend time with. But does this tell us anything about personality itself? Although we may think we have an understanding of what personality is, professional psychologists always seek to move beyond what people think they know in order to determine what is actually real or at least as close to real as we can come. In the pursuit of truly understanding personality, however, many personality theorists seem to have been focused on a particularly Western cultural approach that owes much of its history to the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud (Figure 4.1).

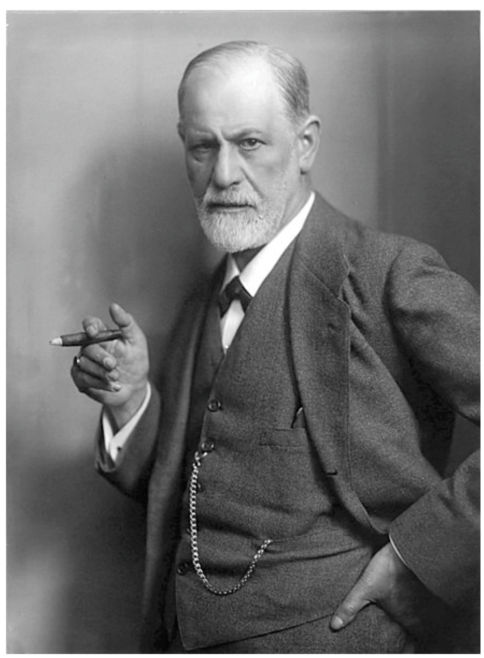

Figure 4.1 Sigmund Freud (cropped). Sigmund Freud – Max Halberstadt – Public Domain

Freud trained as a physician with a strong background in biomedical research. He naturally brought his keen sense of observation, a characteristic of any good scientist, into his psychiatric practice. As he worked with his patients, he developed a distinctly medical model: identify a problem, identify the cause of the problem, and treat the patient accordingly. This approach can work quite well, and it has worked wonderfully for medical science, but it has two main weaknesses when applied to the study of personality. First, it fails to address the complexity and uniqueness of individuals, and second, it does not readily lend itself to describing how one chooses to develop a healthy personality.

Quite soon in the history of personality theory, however, there were influential theorists who began to challenge Freud's perspective. Alfred Adler, although a colleague of Freud's for a time, began to focus on social interest and an individual's style of life. Karen Horney challenged Freud's perspective on the psychology of women, only to later suggest that the issue was more directly related to the oppression of women as a minority, rather than a fundamental difference based on gender. And there were Carl Jung and Carl Rogers, two men profoundly influenced by Eastern philosophy. Consequently, anyone influenced by Jung or Rogers has also been influenced, in part, by Eastern philosophy. What about the rest of the world? Have we taken into account the possibility that there are other, equally valuable and interesting perspectives on the nature of people? Many fields in psychology have made a concerted effort to address cross-cultural issues. By the end of this chapter, you will have a broad understanding of the field of personality, and an appreciation for both what we have in common and what makes us unique, as members of our global community.

Definition and Descriptions of Personality

Personality refers to the long-standing traits and patterns that propel individuals to consistently think, feel, and behave in specific ways. Our personality is what makes us unique individuals. Each person has an idiosyncratic pattern of enduring, long-term characteristics and a manner in which they interact with other individuals and the world around them. Our personalities are thought to be long term, stable, and not easily changed. The word *personality* comes from the Latin word *persona*. In the ancient world, a persona was a mask worn by an actor (Figure 4.2). While we tend to think of a mask as being worn to conceal one's identity, the theatrical mask was originally used to either represent or project a specific personality trait of a character. But are our personalities just masks? Freud certainly considered the unconscious mind to be very important, Cattell considered source traits to be more important than surface traits, and Buddhists consider the natural world (including the self) to be an illusion. Adler believed the best way to examine personality is to look at the person's style of life, and Rogers felt that the only person who could truly understand you is yourself. In order to better understand how some of the different disciplines within the field of psychology contribute to our definition of personality, let's take a brief look at some of the widely recognized factors that come into play.

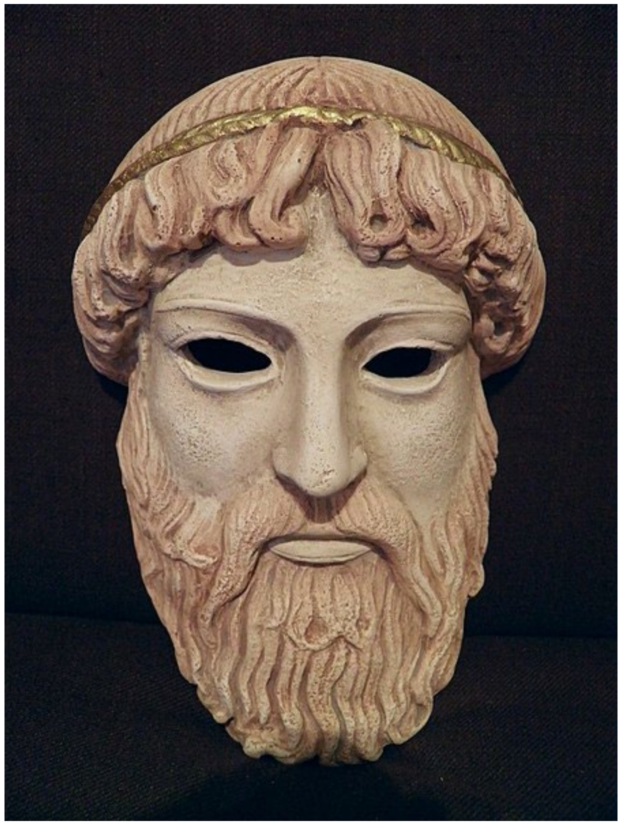

Figure 4.2 Ancient Greek theatrical mask of Zeus, replica. Ancient Greek theatrical mask of Zeus, replica – Carole Raddato - CC-BY-SA 2.0

Psychodynamic Factors

The very word "psychodynamic" suggests that there are ongoing interactions between different elements of the mind. Sigmund Freud not only offered names for these elements (id, ego, and superego), he proposed different levels of consciousness. Since the unconscious mind was very powerful according to Freud, one of the first and most enduring elements of psychodynamic theory is that we are often unaware of why we think and act the way we do. Add to that the belief that our personality is determined in early childhood, and you can quickly see that psychological problems would be very difficult to treat. Perhaps more importantly, since we are not aware of many of our own thoughts and desires, it would difficult or even impossible for us to choose to change our personality no matter how much we might want to.

Most psychodynamic theorists since Freud have expanded the influences that affect us to include more of the outside world. Those theorists who remained loyal to Freud, typically known as neo-Freudians, emphasized the ego. Since the ego functions primarily in the real world, the individual must take into account the influence of other people involved in their lives. Some theorists who differed significantly from the traditional Freudian perspective, most notably Alfred Adler and Karen Horney, focused much of their theories on cultural influences. Adler believed that social cooperation was essential to the success of each individual (and humanity as a whole), whereas Horney provided an intriguing alternative to Freud's sexist theories regarding women. Although Horney based her theories regarding women on the cultural standing between men and women in the Victorian era, to a large extent her theory remains relevant today.

Learning and Cognitive Factors

As a species, human beings are distinguished by their highly developed brains. Animals with less-developed nervous systems rely primarily on instinctive behavior, but very little on learning. While the study of animals' instinctive behavior is fascinating, and led to a shared Nobel Prize for the ethologists Nikolaas Tinbergen, Konrad Lorenz, and Karl von Frisch, animal behavior remains distinctly limited compared to the complex learning and cognitive tasks that humans can readily perform (Beck, 1978; Gould, 1982). Indeed, the profound value of our abilities to think and learn may be best reflected in the fact that, according to Tinbergen's strict definition of instinct (see Beck, 1978), humans appear not to have any instinctive behavior anymore. Yet we have more than made up for it through our ability to learn, and learning theory and behaviorism became dominant forces in the early years of American psychology (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3 We rely heavily on our ability to learn, rather than instincts. Girls in School Afghanistan – WikiImages – Pixabay License

John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner are among the most famous and influential of American psychologists. Learning about their groundbreaking research on classical and operant conditioning is standard fare in psychology courses. More recently, Albert Bandura has enjoyed similar popularity and respect in the field of social learning theory. Anyone who has children knows full well how eagerly they observe us and mimic our actions and speech. An important aspect of the learning perspective is that our personalities may develop as a result of the rewards and/or punishments we receive from others. Consequently, we should be able to shape an individual's personality in any way we want. Early behaviorists, like Watson, suggested that they could indeed take any child and raise them to be successful in any career they chose for them. Although most parents and teachers try to be a good influence on children, and to set good examples for them, children are often influenced more by their peers. What children find rewarding may not be what parents and teachers think is rewarding. This is why a social-cognitive approach to learning becomes very important in understanding personality development. Social-cognitive theorists, like Bandura, recognize that children interact with their environment, partly determining for themselves what is rewarding or punishing, and then react to the environment in their own unique way.

As suggested by the blend of behaviorism and cognition that Bandura and others proposed, there is a close association between behaviorism and the field of cognitive psychology. Although strict behaviorists rejected the study of unobservable cognitive processes, the cognitive field has actually followed the guidelines of behaviorism with regard to a dispassionate and logical observation of the expression of cognitive processes through an individual's behavior and what they say. Thus, the ability of human beings to think, reason, analyze, anticipate, etc., leads them to act in accordance with their ideas, rather than simply on the basis of traditional behavioral controls: reward, punishment, or associations with unconditional stimuli. The success of the cognitive approach when applied to therapy, such as the techniques developed by Aaron Beck, has helped to establish cognitive theory as one the most respected areas in the study of personality and abnormal psychology.

Biological Factors

Although humans may not exhibit instinctive behavior, we are still ultimately a product of our biological makeup, our specific DNA pattern. Our individual DNA pattern is unique, unless we happen to be an identical twin, and it not only provides the basis for our learning and cognitive abilities, it also sets the conditions for certain aspects of our character. Perhaps the most salient of these characteristics is **temperament**, which can loosely be described as the emotional component of our personality. In addition to temperament, twin studies have shown that all aspects of personality appear to be significantly influenced by our genetic inheritance (Bouchard, 1994; Bouchard & McGue, 1990; Bouchard et al., 1990) (Figure 4.4). Even such complex personality variables as well-being, traditionalism, and religiosity have been found to be highly influenced by our genetic make-up (Tellegen et al., 1988; Waller et al., 1990).

Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists also emphasize the role of genetics and adaptation over time. Sociobiologists consider how biological factors influence social behavior. For example, they would suggest that men are inclined to prefer multiple sexual partners because men are biologically capable of fathering many children, whereas women would be inclined to favor one successful and established partner, because a woman must physically invest a year or more in each child (a 9-month pregnancy followed by a period of nursing). Similarly, evolutionary psychologists consider how human behavior has been adaptive for our survival. Humans evolved from plant-eating primates; we are not well suited to defend ourselves against large, meat-eating predators. As a group, however, and using our intellect to fashion weapons from sticks and rocks, we were able to survive and flourish over time. Unfortunately, the same adaptive influences that guide the development of each healthy person can, under adverse conditions, lead to dysfunctional behaviors, and consequently, psychological disorders (Millon, 2004).

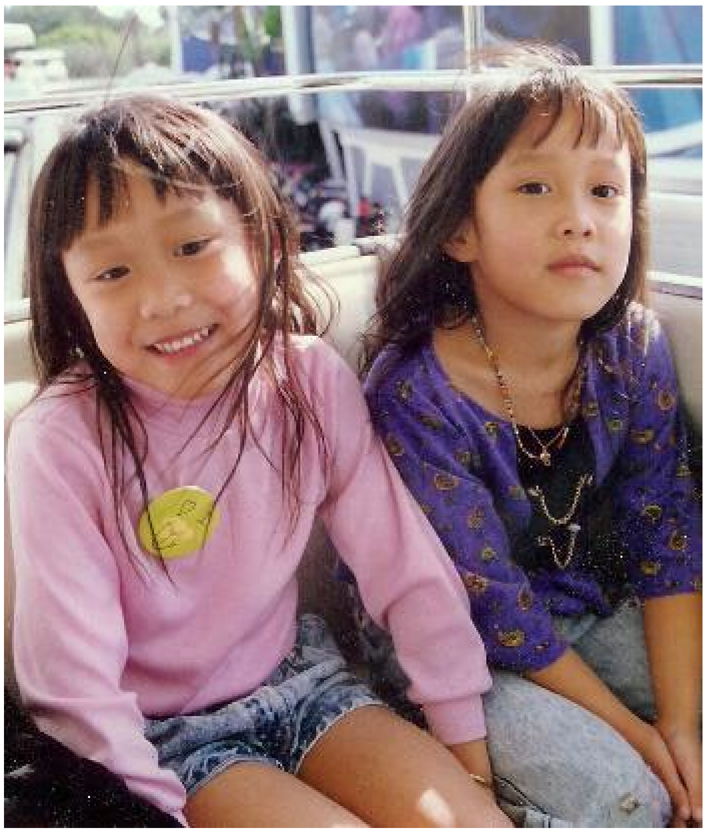

Figure 4.4 Twins studies examine the influence of heredity and environment on personality among other aspects of human development. Twin Girls – Michaelee – Public Domain

Inherent Drives

Freud believed that we are motivated primarily by psychosexual impulses, and secondarily by our tendency toward aggression. Certainly, it is necessary to procreate for the species to survive, and elements of aggression are necessary for us to get what we need and to protect ourselves. But this is a particularly dark and somewhat animalistic view of humanity. The humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow believed in a positive view of people, they proposed that each of us contains an inherent drive to be the best that we can be, and to accomplish all that we are capable of accomplishing. Rogers and Maslow called this drive **self-actualization**. Interestingly, this concept is actually thousands of years old, and having spent time in China, Rogers was well aware of Buddhist and Yogic perspectives on the self.

Somewhat related to the humanistic concept of self-actualization, is the existential perspective. Existential theorists, like Rollo May, believe that individuals can be truly happy only when they find some meaning in life. In Eastern philosophical perspectives, coming from Yoga and Buddhism, meaning in life is found by realizing that life is an illusion, that within each of us is the essence of one universal spirit. Indeed, Yoga means "union," referring to union with God. Thus, we have meaning within us, but the illusion of our life is what distracts us from realizing it.

Sociocultural Influences

Culture can broadly be defined as "everything that people have, think, and do as members of a society" (Ferraro, 2006a), and appears to be as old as the *Homo* genus itself (the genus of which we, as *Homo sapiens*, are the current representatives; Haviland et al., 2005). Culture has also been described as the memory of a society (see Triandis & Suh, 2002). Culture is both learned and shared by members of a society, and it is what makes the behavior of an individual understandable to other members of that culture. Everything we do is influenced by culture, from the food we eat to the nature of our personal relationships, and it varies dramatically from group to group. What makes life understandable and predictable within one group may be incomprehensible to another. Despite differences in detail, however, there are a number of cultural universals, those aspects of culture that have been identified in every cultural group that has been examined historically or ethnographically (Murdock, 1945; see also Ferraro, 2006a). Therefore, if we truly want to understand personality theory, we need to know something about the sociocultural factors that may be the same, or that may differ, between groups.

In 1999, Stanley Sue proposed that psychology has systematically avoided the study of cross-cultural factors in psychological research. This was not because psychologists themselves are biased, but rather, it was due to an inherent bias in the nature of psychological research (for commentaries see also Tebes, 2000; Guyll & Madon, 2000; and Sue, 2000). Although some may disagree with the arguments set forth in Sue's initial study, it is clear that the vast majority of research has been conducted here in America, primarily by American college professors studying American psychology students. And the history of our country clearly identifies most of those individuals, both the professors and the students, as White, middle- to upper-class men. The same year, Lee et al. (1999) brought together a collection of multicultural perspectives on personality, with the individual chapters written by a very diverse group of authors. In both the preface and their introductory chapter, the editors emphasize that neither human nature nor personality can be separated from culture. And yet, as suggested by Sue (1999), they acknowledge the general lack of cross-cultural or multicultural research in the field of personality.

Times have begun to change, however. In 2002, the American Psychological Association (APA) adopted a policy entitled "Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists. The year 2002 also saw a chapter in the prestigious *Annual Review of Psychology* on how culture influences the development of personality (Triandis & Suh, 2002). In a fascinating article on whether psychology actually matters in our lives, former APA president and renowned social psychologist Philip Zimbardo (2004) identified the work of Kenneth and Mamie Clark on prejudice and discrimination, which was presented to the United States Supreme Court during the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, KS* case (which led to the end of school segregation in America) as one of the most significant impacts on American life that psychology has contributed to directly (see also Benjamin & Crouse, 2002; Keppel, 2002; Pickren & Tomes, 2002) (Figure 4.5). Finally, an examination of *American Psychologist* (the principal journal of APA) and *Psychological Science* (the principal journal of the American Psychological Society) since the year 2000 reveals studies demonstrating the importance of cross-cultural research in many areas of psychology. So, although personality theorists, and the field of psychology in general, have been somewhat slow to address cross-cultural and diversity issues, in more recent years psychologists appear to be rapidly gaining a greater appreciation of the importance of studying human diversity in all its forms.

Figure 4.5 Linda Brown Smith, Ethel Louise Belton Brown, Harry Briggs, Jr., and Spottswood Bolling, Jr. during press conference at Hotel Americana. Plaintiffs in Brown vs. Board of Education 10 years later – Al Ravenna – Public Doman

One of the primary goals of this chapter is to incorporate different cultural perspectives into our study of personality theory, to take more of a global perspective than has traditionally been done. Why is this important? The United States of America has less than 300 million people. India has nearly 1 billion people, and China has over 1 billion people. So, two Asian countries alone have nearly 7 times as many people as the United States. How can we claim to be studying personality if we have not taken into account the vast majority of people in the world? Of course, we have not entirely ignored these two particular countries, because two of the most famous personality theorists spent time in these countries when they were young. Carl Jung spent time in India, and his theories were clearly influenced by ancient Vedic philosophy, and Carl Rogers spent time in China while studying to be a minister. So, it is possible to draw connections between Yoga, Buddhism, psychodynamic theory, and humanistic psychology. Sometimes this will involve looking at differences between cultures, and other times it will focus on similarities. At the end of this chapter, you will have gained a sense of the diversity of personality and personality theory, and the connections that tie all of us together.

Some Basic Questions Common to All Areas of Personality Theory

In addition to the broad perspectives described above, there are a number of philosophical questions that help to bring the nature of personality into perspective. Thinking about how these questions are answered by each theory can help us to compare and contrast the different theories.

Is our personality inherited, or are we products of our environment?

This is the classic debate on nature vs. nurture. Are we born with a given temperament, with a genetically determined style of interacting with others, certain abilities, with various behavioral patterns that we cannot even control? Or are we shaped by our experiences, by learning, thinking, and relating to others? Many psychologists today find this debate amusing, because no matter what area of psychology you study, the answer is typically both. We are born with a certain range of possibilities determined by our DNA. We can be a certain height, have a certain IQ, be shy or outgoing, we might be Black, Asian, White or Hispanic, etc. because of who we are genetically. However, the environment can have a profound effect on how our genetic make-up is realized. For example, a child with both parents over six feet in height, will likely have inherited genes to also be over six feet in height. However, while the child was growing up, their family was very poor and they were malnourished, stunting their growth. The end result might be that this child is several inches shorter than their parents. Our genetic make-up provides a range of possibilities for our life, and the environment in which we grow determines where exactly we fall within that range.

Are we unique, or are there common types of personality?

Many people want to believe that they are special and truly unique, and they tend to reject theories that try to categorize individuals. However, if personality theories were unique to each person, we could never possibly cover all of the theories. In order to understand and compare people, personality theorists need to consider that there are common aspects of personality. It is up to each of us to decide whether we are still willing to find what is unique and special about each separate person.

Which is more important, the past, present, or future?

Many theorists, particularly psychodynamic theorists, consider personality to be largely determined at an early age. Similarly, those who believe strongly in the genetic determination of personality would consider many factors set even before birth. But what prospects for growth does this allow, can people change or choose a new direction in their life? Cognitive and behavioral theorists focus on specific thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that are influencing our daily lives, whereas existential theorists search for meaning in our lives. Other theorists, such as the humanists and those who favor the spiritually-oriented perspectives we will examine, consider the future to be primary in our goals and aspirations. Self-actualization is something we can work toward. Indeed, it may be an inherent drive.

Do we have free will, or is our behavior determined?

Although this question seems similar to the previous one, it refers more to whether we consciously choose the path we take in life as compared to whether our behavior is specifically determined by factors beyond our control. We already mentioned the possibility of genetic factors above, but there might also be unconscious factors and stimuli in our environment. Certainly, humans rely on learning for much of what we do in life, so why not for developing our personalities? Though some students do not want to think of themselves as simply products of reinforcement and punishment (i.e., operant conditioning) or the associations formed during classical conditioning (anyone have a phobia?), what about the richness of observational learning? Still, exercising our will and making sound choices seems far more dignified to many people. Is it possible to develop our will, to help us make better choices and follow through on them? Yes, according to William James, America’s foremost psychologist. James considered our will to be of great importance, and he included chapters on the will in two classic books; *Psychology: Briefer Course,* published in 1892 and *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals,* which was published in 1899. James not only thought about the importance of the will, he recommended exercising it.

Summary

- Personality refers to the long-standing traits and patterns that propel individuals to consistently think, feel, and behave in specific ways. Our personality is what makes us unique individuals.
- A wide variety of theoretical perspectives influence how psychologists view personality, including psychodynamic factors, learning/cognitive factors, biological factors, inherent drives, and sociocultural influences.
- The various personality theories also address questions related to nature vs. nurture, whether individuals are unique or whether there are types of personality common to all people, the relative importance of the past, present, and future, and the significance of free will.

Discussion Questions

1. How similar or different, is your personality to your parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.? Do you think that your environment (community, friends, media, etc.) have been more influential to your personality than your genetics?
2. Do you feel that you are driven to accomplish something great, or to find some particular meaning in life? Do you believe that there might be pathways to guide you, such as spiritual or religious pathways?
3. Do you notice cultural differences around you every day, or do you live in a small community where everyone is very much the same? What sort of challenges do you face as a result of cultural differences, either because you deal with them daily or because you have little opportunity to experience them?

Remix/Revisions Featured in this Section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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4.2 Culture and Personality

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe how culture and society influence personality.
- Compare and contrast how various cultural factors affect personality.

In this section, we will examine some of the issues that arise when examining personality development in a sociocultural context. The United States, Canada, and Western Europe represent only about one tenth of the world's population. Thus, it is essential that we consider the influence of different cultures around the world if we are going to claim that we have really examined human personality in all its variations.

The Influence of Culture and Society on Personality

Many psychology textbooks mention a few famous anthropologists, such as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, whose research included work on child development and personality. However, less well-known in the field of psychology is the renowned anthropologist Ralph Linton, who paid particular attention to personality development in relation to culture and society. Linton also collaborated with Abram Kardiner, a founding member of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute (and who was analyzed by Sigmund Freud himself in 1921-1922). Linton and Kardiner freely acknowledged the connections between anthropology and psychology, noting the influence of Benedict and Mead, Franz Boas (recognized as the father of American anthropology and mentor to both Benedict and Mead), and the psychoanalysts Anna Freud, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, and Wilhelm Reich (Kardiner, 1939; Kardiner, Linton, DuBois, & West, 1945; Kardiner & Preble, 1961).

Linton described personality as existing on three levels. First, personality can be described based on either its content or its organization. The organization, furthermore, can be examined in terms of its superficial organization or its central organization. The central organization of personality gives the whole personality its distinctive character, and includes the most invariant aspects of personality, such as the degree of introversion/extraversion, or other aspects of temperament (Linton, 1936, 1945). Although these temperamental attributes are present at birth, they do not comprise personality per se. The superficial organization of personality, however, is based on the goals and interests of the individual, and incorporates the individual's experiences in life within the context of the central organization. In this regard, the superficial organization should not be confused with something transient or insignificant. It is "superficial" only in the sense that it is on the surface of the personality, and the goals and interests of the person are based on the content of personality that represents their life experiences as they are organized within the personality. The goals and interests themselves, which incorporate the content of personality, are determined almost entirely by the culture in which the individual is raised. According to Linton (1936), the process of integrating the individual's experience within the context of one's temperament (or "constitutional qualities") forms a "mutually adjusted, functional whole."

A critical question, of course, is whether cultural experiences can affect the central organization. Linton (1936, 1945, 1955) believed that no matter how an individual receives the cultural characteristics of their society, they are likely to internalize them, a process known as **enculturation**. One of the main reasons that enculturation is so influential in every aspect of the person's being, is that it pervades every aspect of the society in which the person lives. Thus, even someone who is considered a rebel, most likely exists within a range of rebellion that is possible within that particular culture. This is directly related to the apparent reality that cultures do give rise to certain types of personalities. Making the matter even more complicated, or simpler depending on one's perspective, is the role of status within a culture. Thus, although a given culture or society, or one's own temperament, may influence personality in one direction, a particular social class might influence personality in a different direction. An individual born into a given class, whose personal constitution does not fit that class, may develop what Linton called a **status personality**, i.e., a persona that fits with society's expectations for the individual in certain settings. For example, someone born into an upper middle-class family involved in business, who is personally rather introverted and withdrawn, may present a confident and outgoing personality when working, and only upon returning home do they revert to their natural inclination to be shy and quiet (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6 Presenting oneself as confident and outgoing at work, while being quiet and introverted at home is an example of a status personality. Businessman – RoyalAnwar – Pixabay License

One of the most interesting points made by Linton is that individuals with complementary personalities are also mutually adjusted. The most obvious example is that of the gender roles of men and women. Men are expected, in many cultures and societies, to be the dominant member of the family, as well as the "bread-winner." Conversely, women are expected to be submissive, and to remain home and care for the household and the children. In this way, the men and women together complete the necessary tasks for family life without entering into conflict (at least in theory). In some cultures, these gender roles are quite relaxed with regard to the sex of the individual. Amongst the Comanche (a Native American tribe), men whose personalities were not at all suited to being warriors assumed a special role, that of berdache (Linton, 1936). The berdache wore women's clothes, and typically fulfilled a woman's role, but they were treated with somewhat more respect than women (in keeping with the patriarchal nature of the society). Some were homosexuals (though not all), and even married. This was generally accepted, and any disapproval these relationships received was directed toward the warrior husband, not the berdache.

Abram Kardiner, a psychoanalyst who collaborated with Linton, shared the same general perspective on the relationship between personality and culture, and attempted to put the relationship into psychological terms. He distinguished between the basic personality, or ego structure, which he considered to be a cultural phenomenon, and the individual's character, which is their unique adaptation to the environment within their cultural setting. Thus, each individual develops a unique character, but only within the constraints of the culturally-determined range of potential ego structure (Kardiner, 1939). The process of personality development, within a cultural setting, results in what Kardiner called a security system. The security system of the individual is the series of adaptations that serve to ensure the individual's acceptance, approval, support, esteem, and status within the group. Thus, for each person within a given cultural group, their basic personality is formed through an ongoing interaction with the very culture in which that person needs to be (and, hopefully, will be) accepted as a member. Both of Kardiner's major books, The Individual and His Society (Kardiner, 1939) and The Psychological Frontiers of Society (Kardiner, et al., 1945), offer extraordinary examples of detailed anthropological studies of a wide variety of cultures followed by psychoanalytic evaluations of the functions served by various aspects of the cultural practices of those people.

Robert LeVine, like Kardiner, was an anthropologist and psychoanalyst with a strong interest in personality (LeVine, 1973, 1974). He begins by asking the question of whether there are differences in personality between different cultural groups. If there are not, then any analysis of the nature or causes of those alleged differences is meaningless. If there are differences, can we then point to specific evidence that the environment can elicit changes in those differences? The answer is yes to both, and as one example LeVine points to the dramatic acculturation of rural immigrants from underdeveloped areas of

Europe and Asia who emigrated to industrialized countries, such as the United States, and within two or three generations had radically altered not only their basic ways of life, but also their social class (moving from traditional peasantry to the middle-class; LeVine, 1973). LeVine also continued Kardiner's approach of using a psychoanalytic perspective to evaluate and compare the nature of different cultures, and he proposed the term psychoanalytic ethnography. In an effort to justify the use of psychoanalytic ethnography, LeVine argues that there are enough common elements in the nature of all people and cultures to provide for valid comparisons of the differences between those same people and cultures (LeVine, 1973).

One of the most striking discussions of the relationship between culture and the potential for personality development was offered by Pitirim Sorokin, the founder of Harvard University's sociology department and a colleague of the trait theorist Gordon Allport. Sorokin points out that culture can have a dramatic influence on the biological substrates of personality. For example, through the use of contraception, abortion, etc., many potential individuals are never born. Conversely, if such measures are prohibited, many unwanted children are born. In addition, cultural rules and norms against sexual intercourse and/or marriage between certain age groups, races, social classes, families, religions, etc., directly influence the potential for genetic variation within and across different groups of humans (Sorokin, 1947). Indeed, Sorokin took such a broad view of the role of society and culture in the environmental universe of each individual, that he described trying to understand sociocultural phenomena by locating them in terms of sociocultural space and sociocultural distance. The concept of sociocultural distance has taken on new meaning since Sorokin proposed it over 50 years ago. Today, anyone can travel around the world in a matter of hours or days, and many people do so regularly. Technology and globalization have dramatically reduced the distance between people, and consequently brought their cultural differences into contact with one another. Efforts to study cultures and societies alter the location of sociocultural phenomena within our own sphere of personal development. In other words, by studying the relationships between society, culture, and personality, we are altering the meaning and influence of those relationships, hopefully for the better.

Although this section has highlighted the influence of anthropologists and sociologists on cross-cultural research in the study of personality, there has also been an influence from psychology on these investigators. As noted above, both Abram Kardiner and Robert LeVine were psychoanalysts. In addition, Kardiner acknowledges having learned a great deal from a professor named John Dollard. Dollard was a sociologist who had studied psychoanalysis and who collaborated with Neal Miller (a psychologist trained in learning theory) in an effort to apply classical learning theory to psychodynamic theory. Dollard contributed a chapter to one of Linton's books, and was cited by both LeVine and Sorokin (who was, again, also a colleague of Allport). Given such an interesting interaction between the fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology over half a century ago, it seems surprising that psychology is only now emphasizing the value of focusing on cultural influences on personality development.

Different Cultural Factors Affecting Personality

Since culture pervades every aspect of our lives, the number of cultural factors that we might examine in the study of personality is quite large. However, there are a few major factors that stand out, and that have been the subject of significant research in the field of psychology. Thus, we will take a brief look at four major factors that influence personality: religion, race, gender, and age.

Religion as a Cultural Influence

> …religion in its turn exerts the most decisive influence upon all groups and systems of culture, from science and the fine arts to politics and economics. Without knowing the religion of a given culture or group - their systems of ultimate values - one cannot understand their basic traits and social movements. (pg. 228; Sorokin, 1947)

The essential importance of religion was also recognized by Abram Kardiner and Robert LeVine, both of whom, as noted above, studied anthropology and psychoanalysis (see Kardiner, et al., 1945; LeVine, 1973) (Figure 4.7). The recognized founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, also placed great emphasis on the influence of religion and religious symbolism (though he did not believe in God).

Figure 4.7 Baptism is one aspect of religious symbolism that is found in many religious belief systems. Church Window – Didgeman – Pixabay License

Despite the importance of religion, as perhaps the most significant cultural factor, there is variation in the extent to which formal religious beliefs and practices are a part of the routine life of people in different cultures (see Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). Since most psychologists were not emphasizing cultural factors as an essential aspect of the early development of the field (leaving that to anthropologists and sociologists), and given Freud's powerful and convincing arguments against religion, it is not surprising that psychology has not focused on the influence of religion on personality. But that is changing, and despite the role that religion has played in many political battles and outright war, religion and spirituality are also recognized as potentially favorable aspects of psychological development in general, and personality development in particular, in the field of positive psychology (Compton, 2005; Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2005).

The Question of Race and Ethnicity as Cultural Influences

Although the terms race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably with culture, they are quite different. The United States, for example, has large populations of people from different races, ethnic groups, religions, and nationalities, but they all contribute to the greater cultural identity of "American." Indeed, the very concept of America as a "melting pot" defies the use of racial or ethnic characterizations of the American people. This argument goes both ways, of course. We cannot simply refer to people who live within the boundaries of the United States as American, and expect that they are similar in every other cultural respect. Although this may seem rather confusing, that is exactly the point. This does not mean they are not useful, just that we must be careful in our interpretations of people's behavior and personality if they are from another culture.

Although ethnicity and race may be of questionable value as cultural factors, there are two critically important issues that arise from them. A common problem in cross-cultural research is that of **ethnocentrism**, the belief that one's own culture has the right beliefs and practices, whereas other cultures have wrong beliefs and practices (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004; Whitley & Kite, 2006). Such value judgments interfere with the objectivity of cross-cultural research, and can have negative effects on intercultural communication. The other, very serious problem is that of racism. Race is very real if people believe in it and act according to their perception of it. We will examine racism later in the textbook. For now, consider the following quote from a recently published book entitled Racism in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions:

> Racism has evolved as a persistent part of the human condition. Its obstinacy and intractability are frustrating and at times baffling. We live in a world in which most nations have signed United Nations declarations of human rights and claim to be democracies, yet racial and ethnic conflict abound. (pg. xvii; Miller & Garran, 2008).

Gender and Culture

Gender has been the subject of a wide range of studies, from pop-psychology books like Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus (Gray, 1992) and Self-Made Man: One Woman's Journey into Manhood and Back Again (Vincent, 2006) to such ominous sounding titles in academic psychology as The Longest War: Gender and Culture (Wade and Tavris, 1994). In 2005, the president of Harvard University suggested that one of the reasons there were so few women in math and science fields was that they lacked the intrinsic aptitude. The subsequent uproar led to the end of his presidency at Harvard, and a renewed effort to examine the reasons why few women succeed in math and science careers. An extensive study, led by former APA President Diane Halpern came to no specific conclusions, due to the complex interactions of a variety of factors, but in so doing made it clear that no blame can be placed directly on inherent/genetic ability (Halpern, et al., 2007; see also Barnett, 2007).

Gender is a distinctly cultural term, representing the behaviors or patterns of activity that a given culture or society expects from men and women. It is perhaps most commonly used to address differences between males and females, with an underlying assumption that sex differences lead to gender differences. However, apparent sex differences may actually be cultural gender differences, and cultures and societies exert significant influence on gender roles from a very early age (Brislin, 2000; Matsumoto & Juang, 2004; Stewart & McDermott, 2004). Still, some cultural factors may also have a basis in biological reality. For example, males are typically larger and stronger than females, so it makes sense for males to do the hunting and fight the wars. Women become pregnant and then nurse the infants, so it makes sense for them to provide early childcare. How this led to men having greater control and prestige in society, however, remains unclear, especially since that is not universally the case (Wade & Tavris, 1994). In addition, older men often become involved in childcare after their hunting/warrior days are behind them, further complicating the issue.

Among the differences between men and women that seem to be fairly common across cultures, and which may stem from sex differences, are aggression and emphasizing relationships. Men are typically more aggressive, and women seem to focus more on relationships with other people. In accordance with these tendencies, women typically defer to men, particularly in situations that may be confrontational. It also leads to conflict between men and women due to their difficulties communicating, hence the popularity of John Gray's book suggesting that men and women are from completely different planets. Given the status of men, the challenges that these gender differences create for women were not typically given a great deal of attention. However, Karen Horney and more recently the women of the Stone Center Group have made great strides in changing that situation. Not only have the members of the Stone Center Group provided a number of collected works on the psychology of women (Jordan, 1997b; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Jordan, Walker, & Hartling, 2004), there are also textbooks devoted exclusively to the subject (e.g., Matlin, 2004).

Aging Within a Cultural Context

Age is used as routinely as sex to divide people in a society. All societies recognize at least three age groups: child, adult, and elderly. Childhood is typically further divided into young childhood and adolescence. Each group has different rights, responsibilities, roles, and status (Linton, 1936; Sorokin, 1947). Sometimes, these can come into conflict. For example, among the Comanche, as with most Plains tribes in North America, the adult male was expected to be a warrior, whereas the elderly man was respected for his wisdom and gentleness. Transitioning from being a warrior to being an elder was very difficult, and Comanche men often hoped to die in battle in order to avoid the transition. Those who were forced to make the transition became very dangerous adversaries for the young men transitioning from childhood to adulthood, and often the old men would kill the young men when they could (out of sheer envy). Moving even beyond old age, into death, there are many societies in which the dead remain in the minds of the community members, and deceased relatives and heroes are even worshipped. In some cultures, the relationship with those who are dead is a very important part of daily life (Linton, 1936).

Throughout history, as societies have changed, so have the ways in which they treated and cared for (or did not care for) aged individuals. Although modern industrialization is correlated with a significantly longer lifespan, such dramatic cultural changes favor the young people who can more readily adapt to those changes. In addition, industrialized societies typically shift some of the responsibility of caring for the aged from the family to the state. Curiously, this removes the responsibility of caring for aged persons from the very family whom those aged individuals had cared for and raised themselves. The one area in which aged members of the community are likely to retain their leadership status is religion, and the rituals associated with it (Holmes, 1983; Johnson & Thane, 1998; Schweitzer, 1983).

David Gutmann, an early gerontologist with an interest in the effects of aging on personality, has focused his career on studying men in four cultures: a typical American population (to the extent that there is such a thing), the Navajo in the United States, both Lowland and Highland Maya in Mexico, and the Druze in Israel (see Gutmann, 1987, 1997). One of the most interesting realities that he begins with is the recognition that the human species is the only one in which aged individuals remain active long past their reproductive prime. What possible evolutionary advantage does this offer our species? Gutmann believes that our elders fill unique roles in society, thus providing essential benefits to the extended family and the community, particularly for the young. Indeed, Gutmann points out that it is uniquely human to favor the ends of the lifespan, both childhood and old age, over the middle of the lifespan, when reproductive fitness is at its biological peak. As we noted above, however, the transition into old age is not always easy, and this leads to some unique changes in personality associated with aging.

The beginning of old age is marked by the maturity of one's children, such that the adult individual no longer needs to provide care for their children. Thus, both men and women can begin to express those aspects of their personality that were set aside in order to mutually facilitate raising children. Consequently, there is often a relaxing, or even reversal to some extent, of gender roles. A particularly significant change for men who no longer have the physical strength to be warriors (or to engage in the physical labor of their community) is the manner in which they seek mastery over their lives. Young men have the ability to seek active mastery, they strive toward autonomy, competence, and control. Older men must seek passive mastery, through adaptation and accommodation. The oldest men must rely on magical mastery. The world becomes one of potential providers and potential predators. They rely on primitive defense mechanisms, and wish fulfillment becomes synonymous with reality. Their relationship to the world is marked by feelings of vulnerability (Gutmann, 1987, 1997). In such societies, we can more involvement in religious practice that would lead to a degree of respect, or at least acknowledgement, as religious leaders. Of course, the degree to which a society provides for its oldest members, such as through retirement benefits, would have a significant effect on this aging process. Nonetheless, Gutmann found evidence for these changes in mastery style amongst men in mainstream America as well as in the Navajo, Maya, and Druze cultures.

Addressing the Degree of Cultural Integration

Adding to the complexity of culture's role in shaping our personalities are two important factors. First is the degree to which an individual is integrated into their culture, and vice versa. As Sorokin points out, it is exceedingly rare that an individual is either totally integrated into their culture or not integrated into it at all (Sorokin, 1947; see also Kardiner, et al., 1945; Linton, 1936). Thus, culture provides a framework within which individual variation is possible, but at the same time there will always be some consistent basis for understanding the people within a given culture. This becomes particularly important when considering cross-cultural research, since it may be reasonable to make some general assumptions about an individual from another culture, but we must also be prepared for their own unique variation as a person in that cultural group.

A second important factor is that cultural phenomena do not exist in isolation. Both gender and race/ethnicity, for example, influence how one adapts to the aging process (see, e.g., Arber, Davidson, & Ginn, 2003; Barrow, 1986; Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Cool & McCabe, 1983; Holmes, 1983). Gender also interacts with race/ethnicity in determining one's reactions to group psychotherapy (Pack-Brown, Whittington-Clark, & Parker, 1998) and/or adapting to life as a minority student on a majority campus (Levey, Blanco, & Jones, 1998). Religion is considered to be such an important factor in the African American community that its role has been the subject of special interest (see, e.g., Belgrave & Allison, 2006; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). Obviously, many more examples can be found, the point being that as an individual develops, with multiple cultural factors influencing them, and each factor being integrated to a greater or lesser degree, the potential for individual personality differences is extraordinary, even when the overall effect of the specific culture, or society, is to guide its members toward certain underlying tendencies that become characteristic of that culture's members.

Culture and Diversity

The importance of studying culture can be found in the diversity of people both around the world and within our own communities. For example, although many communities may be quite limited in terms of religion and race/ethnicity, nearly all communities have a mixture of gender and age. Although religion, race/ethnicity, gender, and age may be the major factors that have traditionally been studied in the field of psychology, in the instances where culture was studied, it is important to remember two additional points. First, there are other cultural factors that may be very important for certain individuals and/or select groups of people, and second, people can be excitingly (or frustratingly, depending on your point of view) unique in their individuality.

One area of diversity that has been receiving more attention as a cultural factor affecting the lives of many people is that of physical disability. In the past, although it was recognized that individuals with physical disabilities experience basically the same personality development processes as other people, disabilities were considered to be specific conditions that isolated the disabled person from their surroundings (Barker et al., 1953; Pintner et al., 1941). Over time, as more research became available on the psychology of people with disabilities (e.g., Goodley & Lawthorn, 2006; Henderson & Bryan, 1984; Marks, 1999; McDaniel, 1976; Roessler & Bolton, 1978; Stubbins, 1977; Vash, 1981; Wright, 1983), perspectives on how to study these individuals changed as well. In 2004, the Society for Disability Studies adopted preliminary guidelines for developing programs in disability studies. They emphasize challenging the previously held view that disabilities are individual deficits or defects that can or should be fixed by "experts." Rather, they recommend exploring models that examine cultural, social, political, and economic factors which integrate personal and collective responses to difference.

A few academic authors have made passing mention of the value of exercise, self-defense training, and spirituality in coping with physical disabilities (Nardo, 1994; Robinson, West, & Woodworth, 1995; Sobsey, 1994), one particularly interesting area in which culture, physical disability, the mind-body connection, positive psychology, and spirituality all come together is martial arts training (see Kelland, 2009, 2010). A number of notable martial arts experts actively encourage people with disabilities to practice the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of these ancient exercises (such as Grandmaster Mark Shuey Sr. of the Cane Masters International Association, Master Jurgen Schmidt of the International Disabled Self-Defense Association, and Grandmaster John Pellegrini of the International Combat Hapkido Federation), and several books are available on this subject (McNab, 2003; Robertson, 1991; Withers & Sims, 2007). Consider the diversity of cultures and personal interests that come together when, for example, a disabled American living in the modern world pursues the spiritual and physical development associated with an ancient, Asian practice of self-development.

A Final Challenge

As important as it is to keep cultural factors in mind when studying personality, the unfortunate reality is that the major personality theories in psychology, as we recognize psychology today, have arisen within Western intellectual settings. Thus, we do not have corresponding systems of personality theory that arose in other cultures that we might compare to the theories we do have. This somewhat limits our perspective on cross-cultural personality theory to attempts to apply our Western theories to people of other cultures. This limitation should not, however, keep us from considering these issues. Culture is an all-encompassing factor in the development and psychology of both individuals and the groups in which they live. Indeed, in Personality and Person Perception Across Cultures, Lee, McCauley, & Draguns (1999) boldly state that “human nature cannot be independent of culture” (pg. vii). Thus, it is essential that we learn as much as possible about culture.

Summary

- The process of enculturation involves internalizing cultural norms, and may be able to influence the central organization of individuals, as well as the superficial organization.
- Religion appears to be the single most significant cultural factor.
- Race and ethnicity are complex, and are hard to consider as cultural factors because they cannot easily be defined.
- Although sex is a biological distinction, gender roles are an influential cultural factor that are applied from very early in life.
- All societies recognize distinct age groups, and treat those age groups differently. However, there is great variation in the status of each age group, which often leads to conflict.
- In addition to sometimes dramatic differences between cultures, individuals within a culture also differ in the extent to which they integrate different aspects of their culture into their own lives.

Discussion Questions

- When you begin to learn something about another culture, how much does it interest you? How influential do you think your culture has been in your own personal development?
- To what extent have religion, race, gender, and age been important factors in your personal development (either currently, or in the past)? Which do you expect will be the most important in your future development?
- Are you, or is anyone you know, distant or unintegrated with your family's culture or that your community? If so, what sort of problems does that create for your identities? If none, does your cultural integration provide a sense of integrity?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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4.3 Personality, Values, and Attitudes in the Workplace

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast personality tests based on trait theories.
- Discuss personality traits, values, and attitudes to workplace experiences.

Brad works for a marketing firm in Kansas City, Missouri. He has worked for the company for over 15 years and is very talented at his job. He has recently been promoted and now runs the marketing team for a number of the company's largest clients. Brad is a very direct individual, and is extremely comfortable giving feedback, even unsolicited. During every team meeting, Brad is quick to shut down ideas and is known for giving harsh, personal feedback during his teams' presentations. Although he is one of the most tenured, no one goes to him for help or advice because they fear he will use it as an opportunity to point out every professional and personal flaw (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8 Not all personality traits creative positive working environments.
Business Call – drobotdean – Freepik License

Since Brad was promoted to leading the marketing team, employee morale and productivity have dropped significantly. Is this a matter of clashing personalities? Or is Brad too abrasive and brutal in his communication style and feedback techniques?

Personality traits play a role in every relationship. Individual personalities help to form an organization's culture and image. Therefore, every successful organization relies heavily on the personality traits of its employees. While everyone has a different personality, there are certain traits and characteristics that are common amongst individuals. Understanding these similarities and differences can help you to better understand your coworkers, your team, and even your supervisors and bosses.

It is also important to make a connection between personalities and behavior. Certain personality traits can be used to predict behavior. This is why smart hiring practices are so important. It is equally, if not more, important to hire based on behavioral based interview questions and personality questionnaires as opposed to hiring solely on previous experience. Being aware of how personality traits influence behavior can be extremely beneficial to your success in the workplace. This section will deep dive into the idiosyncrasies of personality traits and how certain ones can negatively or positively impact an organization.

Recognizing your personality traits is the first step in successfully achieving your goals. Being able to capitalize on your strengths and also understanding how to strengthen your weaknesses is the cornerstone of success. When we use our personality to make decisions best suited for ourselves, we are more likely to find long-lasting happiness and satisfaction. Similarly, understanding the personalities of others will help us to form stronger relationships.

Personality Traits

In some ways, finding someone with differing personality traits can be beneficial. Relationships involving individuals with opposite personalities can challenge each person to view situations from a different perspective. In the workplace, differing personality traits are important to creating a diverse workplace where creativity and varying ideas can thrive. At the same time, it is also important to surround yourself with people who have similar core beliefs, values, and goals. Hiring employees while taking their personality into consideration can help foster an inclusive and positive work environment.

Thousands of personality traits have been identified over the years. It would be nearly impossible to find an effective way to identify each and every one of an individual's personality traits. To help streamline the process, multiple types of personality tests are available to help individuals recognize their strengths, preferences, communication style, among many other important characteristics. Let's look into some of the most popular personality tests used today.

16PF Questionnaire

Trait theorists believe personality can be understood via the approach that all people have certain traits, or characteristic ways of behaving. Do you tend to be sociable or shy?

Passive or aggressive? Optimistic or pessimistic? Moody or even-tempered? Early trait theorists tried to describe all human personality traits. For example, one trait theorist, Gordon Allport (Allport & Odbert, 1936), found 4,500 words in the English language that could describe people. He organized these personality traits into three categories: cardinal traits, central traits, and secondary traits. A **cardinal trait** is one that dominates your entire personality, and hence your life—such as Ebenezer Scrooge's greed and Mother Theresa's altruism. Cardinal traits are not very common: Few people have personalities dominated by a single trait. Instead, our personalities typically are composed of multiple traits. **Central traits** are those that make up our personalities (such as loyal, kind, agreeable, friendly, sneaky, wild, and grouchy). **Secondary traits** are those that are not quite as obvious or as consistent as central traits. They are present under specific circumstances and include preferences and attitudes. For example, one person gets angry when people try to tickle him; another can only sleep on the left side of the bed; and yet another always orders her salad dressing on the side. And you—although not normally an anxious person—feel nervous before making a speech in front of your English class.

In an effort to make the list of traits more manageable, Raymond Cattell (1946, 1957) narrowed down the list to about 171 traits. However, saying that a trait is either present or absent does not accurately reflect a person's uniqueness, because all of our personalities are actually made up of the same traits; we differ only in the degree to which each trait is expressed. Cattell (1957) identified 16 factors or dimensions of personality: warmth, reasoning, emotional stability, dominance, liveliness, rule-consciousness, social boldness, sensitivity, vigilance, abstractedness, privateness, apprehension, openness to change, self-reliance, perfectionism, and tension (Table 4.1). He developed a personality assessment based on these 16 factors, called the 16PF. Instead of a trait being present or absent, each dimension is scored over a continuum, from high to low. For example, your level of warmth describes how warm, caring, and nice to others you are. If you score low on this index, you tend to be more distant and cold. A high score on this index signifies you are supportive and comforting.

Table 4.1 Personality Factors Measured by the 16PF Questionnaire

Factor	Low Score	High Score
Warmth	reserved, detached	outgoing, supportive

Intellect	concrete thinking	analytical
Emotional Stability	moody, irritable	stable, calm
Aggressiveness	docile, submissive	controlling, dominant
Liveliness	somber, prudent	adventurous, spontaneous
Dutifulness	unreliable	conscientious
Social Assertiveness	shy, restrained	uninhibited, bold
Sensitivity	tough-minded	sensitive, caring
Paranoia	trusting	suspicious
Abstractness	conventional	imaginative
Introversion	open, straightforward	private, shrewd
Anxiety	confident	apprehensive
Openmindedness	closeminded, traditional	curious, experimental
Independence	outgoing, social	self-sufficient
Perfectionism	disorganized, casual	organized, precise
Tension	relaxed	stressed

The Five Factor Model

The Five Factor Model, with its five factors referred to as the Big Five personality factors, is the most popular theory in personality psychology today and the most accurate approximation of the basic personality dimensions (Funder, 2001). The five factors are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. A helpful way to remember the factors is by using the mnemonic OCEAN.

In the Five Factor Model, each person possesses each factor, but they occur along a spectrum (Figure 4.9). Openness to experience is characterized by imagination, feelings, actions, and ideas. People who score high on this factor tend to be curious and have a wide range of interests. Conscientiousness is characterized by competence, self-discipline, thoughtfulness, and achievement-striving (goal-directed behavior). People who score high on this factor are hardworking and dependable. Numerous studies have found a positive correlation between conscientiousness and academic success (Akomolafe, 2013; Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2008; Conrad & Patry, 2012; Noftle & Robins, 2007; Wagerman & Funder, 2007). Extroversion is characterized by sociability, assertiveness, excitement-seeking, and emotional expression. People who score high on this factor are usually described as outgoing and warm. Not surprisingly, people who score high on both extroversion and openness are more likely to participate in adventure and risky sports due to their curious and excitement-seeking nature (Tok, 2011). The fourth factor is agreeableness, which is the tendency to be pleasant, cooperative, trustworthy, and good-natured. People who score low on agreeableness tend to be described as rude and uncooperative, yet one recent study reported that men who scored low on this factor actually earned more money than men who were considered more agreeable (Judge, Livingston, & Hurst, 2012). The last of the Big Five factors is neuroticism, which is the tendency to experience negative emotions. People high on neuroticism tend to experience emotional instability and are characterized as angry, impulsive, and hostile. Watson and Clark (1984) found that people reporting high levels of neuroticism also tend to report feeling anxious and unhappy. In contrast, people who score low in neuroticism tend to be calm and even-tempered.

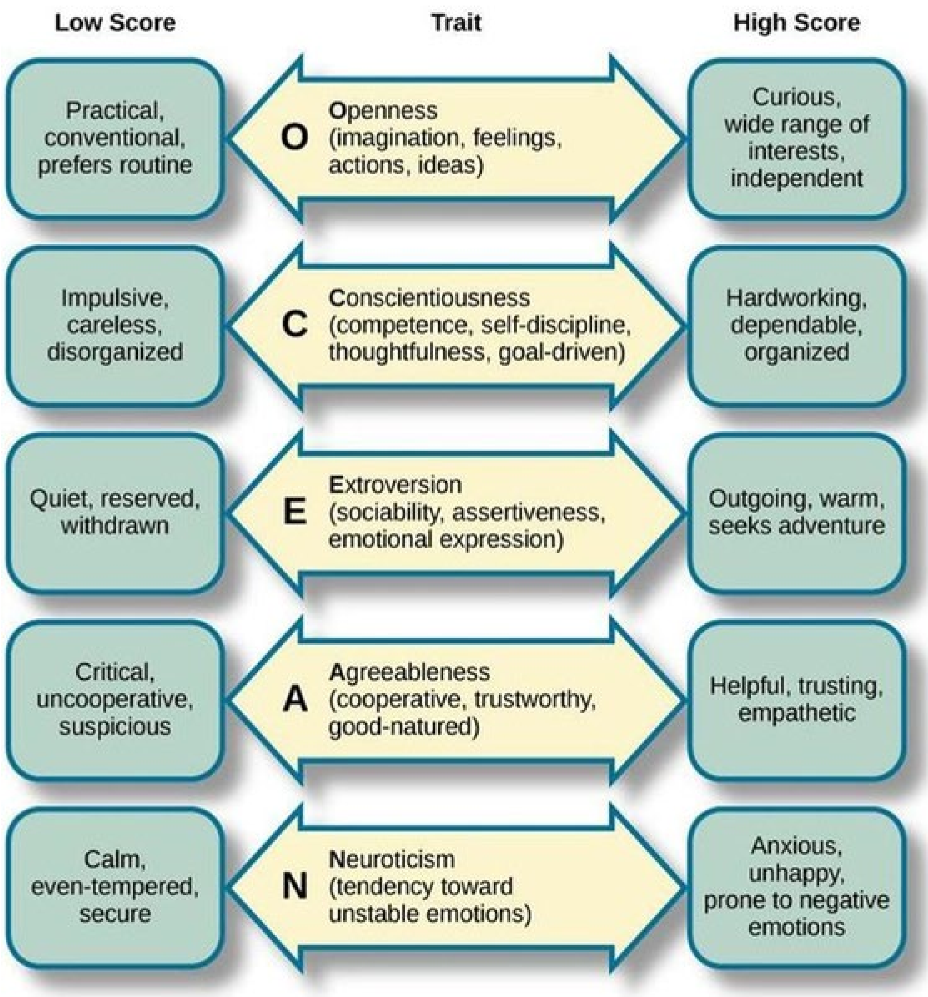

Figure 4.9 The Five-Factor Model of Personality. Big 5 Personality Traits - U3100193 – CC BY-SA 4.0

The Big Five personality factors each represent a range between two extremes. In reality, most of us tend to lie somewhere midway along the continuum of each factor, rather than at polar ends. It's important to note that the Big Five factors are relatively stable over our lifespan, with some tendency for the factors to increase or decrease slightly.

Researchers have found that conscientiousness increases through young adulthood into middle age, as we become better able to manage our personal relationships and careers (Donnellan & Lucas, 2008). Agreeableness also increases with age, peaking between 50 to 70 years (Terracciano, McCrae, Brant, & Costa, 2005). Neuroticism and extroversion tend to decline slightly with age (Donnellan & Lucas; Terracciano et al.). Additionally, The Big Five factors have been shown to exist across ethnicities, cultures, and ages, and may have substantial biological and genetic components (Jang, Livesley, & Vernon, 1996; Jang et al., 2006; McCrae & Costa, 1997; Schmitt et al., 2007).

The HEXACO Model

Another model of personality traits is the HEXACO model. HEXACO is an acronym for six broad traits: honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Anglim & O'Connor, 2018)(Figure 4.10).

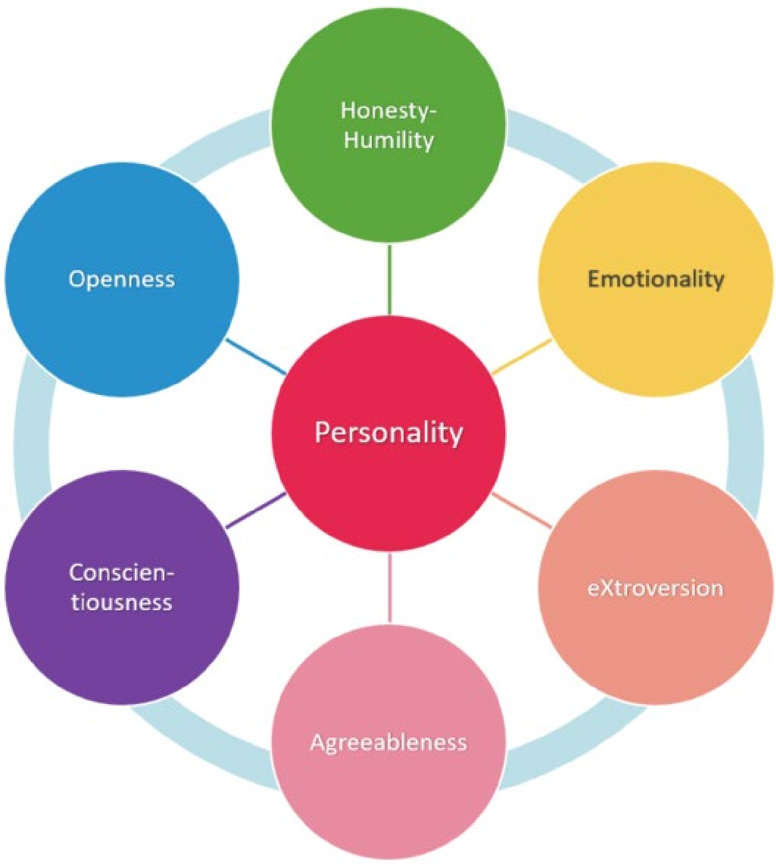

Figure 4.10 The six factors of the HEXACO model. HEXACO - MissLunaRose12 – CC BY-SA 4.0

Table 4.2 below, provides a brief overview of each trait. This model is similar to the Big Five, but it posits slightly different versions of some of the traits, and its proponents argue that one important class of individual differences was omitted from the Five-Factor Model. The HEXACO adds Honesty-Humility as a sixth dimension of personality. People high in this trait are sincere, fair, and modest, whereas those low in the trait are manipulative, narcissistic, and self-centered. Thus, trait theorists are agreed that personality traits are important in understanding behavior, but there are still debates on the exact number and composition of the traits that are most important.

Table 4.2 HEXACO Traits

Trait	**Example Aspects of Trait**
Honesty-humility	sincerity, modesty, faithfulness
Emotionality	sentimentality, anxiety, sensitivity
E**x**traversion	sociability, talkativeness, boldness
Agreeableness	patience, tolerance, gentleness
Conscientiousness	organization, thoroughness, precision
Openness	creativity, inquisitiveness, innovativeness

Personality tests are used to help companies better understand their employees or employee candidates. It is important to remember that there are thousands of different personality traits. Each individual has their own unique set and combination of personality traits. While each of the personality tests we discussed in this section are effective in their own right, there is no exact science to identifying each and every personality trait present in an individual. In addition, many personality tests are based upon an individual's self-assessment and results may differ from day to day. Personality tests may help to confirm things you already believed to be true or they may open your eyes to a side of yourself you didn't realize existed. Let's move onto the next section to examine how an individual's personality can help to predict their choices and behavior.

Personality and Behavior

As we discussed in the last section, personality traits do not fall under a one-size-fits-all category. Every individual has their own unique personality that helps to form their outlook on life and shapes their interactions with others. Imagine being able to take an individual's personality fingerprint and predict how they would act in any given scenario. While seeing into the future is impossible, using personality traits to predict an individual's behavior is on the spectrum of possibilities.

Personalities have been studied and discussed dating back to Ancient Greece and Roman times. Research has been conducted for years and years to try to determine how to properly predict behavior using an individual's personality traits. However, in the 1970s, after years of research and testing, psychologists Daryl Bem and Walter Mischel had limited success in making consistently successful predictions (McAndrew, 2018). Their frustrations led them to believe that situational factors and stressors were more responsible for decisions than an individual's personality.

So, which is it? Is it personality or the situation that plays a leading role in influencing a person's behavior? The short answer is both. Many people expect a clear-cut answer to the question. However, that is an impossible task when it comes to predicting behavior. It is important to take into account the individual's personality in addition to the situation they find themselves in. The next section will discuss how situations can influence behavior, but for the purpose of this section, let's explore the benefits and limitations of using personality to predict behavior.

Personality traits are all on a spectrum. The more extreme an individual is on the spectrum, the easier it is to predict their behavior. Since many personality tests focus on broad traits (OCEAN for example), there is a wide range for interpretation. Let's look at introverts versus extraverts as an example. Everyone falls somewhere on the introvert vs. extravert scale. Even if you are more of an extravert than an introvert you may still not be considered a very outgoing person. Depending on the group of individuals you find yourself with may also change others' perception of you. For example, if you are surrounded by extremely extraverted people, you may appear to be introverted, even though you consider yourself an extravert. Similar to weight or height, everyone has a measurement unique to them but it may appear to be higher or lower when compared to that of others. According to McAndrew (2018), "Research has shown that the more to one of the extremes a person falls on a trait, the more consistently the trait will be a factor in his or her behavior."

It is also important to take into consideration that observing personality traits in multiple scenarios can be more accurate in predicting behavior. Trying to make a prediction based on a single interaction does not paint a completely accurate picture of an individual. Being able to observe the varying degrees of an individual's personality can help to better understand a person and determine the best way to maximize their strengths and support their weaknesses.

So how is predicting behavior helpful in the workplace? Using personality traits to form workgroups and teams can be extremely beneficial in the long run. Diversity is important to success. At the same time, pairing together like-minded individuals can help to promote efficiency and collaboration. Using personality traits and tests to form teams can help to bring together a beautifully balanced group. It is important to keep in mind; however, that observing an individual's personality multiple times may provide additional insight into how they operate. It is extremely important to utilize new found information and observations to rearrange team dynamics. Personality traits alone cannot successfully predict behavior. Situations also play an important role in determining how an individual will act.

Situational Influences on Personality

Certain situations and circumstances can influence a person's day in a positive or negative way. Depending on the circumstance, a normally positive person may become more negative. On the other hand, a traditionally pessimistic person may appear to be more positive. So how is this possible? You have experienced both triumphs and tribulations in your lifetime and whether or not you realized it, they most likely impacted the way you acted and altered your personality for that period of time. It is human nature for emotions and personalities to differ depending on what is happening in our lives.

Even if we are not aware of what others may be going through, it is reasonable to assume that certain situations in the lives of all individuals impacts their personality. For example, you are out with friends, and you see your friend Lorenzo, who is the most extroverted person in the group, crying in the corner. Does this mean Lorenzo is no longer an extravert but rather an introvert? Or could he be crying because he just heard some upsetting news? Chances are, the latter option is a more realistic one. While the news may have changed his personality during that social setting on that day, it most likely did not alter it permanently.

Let's look at another example. The coworker you disagree with most, Kayla, who constantly argues against your ideas, comes into work Monday morning with a pep in her step. At your team meeting, she completely supports your proposed project idea and offers to help execute it. Has Kayla turned a corner and has decided to end the feud between you two? Possibly. But odds are there is something in her life that has temporarily altered her personality. What you may not know, is that over the weekend her all-time favorite team won the Super Bowl. Her excitement from the day before spilled over into Monday, presenting a much version of Kayla that seems to like you a great deal more. People can also change their personality based on who they're around. If the person you're with makes you uncomfortable, you're not likely to be very talkative and offer up good conversation. However, if you're on the phone with a friend you haven't talked to for a while, you're likely to have an animated conversation.

If situations can influence personality and personality can predict behavior, then situational influences also contribute to predicting behavior. It also brings into question whether or not personality traits are consistent since they are easily influenced by situations. In 1968, Walter Mischel published a book entitled *Personality & Assessment*. In his book, Mischel argued that an interactionist approach was best suited when exploring personality, situations, and behavior. This interactionist approach believes that both personality and situational circumstances create behavior. In addition, Mischel explained that personalities tend to differ across a range of situations (personality at work versus home); however, they keep consistencies within similar situations (work meetings). This revelation created an upset in the traditional view of personality by arguing that personality stability and instability can each exist at the same time.

Values

Values refer to stable life goals that people have, reflecting what is most important to them. Values are established throughout one's life as a result of the accumulating life experiences and tend to be relatively stable (Lusk & Oliver, 1974; Rokeach, 1973). The values that are important to people tend to affect the types of decisions they make, how they perceive their environment, and their actual behaviors. Moreover, people are more likely to accept job offers when the company possesses the values people care about (Judge & Bretz, 1992; Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). Value attainment is one reason why people stay in a company, and when an organization does not help them attain their values, they are more likely to decide to leave if they are dissatisfied with the job itself (George & Jones, 1996).

What are the values people care about? There are many typologies of values. One of the most established surveys to assess individual values is the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973). This survey lists 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values in alphabetical order. Terminal values refer to end states people desire in life, such as leading a prosperous life and a world at peace. Instrumental values deal with views on acceptable modes of conduct, such as being honest and ethical, and being ambitious.

According to Rokeach, values are arranged in hierarchical fashion. In other words, an accurate way of assessing someone's values is to ask them to rank the 36 values in order of importance. By comparing these values, people develop a sense of which value can be sacrificed to achieve the other, and the individual priority of each value emerges.

Where do values come from? Research indicates that they are shaped early in life and show stability over the course of a lifetime. Early family experiences are important influences over the dominant values. People who were raised in families with low socioeconomic status and those who experienced restrictive parenting often display conformity values when they are adults, while those who were raised by parents who were cold toward their children would likely value and desire security (Kasser, Koestner, & Lekes, 2002).

Values of a generation also change and evolve in response to the historical context that the generation grows up in. Research comparing the values of different generations resulted in interesting findings. For example, Generation Xers (those born between the mid-1960s and early 1980s) are more individualistic and are interested in working toward organizational goals so long as they coincide with their personal goals. This group, compared to the baby boomers (born between the 1940s and 1960s), is also less likely to see work as central to their life and more likely to desire a quick promotion (Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Values a person holds will affect their employment. For example, someone who values stimulation highly may seek jobs that involve fast action and high risk, such as firefighter, police officer, or emergency medicine. Someone who values achievement highly may be likely to become an entrepreneur or intrapreneur. And an individual who values benevolence and universalism may seek work in the nonprofit sector with a charitable organization or in a “helping profession,” such as nursing or social work. Like personality, values have implications for Organizing activities, such as assigning duties to specific jobs or developing the chain of command; employee values are likely to affect how employees respond to changes in the characteristics of their jobs.

In terms of work behaviors, a person is more likely to accept a job offer when the company possesses the values he or she cares about. A firm’s values are often described in the company’s mission and vision statements, an element of the Planning function (Judge & Bretz, 1992; Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). Value attainment is one reason people stay in a company. When a job does not help them attain their values, they are likely to decide to leave if they are also dissatisfied with the job (George & Jones, 1996). Therefore, understanding employees at work requires understanding the value orientations of employees.

We often find ourselves in situations where our values do not coincide with someone we are working with. For example, if Alison’s main value is connection, this may come out in a warm communication style with coworkers and an interest in their personal lives. Imagine Alison works with Tyler, whose core value is efficiency. Because of Tyler’s focus, he may find it a waste of time to make small talk with colleagues. When Alison approaches Tyler and asks about his weekend, she may feel offended or upset when he brushes her off to ask about the project they are working on together. She feels like a connection wasn’t made, and he feels like she isn’t efficient. Understanding our own values as well as the values of others can greatly help us become better communicators.

Attitudes

Our attitudes are favorable or unfavorable opinions toward people, things, or situations. Many things affect our attitudes, including the environment we were brought up in and our individual experiences. Our personalities and values play a large role in our attitudes as well. For example, many people may have attitudes toward politics that are similar to their parents, but their attitudes may change as they gain more experiences. If someone has a bad experience around the ocean, they may develop a negative attitude around beach activities. However, assume that person has a memorable experience seeing sea lions at the beach, for example, then he or she may change their opinion about the ocean. Likewise, someone may have loved the ocean, but if they have a scary experience, such as nearly drowning, they may change their attitude.

The important thing to remember about attitudes is that they can change over time, but usually some sort of positive experience needs to occur for our attitudes to change dramatically for the better. We also have control of our attitude in our thoughts. If we constantly stream negative thoughts, it is likely we may become a negative person.

In a workplace environment, you can see where attitude is important. Someone's personality may be cheerful and upbeat. These are the prized employees because they help bring positive perspective to the workplace. Likewise, someone with a negative attitude is usually someone that most people prefer not to work with. The problem with a negative attitude is that it has a devastating effect on everyone else. Have you ever felt really happy after a great day and when you got home, your roommate was in a terrible mood because of her bad day? In this situation, you can almost feel yourself deflating! This is why having a positive attitude is a key component to having good human relations at work and in our personal lives.

Our attitude is ultimately about how we set our expectations; how we handle the situation when our expectations are not met; and finally, how we sum up an experience, person, or situation. When we focus on improving our attitude on a daily basis, we get used to thinking positively and our entire personality can change. It goes without saying that employers prefer to hire and promote someone with a positive attitude as opposed to a negative one. Davis (2019) suggests four ways to develop a more positive attitude:

- Spending more time thinking about positive things will help strengthen the positive neural pathways in your brain. This can help you generate your own positive thoughts and feelings more easily.
- Find a silver lining even with things you perceive to be negative. Is there something you can learn or take away from it? Look for an alternative perspective that can help you view the situation more positively.
- Engaging in random acts of kindness can improve your attitude. When you help others unprompted and without reward, you can develop a positive sense of self and the gratitude expressed by those you aid will help create positive feelings.
- Smile, laugh, and enjoy life more. This one might seem like a struggle at times, but the more you can appreciate the small things in your life, the more positive your attitude can become.

When considering our personality, values, and attitudes, we can begin to get the bigger picture of who we are and how our experiences affect how we behave at work and in our personal lives. It is a good idea to reflect often on what aspects of our personality are working well and which we might like to change. With self-awareness we can make changes that eventually result in better human relations.

Summary

- Cattell developed a personality assessment called the 16PF.
- The Five Factor Model is the most widely accepted trait theory today. The five factors are openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These factors occur along a continuum.
- The HEXACO Model posits slightly different versions of some of the Big Five traits, and its proponents argue that one important class of individual differences was omitted from the Five-Factor Model
- Values express a person's life goals; they are similar to personality traits in that they are relatively stable over time.
- Our personality can help define our *attitudes* toward specific things, situations, or people. Most people prefer to work with people who have a positive attitude.

Discussion Questions

1. Choose one of the personality assessments discussed in this section. Can you think of jobs or occupations that seem particularly suited to each trait? Which traits would be universally desirable across all jobs?
2. Why might a prospective employer screen applicants using personality assessments?
3. Have you ever held a job where your personality did not match the demands of the job? How did you react to this situation? How were your attitudes and behaviors affected?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.
- Remix of introduction, behavior, and situational influences from Why It Matters: Individual Personalities and Behaviors (Organizational Behavior – Lumen Learning) , trait theories from 11.7 Trait Theories (Psychology 2e – Openstax), values from 2.3 Personality and Values (Principles of Management – University of Minnesota) attitudes from 1.2 Human Relations: Personality and Attitude Effects (Saylor Academy).

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Chapter 5: Emotions

Think back to a time when you were very upset. Can you remember what you were upset about? What about a time when you were really happy? Which event sticks out more in your mind? Often, we are much better at remember events associated with negative emotions.

In this chapter, you will examine the functions of your emotions, the impact that culture plays in how you display your emotions, and emotional intelligence. Learning these concepts will aid in your future interactions with coworkers, friends, and family, increasing your understanding of human relations.

5.1 Functions of Emotions

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define emotion
- Discuss why emotions are important in human life.
- Describe the functions and meanings of emotion in three areas of life: the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social–cultural.

It is impossible to imagine life without emotion. We treasure our feelings—the joy at a ball game, the pleasure of the touch of a loved one, or the fun with friends on a night out. Even negative emotions are important, such as the sadness when a loved one dies, the anger when violated, the fear that overcomes us in a scary or unknown situation, or the guilt or shame toward others when our sins are made public. Emotions color life experiences and give those experiences meaning and flavor. In fact, emotions play many important roles in people's lives and have been the topic of scientific inquiry in psychology for well over a century (Cannon, 1927; Darwin, 1872; James, 1890). This section explores why we have emotions and why they are important. Doing so requires us to understand the function of emotions, and this module does so below by dividing the discussion into three sections. The first concerns the **intrapersonal** functions of emotion, which refer to the role that emotions play within each of us individually. The second concerns the **interpersonal** functions of emotion, which refer to the role emotions play between individuals within a group. The third concerns the **social and cultural** functions of emotion, which refer to the role that emotions play in the maintenance of social order within a society.

An **emotion** is a subjective state of being that we often describe as our feelings. Emotions result from the combination of subjective experience, expression, cognitive appraisal, and physiological responses (Levenson, Carstensen, Friesen, & Ekman, 1991). However, the exact order in which the components occur is not clear, and some parts may happen at the same time. An emotion often begins with a subjective (individual) experience, which is a stimulus. Often the stimulus is external, but it does not have to be from the outside world. For example, it might be that one thinks about war and becomes sad, even though they never experienced war. Emotional expression refers to the way one displays an emotion and includes nonverbal and verbal behaviors (Gross, 1999) (Figure 5.1). One also performs a cognitive appraisal in which a person tries to determine the way they will be impacted by a situation (Roseman & Smith, 2001). In addition, emotions include physiological responses, such as possible changes in heart rate, sweating, etc. (Soussignan, 2002).

Figure 5.1 Portrait of a Man showing emotions. Portret van een man – Gert Germeraad – CC BY-SA 3.0

All in all, we will see that emotions inform us of who we are, what our relationships with others are like, and how to behave in social interactions. Emotions give meaning to events; without emotions, those events would be mere facts. Emotions help coordinate interpersonal relationships. And emotions play an important role in the cultural functioning of keeping human societies together.

Intrapersonal Functions of Emotion

We will begin our discussion of the functions of emotions with intrapersonal functions.

Emotions Help us Act Quickly with Minimal Conscious Awareness

Emotions are rapid information-processing systems that help us act with minimal thinking (Tooby & Cosmides, 2008). Problems associated with birth, battle, death, and seduction have occurred throughout evolutionary history and emotions evolved to aid humans in adapting to those problems rapidly and with minimal conscious cognitive intervention. If we did not have emotions, we could not make rapid decisions concerning whether to attack, defend, flee, care for others, reject food, or approach something useful, all of which were functionally adaptive in our evolutionary history and helped us to survive. For instance, drinking spoiled milk or eating rotten eggs has negative consequences for our welfare. The emotion of disgust, however, helps us immediately take action by not ingesting them in the first place or by vomiting them out. This response is adaptive because it aids, ultimately, in our survival and allows us to act immediately without much thinking. In some instances, taking the time to sit and rationally think about what to do, calculating cost–benefit ratios in one's mind, is a luxury that might cost one one's life. Emotions evolved so that we can act without that depth of thinking.

Emotions Prepare the Body for Immediate Action

Emotions prepare us for behavior. When triggered, emotions orchestrate systems such as perception, attention, inference, learning, memory, goal choice, motivational priorities, physiological reactions, motor behaviors, and behavioral decision making (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Tooby & Cosmides, 2008). Emotions simultaneously activate certain systems and deactivate others in order to prevent the chaos of competing systems operating at the same time, allowing for coordinated responses to environmental stimuli (Levenson, 1999). For instance, when we are afraid, our bodies shut down temporarily unneeded digestive processes, resulting in saliva reduction (a dry mouth); blood flows disproportionately to the lower half of the body; the visual field expands; and air is breathed in, all preparing the body to flee. Emotions initiate a system of components that includes subjective experience, expressive behaviors, physiological reactions, action tendencies, and cognition, all for the purposes of specific actions; the term "emotion" is, in reality, a metaphor for these reactions (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 The emotion of disgust serves to protect us from toxins and contamination, of the physical and moral variety. Gas Face After Visiting The Frick - Runs With Scissors – CC BY-NC 2.0

One common misunderstanding many people have when thinking about emotions, however, is the belief that emotions must always directly produce action. This is not true. Emotion certainly prepares the body for action; but whether people actually engage in action is dependent on many factors, such as the context within which the emotion has occurred, the target of the emotion, the perceived consequences of one's actions, previous experiences, and so forth (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007; Matsumoto & Wilson, 2008). Thus, emotions are just one of many determinants of behavior, albeit an important one.

Emotions Influence Thoughts

Emotions are also connected to thoughts and memories. Memories are not just facts that are encoded in our brains; they are colored with the emotions felt at those times the facts occurred (Wang & Ross, 2007). Thus, emotions serve as the neural glue that connects those disparate facts in our minds. That is why it is easier to remember happy thoughts when happy, and angry times when angry. Emotions serve as the affective basis of many attitudes, values, and beliefs that we have about the world and the people around us; without emotions those attitudes, values, and beliefs would be just statements without meaning, and emotions give those statements meaning. Emotions influence our thinking processes, sometimes in constructive ways, sometimes not. It is difficult to think critically and clearly when we feel intense emotions, but easier when we are not overwhelmed with emotions (Matsumoto, Hirayama, & LeRoux, 2006).

Emotions Motivate Future Behaviors

Because emotions prepare our bodies for immediate action, influence thoughts, and can be felt, they are important motivators of future behavior. Many of us strive to experience the feelings of satisfaction, joy, pride, or triumph in our accomplishments and achievements. At the same time, we also work very hard to avoid strong negative feelings; for example, once we have felt the emotion of disgust when drinking the spoiled milk, we generally work very hard to avoid having those feelings again (e.g., checking the expiration date on the label before buying the milk, smelling the milk before drinking it, watching if the milk curdles in one's coffee before drinking it). Emotions, therefore, not only influence immediate actions but also serve as an important motivational basis for future behaviors.

Interpersonal Functions of Emotion

Emotions are expressed both verbally through words and nonverbally through facial expressions, voices, gestures, body postures, and movements. We are constantly expressing emotions when interacting with others, and others can reliably judge those emotional expressions (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Matsumoto, 2001); thus, emotions have signal value to others and influence others and our social interactions. Emotions and their expressions communicate information to others about our feelings, intentions, relationship with the target of the emotions, and the environment. Because emotions have this communicative signal value, they help solve social problems by evoking responses from others, by signaling the nature of interpersonal relationships, and by providing incentives for desired social behavior (Keltner, 2003).

Emotional Expressions Facilitate Specific Behaviors in Perceivers

Because facial expressions of emotion are universal social signals, they contain meaning not only about the expressor's psychological state but also about that person's intent and subsequent behavior. This information affects what the perceiver is likely to do. People observing fearful faces, for instance, are more likely to produce approach-related behaviors, whereas people who observe angry faces are more likely to produce avoidance-related behaviors (Marsh, Ambady, & Kleck, 2005). Even subliminal presentation of smiles produces increases in how much beverage people pour and consume and how much they are willing to pay for it; presentation of angry faces decreases these behaviors (Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger, 2005). Also, emotional displays evoke specific, complementary emotional responses from observers; for example, anger evokes fear in others (Dimberg & Ohman, 1996; Esteves, Dimberg, & Ohman, 1994), whereas distress evokes sympathy and aid (Eisenberg et al., 1989).

Emotional Expressions Signal the Nature of Interpersonal Relationships

Emotional expressions provide information about the nature of the relationships among interactants. Some of the most important and provocative set of findings in this area come from studies involving married couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Gottman, Levenson, & Woodin, 2001). In this research, married couples visited a laboratory after having not seen each other for 24 hours, and then engaged in intimate conversations about daily events or issues of conflict. Discrete expressions of contempt, especially by the men, and disgust, especially by the women, predicted later marital dissatisfaction and even divorce.

Emotional Expressions Provide Incentives for Desired Social Behavior

Facial expressions of emotion are important regulators of social interaction. In the developmental literature, this concept has been investigated under the concept of **social referencing** (Klinnert, Campos, & Sorce, 1983); that is, the process whereby infants seek out information from others to clarify a situation and then use that information to act. To date, the strongest demonstration of social referencing comes from work on the visual cliff. In the first study to investigate this concept, Campos and colleagues (Sorce, Emde, Campos, & Klinnert, 1985) placed mothers on the far end of the "cliff" from the infant. Mothers first smiled to the infants and placed a toy on top the safety glass to attract them; infants invariably began crawling to their mothers. When the infants were in the center of the table, however, the mother then posed an expression of fear, sadness, anger, interest, or joy. The results were clearly different for the different faces; no infant crossed the table when the mother showed fear; only 6% did when the mother posed anger, 33% crossed when the mother posed sadness, and approximately 75% of the infants crossed when the mother posed joy or interest.

Other studies provide similar support for facial expressions as regulators of social interaction. In one study (Bradshaw, 1986), experimenters posed facial expressions of neutral, anger, or disgust toward babies as they moved toward an object and measured the amount of inhibition the babies showed in touching the object. The results for 10- and 15-month-olds were the same: anger produced the greatest inhibition, followed by disgust, with neutral the least. This study was later replicated (Hertenstein & Campos, 2004) using joy and disgust expressions, altering the method so that the infants were not allowed to touch the toy (compared with a distractor object) until one hour after exposure to the expression. At 14 months of age, significantly more infants touched the toy when they saw joyful expressions, but fewer touched the toy when the infants saw disgust.

Social and Cultural Functions of Emotion

If you stop to think about the many things we take for granted in our daily lives, we cannot help but come to the conclusion that modern human life is a colorful tapestry of many groups and individual lives woven together in a complex yet functional way. For example, when you're hungry, you might go to the local grocery store and buy some food. Ever stop to think about how you're able to do that? You might buy a banana that was grown in a field in southeast Asia being raised by farmers there, where they planted the tree, cared for it, and picked the fruit. They probably handed that fruit off to a distribution chain that allowed multiple people somewhere to use tools such as cranes, trucks, cargo bins, ships or airplanes (that were also created by multiple people somewhere) to bring that banana to your store. The store had people to care for that banana until you came and got it and to barter with you for it (with your money). You may have gotten to the store riding a vehicle that was produced somewhere else in the world by others, and you were probably wearing clothes produced by some other people somewhere else.

Thus, human social life is complex. Individuals are members of multiple groups, with multiple social roles, norms, and expectations, and people move rapidly in and out of the multiple groups of which they are members. Moreover, much of human social life is unique because it revolves around cities, where many people of disparate backgrounds come together. This creates the enormous potential for social chaos, which can easily occur if individuals are not coordinated well and relationships not organized systematically.

One of the important functions of culture is to provide this necessary coordination and organization. Doing so allows individuals and groups to negotiate the social complexity of human social life, thereby maintaining social order and preventing social chaos. Culture does this by providing a meaning and information system to its members, which is shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet basic needs of survival, pursue happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life (Matsumoto & Juang, 2013). Culture is what allowed the banana from southeast Asia to appear on your table (Figure 5.3).

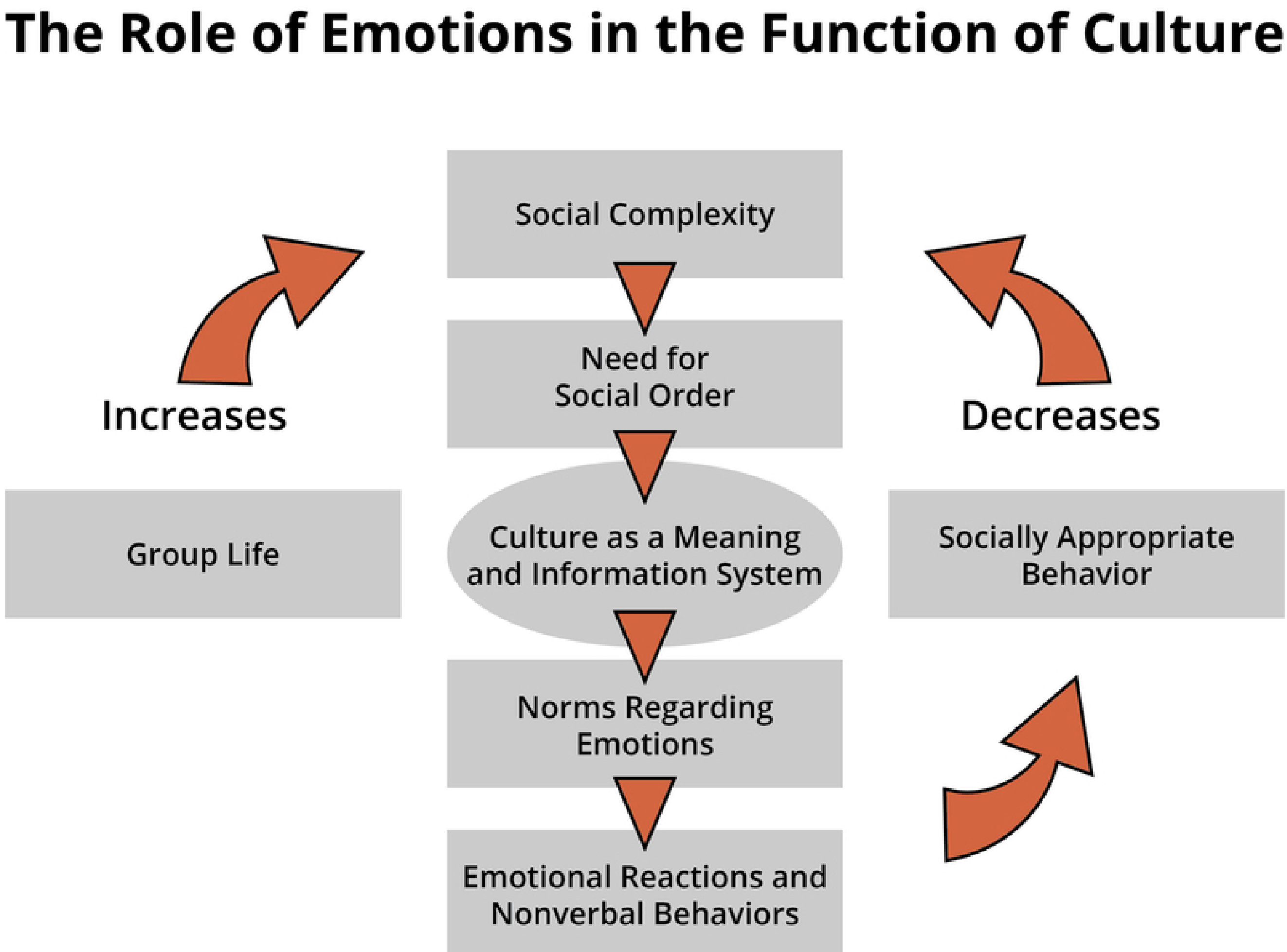

Figure 5.3 The Role of Emotions in the Function of Culture

Cultural transmission of the meaning and information system to its members is, therefore, a crucial aspect of culture. One of the ways this transmission occurs is through the development of worldviews (including attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms) related to emotions (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013; Matsumoto et al., 2008). Worldviews related to emotions provide guidelines for desirable emotions that facilitate norms for regulating individual behaviors and interpersonal relationships (Figure 5.4). Our cultural backgrounds tell us which emotions are ideal to have, and which are not (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). The cultural transmission of information related to emotions occurs in many ways, from childrearers to children, as well as from the cultural products available in our world, such as books, movies, ads, and the like (Schönpflug, 2009; Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007).

Figure 5.4 Although there are cultural differences in the display of emotion, almost all infants start showing emotion such as smiling or reacting to their caretaker as early as 6 weeks after their birth. IMG_9203 - vgm8383 – CC BY-NC 2.0

Cultures also inform us about what to do with our emotions—that is, how to manage or modify them—when we experience them. One of the ways in which this is done is through the management of our emotional expressions through cultural display rules (Friesen, 1972). These are rules that are learned early in life that specify the management and modification of our emotional expressions according to social circumstances. Thus, we learn that "big boys don't cry" or to laugh at the boss's jokes even though they're not funny. By affecting how individuals express their emotions, culture also influences how people experience them as well.

Because one of the major functions of culture is to maintain social order in order to ensure group efficiency and thus survival, cultures create worldviews, rules, guidelines, and norms concerning emotions because emotions have important intra- and interpersonal functions, as described above, and are important motivators of behavior (Figure 5.5). Norms concerning emotion and its regulation in all cultures serve the purpose of maintaining social order. Cultural worldviews and norms help us manage and modify our emotional reactions (and thus behaviors) by helping us to have certain kinds of emotional experiences in the first place and by managing our reactions and subsequent behaviors once we have them. By doing so, our culturally moderated emotions can help us engage in socially appropriate behaviors, as defined by our cultures, and thus reduce social complexity and increase social order, avoiding social chaos. All of this allows us to live relatively harmonious and constructive lives in groups. If cultural worldviews and norms about emotions did not exist, people would just run amok having all kinds of emotional experiences, expressing their emotions and then behaving in all sorts of unpredictable and potentially harmful ways. If that were the case, it would be very difficult for groups and societies to function effectively, and even for humans to survive as a species, if emotions were not regulated in culturally defined ways for the common, social good. Thus, emotions play a critical role in the successful functioning of any society and culture. We will look more in-depth at the role culture plays in emotions in the next section.

Figure 5.5 Cultural display rules teach us how to manage our emotions. For example, in many Asian countries, children are taught to mute their emotions, especially negative emotions like anger. Todaiji Temple - John Gillespie – CC BY-SA 2.0

Summary

- Personality refers to the long-standing traits and patterns that propel individuals to consistently think, feel, and behave in specific ways. Our personality is what makes us unique individuals.
- A wide variety of theoretical perspectives influence how psychologists view personality, including psychodynamic factors, learning/cognitive factors, biological factors, inherent drives, and sociocultural influences.
- The various personality theories also address questions related to nature vs. nurture, whether individuals are unique or whether there are types of personality common to all people, the relative importance of the past, present, and future, and the significance of free will.

Discussion Questions

1. When emotions occur, why do they simultaneously activate certain physiological and psychological systems in the body and deactivate others?
2. Why is it difficult for people to act rationally and think happy thoughts when they are angry? Conversely, why is it difficult to remember sad memories or have sad thoughts when people are happy?
3. Think about the messages children receive from their environment (such as from parents, mass media, the Internet, Hollywood movies, billboards, and storybooks). In what ways do these messages influence the kinds of emotions that children should and should not feel?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of short introduction from 10.4 Emotion (Psychology 2e – Openstax) integrated into main content of Functions of Emotions (Noba).
- Added image in Figure 4.1 from Introduction to Emotion (Introduction to Psychology – Lumen Learning).
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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5.2 Emotional Intelligence

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Understand the theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence and the relationship between emotion and cognition.
- Identify and define key concepts of emotional intelligence (including emotion regulation, expression of emotion, understanding emotion, etc.) and the ways they contribute to decision making, relationship building, and overall well-being.

Imagine you are waiting in line to buy tickets to see your favorite band. Knowing tickets are limited and prices will rise quickly, you showed up 4 hours early. Unfortunately, so did everyone else. The line stretches for blocks and hasn't moved since you arrived. You are now close to Will Call when you notice three people jump ahead of you to join their friends, who appear to have been saving a spot for them. They talk loudly on their cellphones as you inch forward, following the slow procession of others waiting in line. You finally reach the ticket counter only to have the clerk tell you the show is sold out. You notice the loud group off to the side, waving their tickets in the air. At this exact moment, your heart begins to race, and you feel the urge to either slam your hands on the counter or scream in the face of those you believe have slighted you (Figure 5.6). What are these feelings, and what will you do with them?

Figure 5.6 After a serious disappointment or injustice how hard is it to keep control of your emotions? DCist – James Calder – CC BY 2.0

Emotional intelligence (EI) involves the idea that cognition and emotion are interrelated. From this notion stems the belief that emotions influence decision making, relationship building, and everyday behavior. After spending hours waiting eagerly in the pouring rain and having nothing to show for it, is it even possible to squelch such intense feelings of anger due to injustice? From an EI perspective, emotions are active mental processes that can be managed, so long as individuals develop the knowledge and skills to do so. But how, exactly, do we reason with our emotions? In other words, how intelligent is our emotion system?

To begin, we'll briefly review the concept of standard, or general, intelligence. The late American psychologist, David Wechsler, claimed that intelligence is the "global capacity of an individual to think rationally, act purposefully, and deal effectively with their environment" (Wechsler, 1944). If we choose to accept this definition, then intelligence is an operational process through which we learn to utilize our internal abilities in order to better navigate our surroundings—a process that is most certainly similar to, if not impacted by, our emotions. In 1990, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer first explored and defined EI. They explained EI as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EI, according to these researchers, asserts that all individuals possess the ability to leverage their emotions to enhance thinking, judgment, and behavior. This section aims to unpack this theory by exploring the growing empirical research on EI, as well as what can be learned about its impact on our daily lives.

History of EI

Traditionally, many psychologists and philosophers viewed cognition and emotion as separate domains, with emotion posing a threat to productive and rational thinking. Have you ever been told not to let your emotions get in the way of your decisions? This separation of passion and reason stretches as far back as early ancient Greece (Lyons, 1999). Additionally, mid-20th century scholars explained emotions as mentally destabilizing forces (Young, 1943). Yet, there are traces throughout history where the intersection of emotion and cognition has been theoretically questioned. In 350 B.C.E., the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote, "some men . . . if they have first perceived and seen what is coming and have first roused themselves and their calculative faculty, are not defeated by their emotion, whether it be pleasant or painful"(Aristotle, trans. 2009, Book VII, Chapter 7, Section 8)(Figure 5.7). Still, our social interactions and experiences suggest this belief has undergone centuries of disregard, both in Western and Eastern cultures. These are the same interactions that teach us to "toughen up" and keep our emotions hidden. So, how did we arrive at EI—a scientific theory that claims *all* individuals have access to a "calculative faculty" through emotion?

Figure 5.7 Perhaps Aristotle might have revised his statement about people not being "defeated by their emotion" if he was ever stuck in rush hour traffic. Aristotle - Ambroise Tardieu - Public Domain

In the early 1970s, many scientists began to recognize the limitations of the Intelligence Quotient (IQ)—the standardized assessment of intelligence. In particular, they noticed its inability to explain differences among individuals unrelated to just cognitive ability alone. These frustrations led to the advancement of more inclusive theories of intelligence such as Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (1983/1993) and Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence (1985). Researchers also began to explore the influence of moods and emotions on thought processes, including judgment (Isen, Shalker, Clark, & Karp, 1978) and memory (Bower, 1981). It was through these theoretical explorations and empirical studies that the concept of EI began to take shape.

Today, the field of EI is extensive, encompassing varying perspectives and measurement tools. Some attribute this growth to Daniel Goleman's popularization of the construct in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. Generating public appeal, he focused on EI's connection to personal and professional success. Goleman's model of EI includes a blend of emotion-related skills, traditional cognitive intelligence, and distinct personality traits. This embellished conceptualization of EI, followed by an increase in EI literature, contributed, at least in part, to conflicting definitional and measurement models within the field.

Models and Measures of EI

Many researchers would agree that EI theory will only be as successful as its form of measurement. Today, there are three primary models of EI: the ability model (Mayer & Salovey 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), mixed models (Bar-On, 2006; Boyatzis & Sala, 2004), and the trait EI model (Petrides & Furnham, 2003).

Ability models approach EI as a standard intelligence that utilizes a distinct set of mental abilities that (1) are intercorrelated, (2) relate to other extant intelligences, and (3) develop with age and experience (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003). In contrast, both mixed and trait models define and measure EI as a set of perceived abilities, skills, and personality traits.

Ability Models

Mayer and Salovey (1997) proposed a Four-Branch model of EI. This model proposes that four fundamental emotion-related abilities comprise EI: (1) perception/expression of emotion, (2) use of emotion to facilitate thinking, (3) understanding of emotion, and (4) management of emotion in oneself and others.

Perception of Emotion

Perception of emotion refers to people's capacity to identify emotions in themselves and others using facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language (Brackett et al., 2013). Those skilled in the perception of emotion also are able to express emotion accordingly and communicate emotional needs. For example, let's return to our opening scenario. After being turned away at the ticket booth, you slowly settle into the reality that you cannot attend the concert. A group of your classmates, however, managed to buy tickets and are discussing their plans at your lunch table. When they ask if you are excited for the opening band, you shrug and pick at your food. If your classmates are skilled at perception of emotion, then they will read your facial expression and body language and determine that you might be masking your true feelings of disappointment, frustration, or disengagement from the conversation. As a result, they might ask you if something is wrong or choose not to talk about the concert in your presence.

Use of Emotion to Facilitate Thinking

Using emotion to enhance cognitive activities and adapt to various situations is the second component of EI. People who are skilled in this area understand that some emotional states are more optimal for targeted outcomes than others. Feeling frustrated over the concert tickets may be a helpful mindset as you are about to play a football game or begin a wrestling match. The high levels of adrenaline associated with frustration may boost your energy and strength, helping you compete. These same emotions, however, will likely impede your ability to sit at your school desk and solve algebra problems or write an essay (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8 Which emotions would serve you best during a football game? Would the same emotions be useful for a chess match? Matching the emotion to the task at hand is valuable skill to have. My House – Ian Sane – CC BY 2.0

Individuals who have developed and practiced this area of EI actively generate emotions that support certain tasks or objectives. For example, a teacher skilled in this domain may recognize that her students need to experience positive emotions, like joy or excitement, in order to succeed when doing creative work such as brainstorming or collaborative art projects. She may plan accordingly by scheduling these activities for after recess, knowing students will likely come into the classroom cheerful and happy from playing outside. Making decisions based on the impact that emotional experiences may have on actions and behavior is an essential component of EI.

Understanding of Emotion

EI also includes the ability to differentiate between emotional states, as well as their specific causes and trajectories. Feelings of sadness or disappointment can result from the loss of a person or object, such as your concert tickets. Standing in the rain, by most standards, is merely a slight annoyance. However, waiting in the rain for hours in a large crowd will likely result in irritation or frustration. Feeling like you have been treated unfairly when someone cuts in line and takes the tickets you feel you deserved can cause your unpleasantness to escalate into anger and resentment. People skilled in this area are aware of this emotional trajectory and also have a strong sense of how multiple emotions can work together to produce another. For instance, it is possible that you may feel contempt for the people who cut in front of you in line. However, this feeling of contempt does not arise from anger alone. Rather, it is the combination of anger and disgust by the fact that these individuals, unlike you, have disobeyed the rules. Successfully discriminating between negative emotions is an important skill related to understanding of emotion, and it may lead to more effective emotion management (Feldman Barret, Gross, Christensen, & Benvenuto, 2001).

Management of Emotion

Emotion management includes the ability to remain open to a wide range of emotions, recognize the value of feeling certain emotions in specific situations, and understand which short- and long-term strategies are most efficient for emotion regulation (Gross, 1998). Anger seems an appropriate response to falling short of a goal (concert tickets) that you pursued both fairly and patiently. In fact, you may even find it valuable to allow yourself the experience of this feeling. However, this feeling will certainly need to be managed in order to prevent aggressive, unwanted behavior. Coming up with strategies, such as taking a deep breath and waiting until you feel calm before letting the group ahead of you know they cut in line, will allow you to regulate your anger and prevent the situation from escalating. Using this strategy may even let you gain insight into other perspectives—perhaps you learn they had already purchased their tickets and were merely accompanying their friends.

Mixed and Trait Models of EI

Unlike ability models, **mixed models** offer a broad definition of EI that combines mental abilities with personality traits such as optimism, motivation, and stress tolerance (see Cherniss, 2010, for a review). The two most widely used mixed models are the Boyatzis-Goleman model (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004) and the Bar-On model of emotional-social intelligence (Bar-On, 2006). The Boyatzis-Goleman model divides EI competencies into four groups: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Similarly, the Bar-On model offers five main components of EI: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and mood. Developers of the trait EI model (Petrides & Furnham, 2003) explain EI as a constellation of self-perceived, emotion-related personality traits.

Mixed and Trait Model Assessment: Self-Report

Self-report assessments—surveys that ask respondents to report their own emotional skills—are most often associated with mixed and trait models. Self-report measures are usually quick to administer. However, many researchers argue that their vulnerability to social-desirability biases and faking are problematic (Day & Carroll, 2008). In addition, there is wide speculation concerning the potential for inaccurate judgments of personal ability and skill on behalf of responders (Paulhus, Lysy, & Yik, 1998). Self-report measures have been shown to lack discriminant validity from existing personality measures and have very low correlations with ability measures of EI (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). According to Mayer and colleagues (2008), self-report tests may show reliability for individual personalities, but should not be considered EI because performance tests are the gold standard for measuring intelligence.

Although tensions between ability and mixed or trait model approaches appear to divide the field, competing definitions and measurements can only enhance the quality of research devoted to EI and its impact on real-world outcomes.

Room for Debate

While mixed and trait models shed some light on the concept of EI, many researchers feel these approaches undermine the EI construct as a discrete and measurable mental ability. EI, when conceptualized as an ability, most accurately describes the relationship between cognition and emotion by accounting for changes in individual outcomes that are often missed when focusing solely on cognitive intelligence or personality traits (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2010). What's more, among adults, personality traits provide little room for malleability, making development in these areas difficult even when combined with emotional skills. For example, characteristics such as agreeableness and neuroticism, while contributing to personal and professional success, are seen as innate traits that are likely to remain static over time. Distinguishing EI from personality traits helps us better target the skills that can improve desirable outcomes (Brackett et al., 2013). Approaching EI with language that provides the opportunity for personal growth is crucial to its application. Because the ability model aligns with this approach, the remainder of this module will focus on ability EI and the ways in which it can be applied both in professional and academic settings.

Outcomes

Historically, emotions have been thought to have no place in the classroom or workplace (Sutton & Wheatly, 2003). Yet today, we know empirical research supports the belief that EI has the potential to influence decision making, health, relationships, and performance in both professional and academic settings (e.g., Brackett et al., 2013; Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011).

Education

When applied in educational settings, theoretical foundations of EI are often integrated into **social and emotional learning (SEL)** programs. SEL is the process of merging thinking, feeling, and behaving. These skills enable individuals to be aware of themselves and of others, make responsible decisions, and manage their own behaviors and those of others (Elias et al., 1997; Elbertson, Brackett, & Weissberg, 2010). SEL programs are designed to enhance the climate of a classroom, school, or district, with the ultimate goal of enhancing children's social and emotional skills and improving their academic outcomes (Greenberg et al., 2003). Adopting curricula that focus on these elements is believed to enable success in academics, relationships, and, ultimately, in life (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Catalino, Berglundh, Ryan, Lonczek, & Hawkins, 2004).

Take a moment to think about the role of a teacher. How might emotions impact the climate of a classroom? If a teacher enters a classroom feeling anxious, disgruntled, or unenthused, these states will most likely be noticed, and felt, by the students. If not managed well, these negative emotions can hurt the classroom dynamic and prevent student learning (Travers, 2001). Research suggests that the abilities to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions are imperative for effective teaching (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011; Hargreaves, 2001). In a study that examined the relationship between emotion regulation and both job satisfaction and burnout among secondary-school teachers, researchers found that emotion regulation among teachers was associated with positive affect, support from principals, job satisfaction, and feelings of personal accomplishment (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010).

EI, when embedded into SEL programs, has been shown to contribute positively to personal and academic success in students (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Research also shows that strong emotion regulation can help students pay attention in class, adjust to the school environment, and manage academic anxiety (Lopes & Salovey, 2004; Mestre, Guil, Lopes, Salovey, & Gil-Olarte, 2006). A recent randomized control trial of RULER* also found that, after one year, schools that used RULER—compared with those that used only the standard curriculum—were rated by independent observers as having higher degrees of warmth and connectedness between teachers and students, more autonomy and leadership, less bullying among students, and teachers who focused more on students' interests and motivations (Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2013).

> *RULER - Recognize emotions in oneself and in other people. Understand the causes and consequences of a wide range of emotions. Label emotions using a sophisticated vocabulary. Express emotions in socially appropriate way. Regulate emotions effectively.

Workplace

Research conducted in the workplace supports positive links between EI and enhanced job performance, occupational well-being, and leadership effectiveness. In one study, EI was associated with performance indicators such as company rank, percent merit increase, ratings of interpersonal facilitation, and affect and attitudes at work (Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall, & Salovey, 2006). Similar correlations have been found between EI and a variety of managerial simulations involving problem solving, determining employee layoffs, adjusting claims, and negotiating successfully (Day & Carroll, 2004; Feyerherm & Rice, 2002; Mueller & Curhan, 2006). Emotion management is seen as most likely to affect job performance by influencing social and business interactions across a diverse range of industries (O'Boyle et al., 2010).

Leaders in the workplace also benefit from high EI. Experts in the field of organizational behavior are beginning to view leadership as a process of social interactions where leaders motivate, influence, guide, and empower followers to achieve organizational goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006) (Figure 5.9). This is known as transformational leadership—where leaders create a vision and then inspire others to work in this direction (Bass, 1985). In a sample of 24 managers, MSCEIT scores correlated positively with a leader's ability to inspire followers to emulate their own actions and attend to the needs and problems of each individual (Leban & Zulauf, 2004).

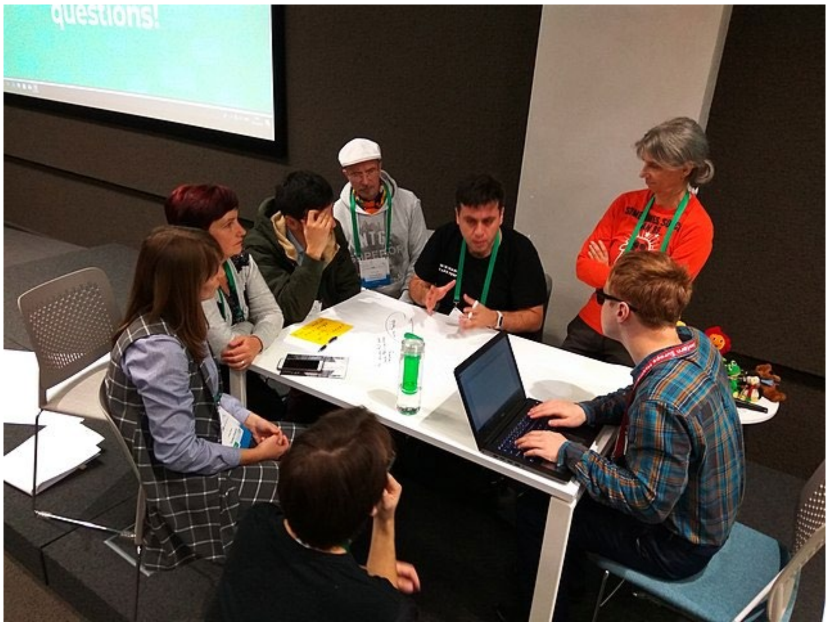

Figure 5.9 Think of a time when you made a choice to demonstrate emotional intelligence at work – what happened? Wikimedia CEE Meeting 2018 – Visem – CC BY-SA 4.0

The workday requires a large number of decisions that need to be made. Many of these decisions are emotionally charged in some way, with passion and opinions behind them. Employees with strong emotional intelligence are more likely to make rational and well-thought-out decisions. Emotional intelligence is an extremely desirable trait for new and tenured employees alike. Many companies ask behavioral based interview questions in order to assess emotional intelligence and make better informed hiring decisions. These companies understand the value of emotionally intelligent individuals and the positive impact they can have on a workforce. With international expansion and globalization becoming more and more relevant, emotional intelligence is more valuable than ever, allowing companies to better breech cultural differences and the complex ways in which other cultures express their emotions.

Emotional intelligence can be explained and presented through training events, but it is up to each individual to grow and develop their own emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence cannot be taught in a classroom, but is instead developed through everyday life and interactions with others. Since each individual is responsible for their own emotional intelligence, making smart hiring choices and considering how an individual will affect team dynamics is essential to building a strong, emotionally intelligent team.

Future Directions of EI

Although further explorations and research in the field of EI are needed, current findings indicate a fundamental relationship between emotion and cognition. Returning to our opening question, what will you do when denied concert tickets? One of the more compelling aspects of EI is that it grants us reign over our own emotions—forces once thought to rule the self by denying individual agency. But with this power comes responsibility. If you are enraged about not getting tickets to the show, perhaps you can take a few deep breaths, go for a walk, and wait until your physiological indicators (shaky hands or accelerated heartbeat) subside. Once you've removed yourself, your feeling of rage may lessen to annoyance. Lowering the intensity level of this feeling (a process known as *down regulating*) will help re-direct your focus on the situation itself, rather than the activated emotion. In this sense, emotion regulation allows you to objectively view the point of conflict without dismissing your true feelings. Merely down regulating the emotional experience facilitates better problem solving. Now that you are less activated, what is the best approach? Should you talk to the ticket clerk? Ask to see the sales manager? Or do you let the group know how you felt when they cut the line? All of these options present better solutions than impulsively acting out rage.

As discussed in this section, research shows that the cultivation and development of EI contributes to more productive, supportive, and healthy experiences. Whether we're waiting in a crowded public place, delivering lesson plans, or engaging in conversation with friends, we are the ultimate decision makers when it comes how we want to feel and, in turn, behave. By engaging the right mental processes and strategies, we can better understand, regulate, and manage our emotional states in order to live the lives we desire.

Summary

- Emotional intelligence (EI) involves the idea that cognition and emotion are interrelated.
- In the early 1970s, many scientists began to recognize the limitations of the Intelligence Quotient (IQ)—the standardized assessment of intelligence. In particular, they noticed its inability to explain differences among individuals unrelated to just cognitive ability alone.
- Ability models approach EI as a standard intelligence that utilizes a distinct set of mental abilities that (1) are intercorrelated, (2) relate to other extant intelligences, and (3) develop with age and experience.
- Mixed models offer a broad definition of EI that combines mental abilities with personality traits such as optimism, motivation, and stress tolerance.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the four emotional abilities that comprise EI, and how do they relate to each other?
2. What are three possible implications for using ability-based and mixed or trait-based models of EI?
3. Discuss the ways in which EI can contribute positively to the workplace and classroom settings.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix adding Emotional Intelligence (Human Resources Management - Lumen Learning) to the workplace section of Emotional Intelligence (Noba).
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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5.3 Culture and Emotion

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the universalist and social constructionist views of emotion.
- Discuss why cultural differences in emotion matter.

Take a moment and imagine you are traveling in a country you've never been to before. Everything—the sights, the smells, the sounds—seems strange. People are speaking a language you don't understand and wearing clothes unlike yours. But they greet you with a smile and you sense that, despite the differences you observe, deep down inside these people have the same feelings as you. But is this true? Do people from opposite ends of the world really feel the same emotions? While most scholars agree that members of different cultures may vary in the foods they eat, the languages they speak, and the holidays they celebrate, there is disagreement about the extent to which culture shapes people's emotions and feelings—including what people feel, what they express, and what they do during an emotional event. Understanding how culture shapes people's emotional lives and what impact emotion has on psychological health and well-being in different cultures will not only advance the study of human behavior but will also benefit multicultural societies. Across a variety of settings—academic, business, medical—people worldwide are coming into more contact with people from foreign cultures. In order to communicate and function effectively in such situations, we must understand the ways cultural ideas and practices shape our emotions.

Historical Background

In the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists tended to fall into either one of two camps. The **universalist** camp claimed that, despite cultural differences in customs and traditions, at a fundamental level all humans feel similarly. These universalists believed that emotions evolved as a response to the environments of our primordial ancestors, so they are the same across all cultures. Indeed, people often describe their emotions as "automatic," "natural," "physiological," and "instinctual," supporting the view that emotions are hard-wired and universal.

The **social constructivist** camp, however, claimed that despite a common evolutionary heritage, different groups of humans evolved to adapt to their distinctive environments. And because human environments vary so widely, people's emotions are also culturally variable. For instance, Lutz (1988) argued that many Western views of emotion assume that emotions are "singular events situated within individuals." However, people from

Ifaluk (a small island near Micronesia) view emotions as "exchanges between individuals" (p. 212). Social constructivists contended that because cultural ideas and practices are all-encompassing, people are often unaware of how their feelings are shaped by their culture. Therefore, emotions can feel automatic, natural, physiological, and instinctual, and yet still be primarily culturally shaped.

In the 1970s, Paul Ekman conducted one of the first scientific studies to address the universalist–social constructivist debate. He and Wallace Friesen devised a system to measure people's facial muscle activity, called the Facial Action Coding System (FACS; Ekman & Friesen, 1978). Using FACS, Ekman and Friesen analyzed people's facial expressions and identified specific facial muscle configurations associated with specific emotions, such as happiness, anger, sadness, fear, disgust. Ekman and Friesen then took photos of people posing with these different expressions (Figure 5.10). With the help of colleagues at different universities around the world, Ekman and Friesen showed these pictures to members of vastly different cultures, gave them a list of emotion words (translated into the relevant languages), and asked them to match the facial expressions in the photos with their corresponding emotion words on the list (Ekman & Friesen, 1971; Ekman et al., 1987).

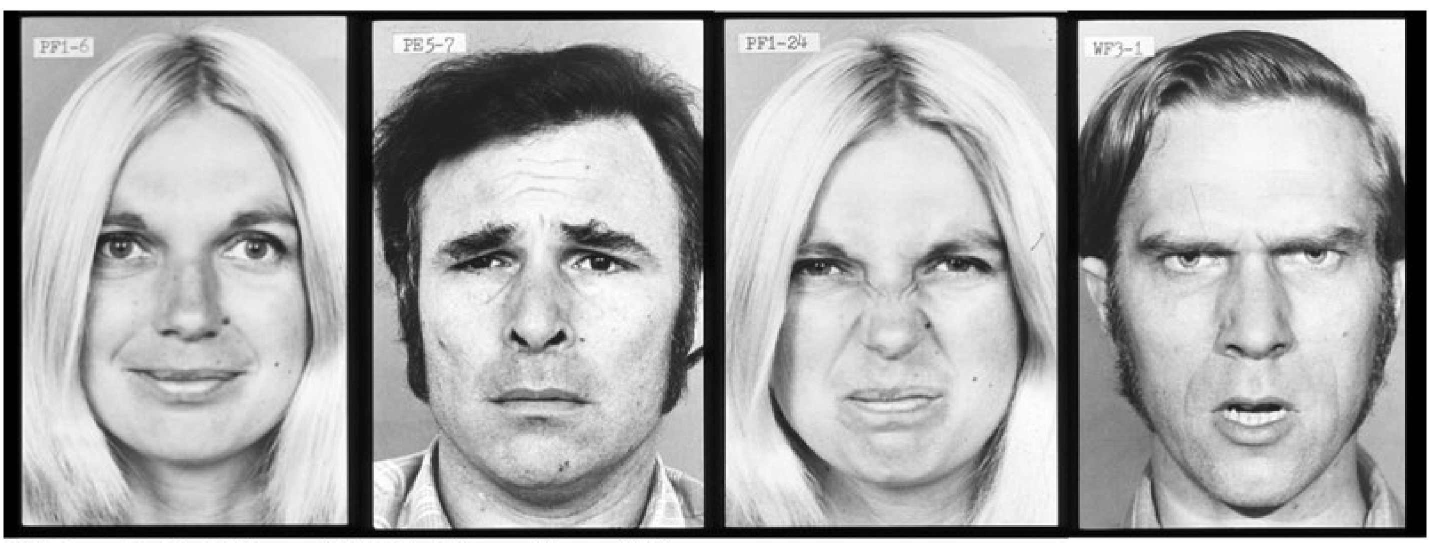

Photo credit - Paul Eckman Ph.D. / Paul Ekman Group, LLC.

Figure 5.10 Facial expressions associated with happiness, sadness, disgust, and anger based on the Facial Action Coding System. [Image: Paul Eckman, used with permission]

Across cultures, participants "recognized" the emotional facial expressions, matching each picture with its "correct" emotion word at levels greater than chance. This led Ekman and his colleagues to conclude that there are universally recognized emotional facial expressions. At the same time, though, they found considerable variability across cultures in recognition rates. For instance, whereas 95% of U.S. participants associated a smile with "happiness," only 69% of Sumatran participants did. Similarly, 86% of U.S. participants associated wrinkling of the nose with "disgust," but only 60% of Japanese did (Ekman et al., 1987). Ekman and colleagues interpreted this variation as demonstrating cultural differences in “display rules,” or rules about what emotions are appropriate to show in a given situation (Ekman, 1972). Indeed, since this initial work, Matsumoto and his colleagues have demonstrated widespread cultural differences in display rules (Safdar et al., 2009). One prominent example of such differences is biting one’s tongue. In India, this signals embarrassment; however, in the U.S. this expression has no such meaning (Haidt & Keltner, 1999).

These findings suggest both cultural similarities and differences in the recognition of emotional facial expressions (although see Russell, 1994, for criticism of this work). Interestingly, since the mid-2000s, increasing research has demonstrated cultural differences not only in display rules, but also the degree to which people focus on the face (versus other aspects of the social context; Masuda, Ellsworth, Mesquita, Leu, Tanida, & Van de Veerdonk, 2008), and on different features of the face (Yuki, Maddux, & Matsuda, 2007) when perceiving others’ emotions. For example, people from the United States tend to focus on the mouth when interpreting others’ emotions, whereas people from Japan tend to focus on the eyes.

But how does culture shape other aspects of emotional life—such as how people emotionally respond to different situations, how they want to feel generally, and what makes them happy? Today, most scholars agree that emotions and other related states are multifaceted, and that cultural similarities and differences exist for each facet. Thus, rather than classifying emotions as *either* universal *or* socially-constructed, scholars are now attempting to identify the specific similarities and differences of emotional life across cultures. These endeavors are yielding new insights into the effects of cultural on emotion.

Given the wide range of cultures and facets of emotion in the world, for the remainder of the module we will limit our scope to the two cultural contexts that have received the most empirical attention by social scientists: North America (United States, Canada) and East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea). Social scientists have focused on North American and East Asian contexts because they differ in obvious ways, including their geographical locations, histories, languages, and religions. Moreover, since the 1980s large-scale studies have revealed that North American and East Asian contexts differ in their overall values and attitudes, such as the prioritization of personal vs. group needs (individualism vs. collectivism; Hofstede, 2001). Whereas North American contexts encourage members to prioritize personal over group needs (to be “individualistic”), East Asian contexts encourage members to prioritize group over personal needs (to be “collectivistic”).

Views of Self in North American and East Asian Contexts

In a landmark paper, cultural psychologists Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that previously observed differences in individualism and collectivism translated into different models of the self—or one’s personal concept of who they are as a person. Specifically, the researchers argued that in North American contexts, the dominant model is an **independent self**, in which being a person means being distinct from others and behaving accordingly across situations. In East Asian contexts, however, the dominant is an **interdependent self**, in which being a person means being fundamentally connected to others and being responsive to situational demands. For example, in a classic study (Cousins, 1989), American and Japanese students were administered the Twenty Statements Test, in which they were asked to complete the sentence stem, "I am ______," twenty times. U.S. participants were more likely than Japanese participants to complete the stem with psychological attributes (e.g., friendly, cheerful); Japanese participants, on the other hand, were more likely to complete the stem with references to social roles and responsibilities (e.g., a daughter, a student) (Cousins, 1989). These different models of the self result in different principles for interacting with others. An independent model of self teaches people to express themselves and try to influence others (i.e., change their environments to be consistent with their own beliefs and desires). In contrast, an interdependent model of self teaches people to suppress their own beliefs and desires and adjust to others' (i.e., fit in with their environment) (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984). Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that these different models of self have significant implications for how people in Western and East Asian contexts feel.

Cultural Similarities and Differences in Emotion

A considerable body of empirical research suggests that these different models of self shape various aspects of emotional dynamics. Next, we will discuss several ways culture shapes emotion, starting with emotional response.

Culture Influences People's Emotional Responses

How does culture influence people's responses to emotional events? Studies of emotional response tend to focus on three components: physiology (e.g., how fast one's heart beats), subjective experience (e.g., feeling intensely happy or sad), and facial expressive behavior (e.g., smiling or frowning). Although only a few studies have simultaneously measured these different aspects of emotional response, those that do tend to observe more similarities than differences in physiological responses between cultures. That is, regardless of culture, people tend to respond similarly in terms of physiological (or bodily) expression. For instance, in one study, European American and Hmong (pronounced "muhng") American participants were asked to relive various emotional episodes in their lives (e.g., when they lost something or someone they loved; when something good happened) (Tsai, Chentsova-Dutton, Freire-Bebeau, & Przymus, 2002). At the level of physiological arousal (e.g., heart rate), there were no differences in how the participants responded. However, their facial expressive behavior told a different story. When reliving events that elicited happiness, pride, and love, European Americans smiled more frequently and more intensely than did their Hmong counterparts—though all participants reported feeling happy, proud, and in love at similar levels of intensity. And similar patterns have emerged in studies comparing European Americans with Chinese Americans during different emotion-eliciting tasks (Tsai et al., 2002; Tsai, Levenson, & McCoy, 2006; Tsai, Levenson, & Carstensen, 2000). Thus, while the physiological aspects of emotional responses appear to be similar across cultures, their accompanying facial expressions are more culturally distinctive.

Again, these differences in facial expressions during positive emotional events are consistent with findings from cross-cultural studies of *display rules*, and stem from the models of self-description discussed above: In North American contexts that promote an independent self , individuals tend to express their emotions to influence others. Conversely, in East Asian contexts that promote an interdependent self, individuals tend to control and suppress their emotions to adjust to others.

Cultural Differences in Emotional Suppression

If the cultural ideal in North American contexts is to express oneself, then suppressing emotions (not showing how one feels) should have negative consequences. This is the assumption underlying hydraulic models of emotion: the idea that emotional suppression and repression impair psychological functioning (Freud, 1910). Indeed, significant empirical research shows that suppressing emotions can have negative consequences for psychological well-being in North American contexts (Gross, 1998). However, Soto and colleagues (2011) find that the relationship between suppression and psychological well-being varies by culture. True, with European Americans, emotional suppression is associated with higher levels of depression and lower levels of life satisfaction. (Remember, in these individualistic societies, the expression of emotion is a fundamental aspect of positive interactions with others.) On the other hand, since for Hong Kong Chinese, emotional suppression is needed to adjust to others (in this interdependent community, suppressing emotions is how to appropriately interact with others), it is simply a part of normal life and therefore not associated with depression or life satisfaction.

These findings are consistent with research suggesting that factors related to clinical depression vary between European Americans and Asian Americans. European Americans diagnosed with depression show dampened or muted emotional responses (Bylsma, Morris, & Rottenberg, 2008). For instance, when shown sad or amusing film clips, depressed European Americans respond less intensely than their nondepressed counterparts. However, other studies have shown that depressed East Asian Americans (i.e., people of East Asian descent who live in the United States) demonstrate *similar or increased* emotional responses compared with their nondepressed counterparts (Chentsova-Dutton et al., 2007; Chentsova-Dutton, Tsai, & Gotlib, 2010). In other words, depressed European Americans show reduced emotional expressions, but depressed East Asian Americans do *not*—and, in fact, may express *more* emotion. Thus, muted responses (which resemble suppression) are associated with depression in European American contexts, but not in East Asian contexts.

Cultural Influences on Subjective Emotional Experiences

What about people's subjective emotional experiences? Do people across cultures *feel* the same emotions in similar situations, despite how they show them? Recent studies indicate that culture affects whether people are likely to feel bad during good events. In North American contexts, people rarely feel bad after good experiences. However, a number of research teams have observed that, compared with people in North American contexts, people in East Asian contexts are more likely to feel bad *and* good ("mixed" emotions) during positive events (e.g., feeling worried after winning an important competition; Miyamoto, Uchida, & Ellsworth, 2010). This may be because, compared with North Americans, East Asians engage in more dialectical thinking (i.e., they are more tolerant of contradiction and change). Therefore, they accept that positive and negative feelings can occur simultaneously. In addition, whereas North Americans value maximizing positive states and minimizing negative ones, East Asians value a greater balance between the two (Sims, Tsai, Wang, Fung, & Zhang, 2013). To better understand this, think about how you would feel after getting the top score on a test that's graded on a curve. In North American contexts, such success is considered an individual achievement and worth celebrating. But what about the other students who will now receive a lower grade because you "raised the curve" with your good grade? In East Asian contexts, not only would students be more thoughtful of the overall group's success, but they would also be more comfortable acknowledging both the positive (their own success on the test) and the negative (their classmates' lower grades).

Again, these differences can be linked to cultural differences in models of the self. An interdependent model encourages people to think about how their accomplishments might affect others (e.g., make others feel bad or jealous). Thus, awareness of negative emotions during positive events may discourage people from expressing their excitement and standing out (as in East Asian contexts). Such emotional suppression helps individuals feel in sync with those around them. An independent model, however, encourages people to express themselves and stand out, so when something good happens, they have no reason to feel bad.

So far, we have reviewed research that demonstrates cultural similarities in physiological responses and in the ability to suppress emotions. We have also discussed the cultural differences in facial expressive behavior and the likelihood of experiencing negative feelings during positive events. Next, we will explore how culture shapes people's ideal or desired states.

Cultural Variation of Positive Affective States

Everyone welcomes positive feelings, but cultures vary in the specific types of **positive affective states** (see Figure 2) their people favor. An affective state is essentially the type of emotional arousal one feels coupled with its intensity—which can vary from pleasant to unpleasant (e.g., happy to sad), with high to low arousal (e.g., energetic to passive). Although people of all cultures experience this range of affective states, they can vary in their preferences for each. For example, people in North American contexts lean toward feeling excited, enthusiastic, energetic, and other "high arousal positive" states. People in East Asian contexts, however, generally prefer feeling calm, peaceful, and other "low arousal positive" states (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). These cultural differences have been observed in young children between the ages of 3 and 5, college students, and adults between the ages of 60 and 80 (Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007; Tsai, Sims, Thomas, & Fung, 2013), and are reflected in widely-distributed cultural products. For example, wherever you look in American contexts—women's magazines, children's storybooks, company websites, and even Facebook profiles (Figure 3)—you will find more open, excited smiles and fewer closed, calm smiles compared to Chinese contexts (Chim, Moon, Ang, Tsai, 2013; Tsai, 2007; Tsai, Louie, et al., 2007) (Figure 5.11).

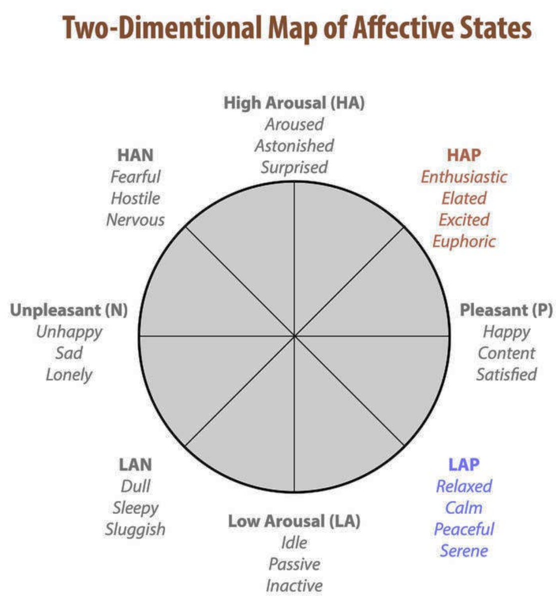

Figure 5.11 Adapted from Feldman, Barrett, and Russell (1999); Larsen and Diener ((1992); Russell (1991); Thayer (1989); Watson and Tellegen (1985)

Again, these differences in ideal affect (i.e., the emotional states that people believe are best) correspond to the independent and interdependent models described earlier: Independent selves want to influence others, which requires action (*doing something*), and action involves high arousal states. Conversely, interdependent selves want to adjust to others, which requires *suspending* action and attending to others—both of which involve low arousal states. Thus, the more that individuals and cultures want to influence others (as in North American contexts), the more they value excitement, enthusiasm, and other high arousal positive states. And, the more that individuals and cultures want to adjust to others (as in East Asian contexts), the more they value calm, peacefulness, and other low arousal positive states (Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung, 2007) (Figure 5.12).

a) b)

Figure 5.12 Sample Hong Kong Chinese (left) and European American (right) Facebook pages.

Because one's ideal affect functions as a guide for behavior and a way of evaluating one's emotional states, cultural differences in ideal affect can result in different emotional lives. For example, several studies have shown that people engage in activities (e.g., recreational pastimes, musical styles) consistent with their cultural ideal affect. That is, people from North American contexts (who value high arousal affective states) tend to prefer thrilling activities like skydiving, whereas people from East Asian contexts (who value low arousal affective states) prefer tranquil activities like lounging on the beach (Tsai, 2007). In addition, people base their conceptions of well-being and happiness on their ideal affect. Therefore, European Americans are more likely to define well-being in terms of excitement, whereas Hong Kong Chinese are more likely to define well-being in terms of calmness. Indeed, among European Americans, the less people experience *high* arousal positive states, the more depressed they are. But, among Hong Kong Chinese—you guessed it!—the less people experience *low* arousal positive states, the more depressed they are (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006).

Culture Influences the Weight Placed Factors that Impact Happiness

What factors make people happy or satisfied with their lives? We have seen that discrepancies between how people actually feel (actual affect) and how they want to feel (ideal affect)—as well as people's suppression of their ideal affect—are associated with depression. But happiness is based on other factors as well. For instance, Kwan, Bond, & Singelis (1997) found that while European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese subjects both based life satisfaction on how they felt about themselves (self-esteem) and their relationships (relationship harmony), their weighting of each factor was different. That is, European Americans based their life satisfaction primarily on self-esteem, whereas Hong Kong Chinese based their life satisfaction equally on self-esteem and relationship harmony. Consistent with these findings, Oishi and colleagues (1999) found in a study of 39 nations that self-esteem was more strongly correlated with life satisfaction in more individualistic nations compared to more collectivistic ones. Researchers also found that in individualistic cultures people rated life satisfaction based on their emotions more so than on social definitions (or norms). In other words, rather than using social norms as a guideline for what constitutes an ideal life, people in individualistic cultures tend to evaluate their satisfaction according to how they feel emotionally. In collectivistic cultures, however, people's life satisfaction tends to be based on a balance between their emotions and norms (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Similarly, other researchers have recently found that people in North American contexts are more likely to feel negative when they have poor mental and physical health, while people in Japanese contexts don't have this association (Curhan et al., 2013).

Again, these findings are consistent with cultural differences in models of the self. In North American, independent contexts, feelings about the self matter more, whereas in East Asian, interdependent contexts, feelings about others matter as much as or even more than feelings about the self.

Why Do Cultural Similarities and Differences in Emotion Matter?

Understanding cultural similarities and differences in emotion is obviously critical to understanding emotions in general, and the flexibility of emotional processes more specifically. Given the central role that emotions play in our interaction, understanding cultural similarities and differences is especially critical to preventing potentially harmful miscommunications. Although misunderstandings are unintentional, they can result in negative consequences—as we've seen historically for ethnic minorities in many cultures. For instance, across a variety of North American settings, Asian Americans are often characterized as too "quiet" and "reserved," and these low arousal states are often misinterpreted as expressions of disengagement or boredom—rather than expressions of the ideal of calmness. Consequently, Asian Americans may be perceived as "cold," "stoic," and "unfriendly," fostering stereotypes of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Indeed, this may be one reason Asian Americans are often overlooked for top leadership positions (Hyun, 2005).

In addition to averting cultural miscommunications, recognizing cultural similarities and differences in emotion may provide insights into other paths to psychological health and well-being. For instance, findings from a recent series of studies suggest that calm states are easier to elicit than excited states, suggesting that one way of increasing happiness in cultures that value excitement may be to increase the value placed on calm states (Chim, Tsai, Hogan, & Fung, 2013).

What About Other Cultures?

In this section, we've focused primarily on comparisons between North American and East Asian contexts because most of the research in cultural psychology has focused on these comparisons. However, there are obviously a multitude of other cultural contexts in which emotional differences likely exist. For example, although Western contexts are similar in many ways, specific Western contexts (e.g., American vs. German) also differ from each other in substantive ways related to emotion (Koopmann-Holm & Matsumoto, 2011). Thus, future research examining other cultural contexts is needed. Such studies may also reveal additional, uninvestigated dimensions or models that have broad implications for emotion. In addition, because more and more people are being raised within multiple cultural contexts (e.g., for many Chinese Americans, a Chinese immigrant culture at home and mainstream American culture at school), more research is needed to examine how people negotiate and integrate these different cultures in their emotional lives (for examples, see De Leersnyder, Mesquita, & Kim, 2011; Perunovic, Heller, & Rafaeli, 2007).

How Are Cultural Differences in Beliefs About Emotion Transmitted?

According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), cultural ideas are reflected in and reinforced by practices, institutions, and products. As an example of this phenomenon—and illustrating the point regarding cultural differences in ideal affect—bestselling children's storybooks in the United States often contain more exciting and less calm content (smiles and activities) than do bestselling children's storybooks in Taiwan (Tsai, Louie, et al., 2007) (Figure 5.13).

To investigate this further, the researchers randomly assigned European American, Asian American, and Taiwanese Chinese preschoolers to be read either stories with exciting content or stories with calm content. Across all of these cultures, the kids who were read stories with exciting content were afterward more likely to value excited states, whereas those who were read stories with calm content were more likely to value calm states. As a test, after hearing the stories, the kids were shown a list of toys and asked to select their favorites. Those who heard the exciting stories wanted to play with more arousing toys (like a drum that beats loud and fast), whereas those who heard the calm stories wanted to play with less arousing toys (like a drum that beats quiet and slow). These findings suggest that regardless of ethnic background, direct exposure to storybook content alters children's ideal affect. More studies are needed to assess whether a similar process occurs when children and adults are chronically exposed to various types of cultural products. As well, future studies should examine other ways cultural ideas regarding emotion are transmitted (e.g., via interactions with parents and teachers).

Figure 5.13 Children's story books offer one interesting and effective way to study how early influences can impact a person's ideal affect. Hanasaka JīSan はなさかじいさん – Toshio Nishiuchi – BY-NC-SA 2.0

Summary

- Universalists believed that emotions evolved as a response to the environments of our primordial ancestors, so they are the same across all cultures.
- Social constructivists contended that because cultural ideas and practices are all-encompassing, people are often unaware of how their feelings are shaped by their culture. Therefore, emotions can feel automatic, natural, physiological, and instinctual, and yet still be primarily culturally shaped.
- Differences in facial expressions during positive emotional events are consistent with findings from cross-cultural studies of display rules.
- Everyone welcomes positive feelings, but cultures vary in the specific types of positive affective states their people favor.
- In North American, independent contexts, feelings about the self matter more, whereas in East Asian, interdependent contexts, feelings about others matter as much as or even more than feelings about the self.

Discussion Questions

1. What cultural ideas and practices related to emotion were you exposed to when you were a child? What cultural ideas and practices related to emotion are you currently exposed to as an adult? How do you think they shape your emotional experiences and expressions?
2. Do the empirical findings described in this section change your beliefs about emotion? Why or why not?
3. Imagine you are a manager of a large American company that is beginning to do work in China and Japan. How will you apply your current knowledge about culture and emotion to prevent misunderstandings between you and your Chinese and Japanese employees?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of [Culture and Emotion](#) (Culture and Emotion - Noba)
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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Chapter 6: Perception

Can you remember a time when you felt it was important for you to make a positive first impression? What about a time when someone made a positive first impression on you? First impressions are important aspects of how we perceive others and how others perceive us.

In this chapter you will learn about the process of perception. You will learn the major steps involved with perceiving the world around you, how culture and personality influence your perceptions, the different types of attributions you make about yourself and others, and how you can improve your perceptions about yourself and others. This will provide you with appropriate strategies to more accurately perceive yourself and others.

6.1 The Process of Perception

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss how salience influences the selection of perceptual information.
- Explain the ways in which we organize perceptual information.
- Discuss the role of schemata in the interpretation of perceptual information.

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting sensory information. This cognitive and psychological process begins with receiving stimuli through our primary senses (vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell). This information is then passed along to corresponding areas of the brain and organized into our existing structures and patterns, and then interpreted based on previous experiences (Figure 6.1). How we perceive the people and objects around us directly affects our communication. We respond differently to an object or person that we perceive favorably than we do to something or someone we find unfavorable. But how do we filter through the mass amounts of incoming information, organize it, and make meaning from what makes it through our perceptual filters and into our social realities?

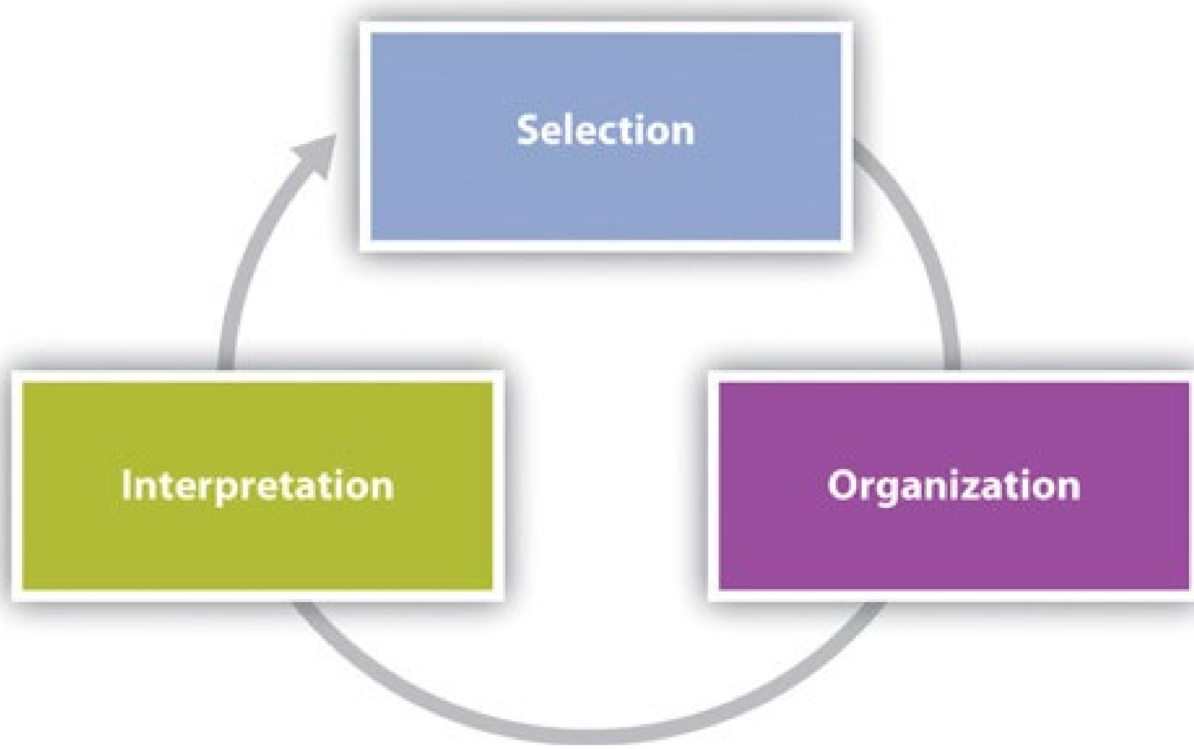

Figure 6.1 The process of perception.

Selecting Information

We take in information through all five of our senses, but our perceptual field (the world around us) includes so many stimuli that it is impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all. So, as information comes in through our senses, various factors influence what actually continues on through the perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Selecting is the first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information (Figure 6.2). Think about how, out of many other possible stimuli to pay attention to, you may hear a familiar voice in the hallway, see a pair of shoes you want to buy from across the mall, or smell something cooking for dinner when you get home from work. We quickly cut through and push to the background all kinds of sights, smells, sounds, and other stimuli, but how do we decide what to select and what to leave out?

Figure 6.2 Even in a noisy place, you can hear someone call your name from across the room. Friday Night Party – Ontario Library Association – CC BY 2.0

We tend to pay attention to information that is salient. **Salience** is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context. The thing attracting our attention can be abstract, like a concept, or concrete, like an object. For example, a person's identity as a Native American may become salient when they are protesting at the Columbus Day parade in Denver, Colorado. Or a bright flashlight shining in your face while camping at night is sure to be salient. The degree of salience depends on three features (Fiske & Tayor, 1991). We tend to find things salient when they are visually or aurally stimulating, they meet our needs or interests, or when they do or don't meet our expectations.

Visual and Aural Stimulation

It is probably not surprising to learn that visually and/or aurally stimulating things become salient in our perceptual field and get our attention. Creatures ranging from fish to hummingbirds are attracted to things like silver spinners on fishing poles or red and yellow bird feeders. Having our senses stimulated isn't always a positive thing though. Think about the couple that won't stop talking during the movie or the upstairs neighbor whose subwoofer shakes your ceiling at night. In short, stimuli can be attention-getting in a productive or distracting way. However, we can use this knowledge to our benefit by minimizing distractions when we have something important to say. It's probably better to have a serious conversation with a significant other in a quiet place rather than a crowded food court.

Needs and Interests

We tend to pay attention to information that we perceive to meet our needs or interests in some way. This type of selective attention can help us meet instrumental needs and get things done. When you need to speak with a financial aid officer about your scholarships and loans, you sit in the waiting room and listen for your name to be called. Paying close attention to whose name is called means you can be ready to start your meeting and hopefully get your business handled. When we don't think certain messages meet our needs, stimuli that would normally get our attention may be completely lost. Imagine you are in the grocery store and you hear someone say your name. You turn around, only to hear that person say, "Finally! I said your name three times. I thought you forgot who I was!" A few seconds before, when you were focused on figuring out which kind of orange juice to get, you were attending to the various pulp options to the point that you tuned other stimuli out, even something as familiar as the sound of someone calling your name. We select and attend to information that meets our needs.

We also find information salient that interests us. Of course, many times, stimuli that meet our needs are also interesting, but it's worth discussing these two items separately because sometimes we find things interesting that don't necessarily meet our needs (Figure 6.3). I'm sure we've all gotten sucked into a television show, video game, or random project and paid attention to that at the expense of something that actually meets our needs like cleaning or spending time with a significant other. Paying attention to things that interest us but don't meet specific needs seems like the basic formula for procrastination that we are all familiar with.

In many cases we know what interests us and we automatically gravitate toward stimuli that match up with that. For example, as you filter through radio stations, you likely already have an idea of what kind of music interests you and will stop on a station playing something in that genre while skipping right past stations playing something you aren't interested in. Because of this tendency, we often have to end up being forced into or accidentally experiencing something new in order to create or discover new interests. For example, you may not realize you are interested in Asian history until you are required to take such a course and have an engaging professor who sparks that interest in you. Or you may accidentally stumble on a new area of interest when you take a class you wouldn't otherwise because it fits into your schedule. As communicators, you can take advantage of this perceptual tendency by adapting your topic and content to the interests of your audience.

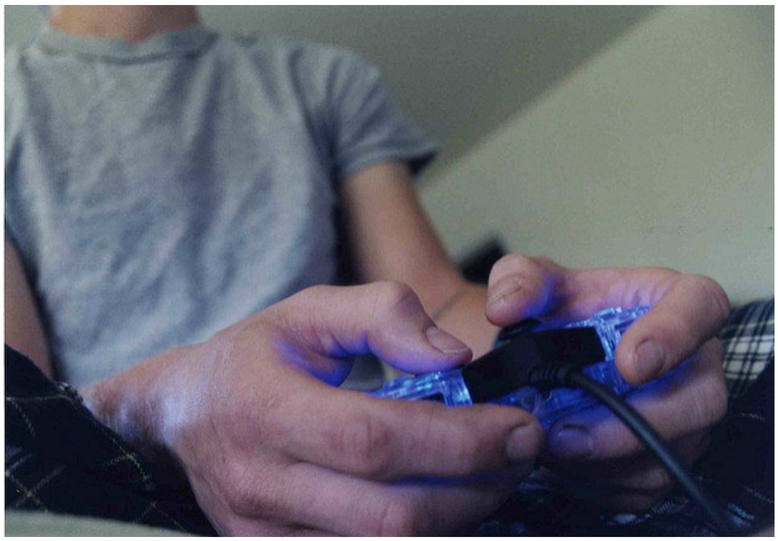

Figure 6.3 If you're engrossed in an interesting video game, you may not notice other perceptual cues. [Tex playing video games](#) – [Rebecca Pollard](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

Expectations

The relationship between salience and expectations is a little more complex. Basically, we can find expected things salient and find things that are unexpected salient. While this may sound confusing, a couple examples should illustrate this point. If you are expecting a package to be delivered, you might pick up on the slightest noise of a truck engine or someone's footsteps approaching your front door. Since we expect something to happen, we may be extra tuned in to clues that it is coming. In terms of the unexpected, if you have a shy and soft-spoken friend who you overhear raising the volume and pitch of their voice while talking to another friend, you may pick up on that and assume that something out of the ordinary is going on. For something unexpected to become salient, it has to reach a certain threshold of difference. If you walked into your regular class and there were one or two more students there than normal, you may not even notice. If you walked into your class and there was someone dressed up as a wizard, you would probably notice. So, if we expect to experience something out of the routine, like a package delivery, we will find stimuli related to that expectation salient. If we experience something that we weren't expecting and that is significantly different from our routine experiences, then we will likely find it salient.

There is a middle area where slight deviations from routine experiences may go unnoticed because we aren't expecting them. To go back to the earlier example, if you aren't expecting a package, and you regularly hear vehicle engines and sidewalk foot traffic outside your house, those pretty routine sounds wouldn't be as likely to catch your attention, even if it were slightly more or less traffic than expected. This is because our expectations are often based on previous experience and patterns we have observed and internalized, which allows our brains to go on "autopilot" sometimes and fill in things that are missing or overlook extra things. Look at the following sentence and read it aloud:

> Percpetoin is bsaed on pateetrns, maening we otfen raech
> a cocnlsuion witouht cosnidreing ecah indviidaul elmenet.

This example illustrates a test of our expectation and an annoyance to every college student. We have all had the experience of getting a paper back with typos and spelling errors circled. This can be frustrating, especially if we actually took the time to proofread. When we first learned to read and write, we learned letter by letter. A teacher or parent would show us a card with A-P-P-L-E written on it, and we would sound it out. Over time, we learned the patterns of letters and sounds and could see combinations of letters and pronounce the word quickly. Since we know what to expect when we see a certain pattern of letters, and know what comes next in a sentence since we wrote the paper, we don't take the time to look at each letter as we proofread. This can lead us to overlook common typos and spelling errors, even if we proofread something multiple times. Now that we know how we select stimuli, let's turn our attention to how we organize the information we receive.

Organizing Information

Organizing is the second part of the perception process, in which we sort and categorize information that we perceive based on innate and learned cognitive patterns. Three ways we sort things into patterns are by using proximity, similarity, and difference (Coren, 1980).

Proximity

In terms of proximity, we tend to think that things that are close together go together (Figure 6.4). For example, have you ever been waiting to be helped in a business and the clerk assumes that you and the person standing near you are together? The moment usually ends when you and the other person in line look at each other, then back at the clerk, and one of you explains that you are not together. Even though you may have never met that other person in your life, the clerk used a basic perceptual organizing cue to group you together because you were standing in proximity to one another.

Figure 6.4 Most people would likely say that there are twelve groups of coffee beans in this image based on proximity. Coffee Beans illustration from The Encyclopedia of Food – Artemas Ward – Public Domain

Similarity

We also group things together based on similarity. We tend to think similar-looking or similar-acting things belong together. For example, a group of friends that spend time together are all males, around the same age, of the same race, and have short hair. People might assume that they are brothers. Despite the fact that many of their features are different, the salient features are organized based on similarity and they are assumed to be related (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5 A group of friends that spend time together may be viewed as being related due to similarity. My friends Eder, Andro, Nenos and the little one - Marsel Majid Elia – CC BY-SA 4.0

Difference

We also organize information that we take in based on difference. In this case, we assume that the item that looks or acts different from the rest doesn't belong with the group (Figure 6.6). For example, if you ordered ten burgers and nine of them are wrapped in paper and the last is in a cardboard container, you may assume that the burger in the container is different in some way. Perceptual errors involving people and assumptions of difference can be especially awkward, if not offensive. Have you ever attended an event, only to be mistaken as an employee working at the event, rather than a guest at the event?

Figure 6.6 Jelly beans have been separated according to different flavors and their associated visual appearance. Jelly Belly jelly beans – Brandi Sims – CC BY 2.0

These strategies for organizing information are so common that they are built into how we teach our children basic skills and how we function in our daily lives. I'm sure we all had to look at pictures in grade school and determine which things went together and which thing didn't belong. If you think of the literal act of organizing something, like your desk at home or work, we follow these same strategies. If you have a bunch of papers and mail on the top of your desk, you will likely sort papers into separate piles for separate classes or put bills in a separate place than personal mail. You may have one drawer for pens, pencils, and other supplies and another drawer for files. In this case you are grouping items based on similarities and differences. You may also group things based on proximity, for example, by putting financial items like your checkbook, a calculator, and your pay stubs in one area so you can update your budget efficiently. In summary, we simplify information and look for patterns to help us more efficiently communicate and get through life.

Simplification and categorizing based on patterns aren't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, without this capability we would likely not have the ability to speak, read, or engage in other complex cognitive/behavioral functions. Our brain innately categorizes and files information and experiences away for later retrieval, and different parts of the brain are responsible for different sensory experiences. In short, it is natural for things to group together in some ways. There are differences among people, and looking for patterns helps us in many practical ways. However, the judgments we place on various patterns and categories are not natural; they are learned and culturally and contextually relative. Our perceptual patterns do become unproductive and even unethical when the judgments we associate with certain patterns are based on stereotypical or prejudicial thinking.

We also organize interactions and interpersonal experiences based on our firsthand experiences. Misunderstandings and conflict may result when two people experience the same encounter differently. Punctuation refers to the structuring of information into a timeline to determine the cause (stimulus) and effect (response) of our communication interactions (Sillars, 1980). Applying this concept to interpersonal conflict can help us see how the process of perception extends beyond the individual to the interpersonal level. This concept also helps illustrate how organization and interpretation can happen together and how interpretation can influence how we organize information and vice versa.

Where does a conflict begin and end? The answer to this question depends on how the people involved in the conflict punctuate, or structure, their conflict experience. Punctuation differences can often escalate conflict, which can lead to a variety of relationship problems (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967). For example, Linda and Joe are on a project team at work and have a deadline approaching. Linda has been working on the project over the weekend in anticipation of her meeting with Joe first thing

Monday morning. She has had some questions along the way and has e-mailed Joe for clarification and input, but he hasn't responded. On Monday morning, Linda walks into the meeting room, sees Joe, and says, "I've been working on this project all weekend and needed your help. I e-mailed you three times! What were you doing?" Joe responds, "I had no idea you e-mailed me. I was gone all weekend on a camping trip." In this instance, the conflict started for Linda two days ago and has just started for Joe. So, for the two of them to most effectively manage this conflict, they need to communicate so that their punctuation, or where the conflict started for each one, is clear and matches up. In this example, Linda made an impression about Joe's level of commitment to the project based on an interpretation she made after selecting and organizing incoming information. Being aware of punctuation is an important part of perception checking, which we will discuss later. Let's now take a closer look at how interpretation plays into the perception process.

Interpreting Information

Although selecting and organizing incoming stimuli happens very quickly, and sometimes without much conscious thought, interpretation can be a much more deliberate and conscious step in the perception process. Interpretation is the third part of the perception process, in which we assign meaning to an experience using a mental structure known as schema. A **schema** is a cognitive tool for organizing related concepts or information. Schemata are like databases of stored, related information that we use to interpret new experiences. Overtime we incorporate more and more small units of information together to develop more complex understandings of new information.

We have an overall schema about education and how to interpret experiences with teachers and classmates (Figure 6.7). This schema started developing before we even went to preschool based on things that parents, peers, and the media told us about school. For example, you learned that certain symbols and objects like an apple, a ruler, a calculator, and a notebook are associated with being a student or teacher. You learned new concepts like grades and recess, and you engaged in new practices like doing homework, studying, and taking tests. You also formed new relationships with classmates, teachers, and administrators. As you progressed through your education, your schema adapted to the changing environment. How smooth or troubling schema reevaluation and revision is varies from situation to situation and person to person. For example, some students adapt their schema relatively easily as they move from elementary, to middle, to high school, and on to college and are faced with new expectations for behavior and academic engagement. Other students don't adapt as easily, and holding onto their old schema creates problems as they try to interpret new information through old, incompatible schema.

Figure 6.7 When you first looked at this image, did you identify it as a classroom? Chances are you have had many experiences in classrooms and have developed a schema for what a classroom looks like. [Typical classroom in Br. Andrew Gonzales Hall](#) - [Malate269](#) – [Attribution Only License](#)

It's also important to be aware of schemata because our interpretations affect our behavior. For example, if you are doing a group project for class and you perceive a group member to be shy based on your schema of how shy people communicate, you may avoid giving them presentation responsibilities in your group project because you do not think shy people make good public speakers.

As we have seen, schemata are used to interpret others' behavior and form impressions about who they are as a person. To help this process along, we often solicit information from people to help us place them into a preexisting schema. In the United States and many other Western cultures, people's identities are often closely tied to what they do for a living. When we introduce others, or ourselves, occupation is usually one of the first things we mention. Think about how your communication with someone might differ if he or she were introduced to you as an artist versus a doctor. We make similar interpretations based on where people are from, their age, their race, and other social and cultural factors.

In summary, we have schemata about individuals, groups, places, and things, and these schemata filter our perceptions before, during, and after interactions. As schemata are retrieved from memory, they are executed, like computer programs or apps on your smartphone, to help us interpret the world around us. Just like computer programs and apps must be regularly updated to improve their functioning, we update and adapt our schemata as we have new experiences.

Summary

- Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process affects our communication because we respond to stimuli differently, whether they are objects or persons, based on how we perceive them.
- We select information based on salience. We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs and interests. Expectations also influence what information we select.
- We organize information that we select into patterns based on proximity, similarity, and difference.
- We interpret information using schemata, which allow us to assign meaning to information based on accumulated knowledge and previous experience.

Discussion Questions

1. Take a moment to look around wherever you are right now. Take in the perceptual field around you. What is salient for you in this moment and why? Explain the degree of salience using the three reasons for salience discussed in this section.
2. As we organize information (sensory information, objects, and people) we simplify and categorize information into patterns. Identify some cases in which this aspect of the perception process is beneficial. Identify some cases in which it could be harmful or negative.
3. Think about some of the schemata you have that help you make sense of the world around you. For each of the following contexts—academic, professional, personal, and civic—identify a schema that you commonly rely on or think you will rely on. For each schema you identified note a few ways that it has already been challenged or may be challenged in the future.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Added and changed some images as well as changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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6.2 Effects on Perception

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between internal and external attributions.
- Discuss the various ways that we perceive others.
- Recognize the roles that culture and personality play in the perception of others.

Are you a good judge of character? How quickly can you "size someone up?" Interestingly, research shows that many people are surprisingly accurate at predicting how an interaction with someone will unfold based on initial impressions. Fascinating research has also been done on the ability of people to make a judgment about a person's competence after as little as 100 milliseconds of exposure to politicians' faces. Even more surprising is that people's judgments of competence, after exposure to two candidates for senate elections, accurately predicted election outcomes (Ballew II & Todoroy, 2007). In short, after only minimal exposure to a candidate's facial expressions, people made judgments about the person's competence, and those candidates judged more competent were people who actually won elections. As you read this section, keep in mind that these principles apply to how you perceive others and to how others perceive you. Just as others make impressions on us, we make impressions on others. We have already learned how the perception process works in terms of selecting, organizing, and interpreting. In this section, we will focus on how we perceive others, with specific attention to how we interpret our perceptions of others.

Attribution and Interpretation

You may have a family member, friend, or coworker with whom you have different beliefs. When conversations and inevitable disagreements occur, you may view this person as "pushing your buttons" if you are invested in the issue being debated, or you may view the person as "on their soapbox" if you aren't invested. In either case, your existing perceptions of the other person are probably reinforced after your conversation and you may leave the conversation thinking, "They is never going to wake up and see how ignorant they are. I don't know why I even bother trying to talk to them." Similar situations occur regularly, and there are some key psychological processes that play into how we perceive others' behaviors. By examining these processes, attribution in particular, we can see how our communication with others is affected by the explanations we create for others' behavior. In addition, we will learn some common errors that we make in the attribution process that regularly lead to conflict and misunderstanding.

Attribution

In most interactions, we engage in **attribution**, the process of coming up with explanations for what is happening. Why did my neighbor slam the door when she saw me walking down the hall? Why is my partner being extra nice to me today? Why did my officemate miss our project team meeting this morning? In general, we seek to attribute the cause of others' behaviors to internal or external factors. **Internal attributions** connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits. Whereas **external attributions** connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors outside of our control. Attributions are important to consider because our reactions to others' behaviors are strongly influenced by the explanations we reach (Figure 6.8). Imagine that Gloria and Jerry are dating. One day, Jerry gets frustrated and raises his voice to Gloria. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow up to his personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change.

Figure 6.8 Frustrated drivers often use internal attributions to explain other drivers' behaviors. ROAD RAGE FIST – Beelgin - CC BY 2.0

Conversely, Gloria may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Jerry's control, since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Gloria may think, "Wow, this person is really a loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Jerry has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed." This process of attribution is ongoing, and, as with many aspects of perception, we are sometimes aware of the attributions we make, and sometimes they are automatic and/or unconscious. Attribution has received much scholarly attention because it is in this part of the perception process that some of the most common perceptual errors or biases occur.

One of the most common perceptual errors is the **fundamental attribution error**, which refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions (Sillars, 1980). For example, when I worked at an urban college in Denver, Colorado, I often had students come into class irritated, saying, "I got a parking ticket! I can't believe those people. Why don't they get a real job and stop ruining my life!" If you Google some clips from the reality television show *Parking Wars*, you will see the ire that people often direct at parking enforcement officers. In this case, illegally parked students attribute the cause of their situation to the malevolence of the parking officer, essentially saying they got a ticket because the officer was a mean/bad person, which is an internal attribution. Students were much less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing his or her job (an external attribution) and the ticket was a result of the student's decision to park illegally.

Perceptual errors can also be biased, and in the case of the self-serving bias, the error works out in our favor. Just as we tend to attribute others' behaviors to internal rather than external causes, we do the same for ourselves, especially when our behaviors have led to something successful or positive. When our behaviors lead to failure or something negative, we tend to attribute the cause to external factors. Thus, the **self-serving bias** is a perceptual error through which we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control. When we look at the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias together, we can see that we are likely to judge ourselves more favorably than another person, or at least less personally.

The professor-student relationship offers a good case example of how these concepts can play out. Students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment may attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. Professors may attribute a poor grade to the student's laziness, attitude, or intelligence. In both cases, the behavior is explained using an internal attribution and is an example of the fundamental attribution error. Students may further attribute their poor grade to their busy schedule or other external, situational factors rather than their lack of motivation, interest, or preparation (internal attributions). On the other hand, when a student earns a good grade on a paper, they will likely attribute that cause to their intelligence or hard work rather than an easy assignment or an "easy grading" professor. Both of these examples illustrate the self-serving bias. These psychological processes have implications for our communication because when we attribute causality to another person's personality, we tend to have a stronger emotional reaction and tend to assume that this personality characteristic is stable, which may lead us to avoid communication with the person or to react negatively. Now that you aware of these common errors, you can monitor them more and engage in perception checking, which we will learn more about later, to verify your attributions.

Impressions and Interpretation

As we perceive others, we make impressions about their personality, likeability, attractiveness, and other characteristics. Although much of our impressions are personal, what forms them is sometimes based more on circumstances than personal characteristics. All the information we take in isn't treated equally. How important are first impressions? Does the last thing you notice about a person stick with you longer because it's more recent? Do we tend to remember the positive or negative things we notice about a person? This section will help answer these questions, as we explore how the timing of information and the content of the messages we receive can influence our perception.

First and Last Impressions

The old saying "You never get a second chance to make a good impression" points to the fact that first impressions matter. The brain is a predictive organ in that it wants to know, based on previous experiences and patterns, what to expect next, and first impressions function to fill this need, allowing us to determine how we will proceed with an interaction after only a quick assessment of the person with whom we are interacting (Hargie, 2011). Research shows that people are surprisingly good at making accurate first impressions about how an interaction will unfold and at identifying personality characteristics of people they do not know (Figure 6.9). Studies show that people are generally able to predict how another person will behave toward them based on an initial interaction. People's accuracy and ability to predict interaction based on first impressions vary, but people with high accuracy are typically socially skilled and popular and have less loneliness, anxiety, and depression; more satisfying relationships; and more senior positions and higher salaries (Hargie, 2011). Having the ability to form accurate first impressions correlates with other positive characteristics.

Figure 6.9 People who are able to form accurate first impressions tend to have more satisfying relationships. Job Interview – Styles66 – Pixabay License

First impressions are enduring because of the **primacy effect**, which leads us to place more value on the first information we receive about a person. So, if we interpret the first information we receive from or about a person as positive, then a positive first impression will form and influence how we respond to that person as the interaction continues. Likewise, negative interpretations of information can lead us to form negative first impressions. If you sit down at a restaurant and servers walk by for several minutes and no one greets you, then you will likely interpret that negatively and not have a good impression of your server when they finally arrive at your table. This may lead you to be short with the server, which may lead them to not be as attentive as they normally would. At this point, a series of negative interactions has set into motion a cycle that will be very difficult to reverse and make positive.

In contrast, the **recency effect** leads us to put more weight on the most recent impression we have of a person's communication over earlier impressions. Even a positive first impression can be tarnished by a negative final impression. Imagine that a professor has maintained a relatively high level of credibility with you over the course of the semester. They made a good first impression by being organized, approachable, and interesting during the first days of class. The rest of the term went fairly well with no major conflicts. However, during the last week of the term, they didn't have final papers graded and ready to turn back by the time they said they would, which left you with some uncertainty about how well you needed to do on the final exam to earn an A in the class. When you did get your paper back, on the last day of class, you saw that your grade was much lower than you expected. If this happened to you, what would you write on the instructor evaluation? Because of the recency effect, many students would likely give a disproportionate amount of value to the professor's actions in the final week of the semester, negatively skewing the evaluation, which is supposed to be reflective of the entire course. Even though the professor only returned one assignment late, that fact is very recent in students' minds and can overshadow the positive impression that formed many weeks earlier.

Physical and Environmental Influences on Perception

We make first impressions based on a variety of factors, including physical and environmental characteristics. In terms of physical characteristics, style of dress and grooming are important, especially in professional contexts. We have general schema regarding how to dress and groom for various situations ranging from formal, to business casual, to casual, to lounging around the house.

You would likely be able to offer some descriptors of how a person would look and act from the following categories: a goth person, a prep, a jock, a fashionista, a hipster. The schema associated with these various cliques or styles are formed through personal experience and through exposure to media representations of these groups. Different professions also have schema for appearance and dress. Imagine a doctor, mechanic, congressperson, exotic dancer, or mail carrier. Each group has clothing and personal styles that create and fit into general patterns. Of course, the mental picture we have of any of the examples above is not going to be representative of the whole group, meaning that stereotypical thinking often exists within our schema. We will learn more about the negative effects of stereotypical thinking later in the chapter, but it's important to understand how persuasive various physical perceptual influences can be.

Think about the harm that has been done when people pose as police or physicians to commit crimes or other acts of malice. Seeing someone in a white lab coat automatically leads us to see that person as an authority figure, and we fall into a scripted pattern of deferring to the "physician" and not asking too many questions (Figure 6.10). The Milgram experiments offer a startling example of how powerful these influences are. In the experiments, participants followed instructions from a man in a white lab coat (who was actually an actor), who prompted them to deliver electric shocks to a person in another room every time the other person answered a memory question incorrectly. The experiment was actually about how people defer to authority figures instead of acting independently. Although no one was actually being shocked in the other room, many participants continued to "shock," at very high levels of voltage, the other person even after that person supposedly being shocked complained of chest pains and became unresponsive (Encina, 2003).

Figure 6.10 Clothing, like a physician's lab coat, forms powerful impressions that have noticeable effects on people's behavior. Happy doctor – Lisa Brewster - CC BY-SA 2.0

Just as clothing and personal style help us form impressions of others, so do physical body features. The degree to which we perceive people to be attractive influences our attitudes about and communication with them. Facial attractiveness and body weight tend to be common features used in the perception of physical attractiveness. In general people find symmetrical faces and non-overweight bodies attractive. People perceived as attractive are generally evaluated more positively and seen as kinder and more competent than people evaluated as less attractive. Additionally, people rated as attractive receive more eye contact, more smiles, and closer proximity to others (people stand closer to them). Unlike clothing and personal style, these physical features are more difficult, if not impossible, to change.

Finally, the material objects and people that surround a person influence our perception. In the MTV show *Room Raiders*, contestants go into the bedrooms of three potential dates and choose the one they want to go on the date with based on the impressions made while examining each potential date's cleanliness, decorations, clothes, trophies and awards, books, music, and so on. Research supports the reliability of such impressions, as people have been shown to make reasonably accurate judgments about a person's personality after viewing his or her office or bedroom (Hargie, 2011). Although the artificial scenario set up in *Room Raiders* doesn't exactly match up with typical encounters, the link between environmental cues and perception is important enough for many companies to create policies about what can and can't be displayed in personal office spaces. It would seem odd for a bank manager to have an *Animal House* poster hanging in his office, and that would definitely influence customers' perceptions of the manager's personality and credibility. The arrangement of furniture also creates impressions. Walking into a meeting and sitting on one end of a long boardroom table is typically less inviting than sitting at a round table or on a sofa.

Although some physical and environmental features are easier to change than others, it is useful to become aware of how these factors, which aren't necessarily related to personality or verbal and nonverbal communication, shape our perceptions. These early impressions also affect how we interpret and perceive later encounters, which can be further explained through the halo and horn effects.

The Halo and Horn Effects

We have a tendency to adapt information that conflicts with our earlier impressions in order to make it fit within the frame we have established. This is known as selective distortion, and it manifests in the halo and horn effects. The angelic halo and devilish horn are useful metaphors for the lasting effects of positive and negative impressions.

The **halo effect** occurs when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The **horn effect** occurs when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative (Hargie, 2011). Since impressions are especially important when a person is navigating the job market, let's imagine how the horn and halo effects could play out for a recent college graduate looking to land her first real job. Nell has recently graduated with her degree in communication studies and is looking to start her career as a corporate trainer. If one of Nell's professors has a relationship with an executive at an area business, his positive verbal recommendation will likely result in a halo effect for Nell. Since the executive thinks highly of his friend the professor, and the professor things highly of Nell, then the executive will start his interaction with Nell with a positive impression and interpret her behaviors more positively than he would otherwise. The halo effect initiated by the professor's recommendation may even lead the executive to dismiss or overlook some negative behaviors. Let's say Nell doesn't have a third party to help make a connection and arrives late for her interview. That negative impression may create a horn effect that carries through the interview. Even if Nell presents as competent and friendly, the negative first impression could lead the executive to minimize or ignore those positive characteristics, and the company may not hire her.

Culture, Personality, and Perception

Our cultural identities and our personalities affect our perceptions. Sometimes we are conscious of the effects and sometimes we are not. In either case, we have a tendency to favor others who exhibit cultural or personality traits that match up with our own. This tendency is so strong that is often leads us to assume that people we like are more similar to us than they actually are. Knowing more about how these forces influence our perceptions can help us become more aware of and competent in regards to the impressions we form of others.

Culture

Race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make. The schemata through which we interpret what we perceive are influenced by our cultural identities. As we are socialized into various cultural identities, we internalize beliefs, attitudes, and values shared by others in our cultural group (Figure 6.11). Schemata held by members of a cultural identity group have similarities, but schemata held by different cultural groups may vary greatly. Unless we are exposed to various cultural groups and learn how others perceive us and the world around them, we will likely have a narrow or naïve view of the world and assume that others see things the way we do. Exposing yourself to and experiencing cultural differences in perspective doesn't mean that you have to change your schema to match another cultural group's schemata. Instead, it may offer you a chance to better understand why and how your schemata were constructed the way they were.

Figure 6.11 How we interpret basic sensory information, like smells, varies by culture. In some cultures, natural body odor isn't considered an offensive smell like it generally is in the United States. Armpit – David Shankbone – GNU Free Documentation License

As we have learned, perception starts with information that comes in through our senses. How we perceive even basic sensory information is influenced by our culture, as is illustrated in the following list:

- **Sight.** People in different cultures "read" art in different ways, differing in terms of where they start to look at an image and the types of information they perceive and process.
- **Sound.** "Atonal" music in some Asian cultures is unpleasing; it is uncomfortable to people who aren't taught that these combinations of sounds are pleasing.
- **Touch.** In some cultures, it would be very offensive for a man to touch—even tap on the shoulder—a woman who isn't a relative.
- **Taste.** Tastes for foods vary greatly around the world. "Stinky tofu," which is a favorite snack of people in Taipei, Taiwan's famous night market, would likely be very off-putting in terms of taste and smell to many foreign tourists.
- **Smell.** While US Americans spend considerable effort to mask natural body odor, which we typically find unpleasant, with soaps, sprays, and lotions, some other cultures would not find unpleasant or even notice what we consider "b.o." Those same cultures may find a US American's "clean" (soapy, perfumed, deodorized) smell unpleasant.

Aside from differences in reactions to basic information we take in through our senses, there is also cultural variation in how we perceive more complicated constructs, like marriage, politics, and privacy. In May of 2012, French citizens elected a new president. François Hollande moved into the presidential palace with his partner of five years, Valerie Trierweiler. They are the first unmarried couple in the country's history to occupy the presidential palace (de la Baume, 2012). Even though new census statistics show that more unmarried couples are living together than ever before in the United States, many still disapprove of the practice, and it is hard to imagine a US president in a similar circumstance as France's Hollande. Other places like Saudi Arabia and the Vatican have strong cultural aversions to such a practice, which could present problems when France's first couple travels abroad.

As we've already learned, our brain processes information by putting it into categories and looking for predictability and patterns. The previous examples have covered how we do this with sensory information and with more abstract concepts like marriage and politics, but we also do this with people. When we categorize people, we generally view them as "like us" or "not like us." This simple us/them split affects subsequent interaction, including impressions and attributions. For example, we tend to view people we perceive to be like us as more trustworthy, friendly, and honest than people we perceive to be not like us (Brewer, 1999). We are also more likely to use internal attribution to explain negative behavior of people we perceive to be different from us. If a person of a different race cuts another driver off in traffic, the driver is even more likely to attribute that action to the other driver's internal qualities (thinking, for example, "He or she is inconsiderate and reckless!") than they would someone of their own race. Having such inflexible categories can have negative consequences, for example, forcing people into rigid categories leads to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Of course, race isn't the only marker of difference that influences our perceptions, and the problem with our rough categorization of people into "like us" and "not like us" categories is that these differences aren't really as easy to perceive as we think. We cannot always tell whether or not someone is culturally like us through visual cues. For some cultural identities, like sexual orientation and ability, our awareness of any differences may only come when the other person discloses their identity to us.

You no doubt frequently hear people talking and writing about the "vast differences" between men and women. Whether it's communication, athletic ability, expressing emotions, or perception, people will line up to say that women are one way and men are the other way. While it is true that gender affects our perception, the reason for this difference stems more from social norms than genetic, physical, or psychological differences between men and women. We are socialized to perceive differences between men and women, which leads us to exaggerate and amplify what differences there actually are (McCornack, 2007). We basically see the stereotypes and differences we are told to see, which helps to create a reality in which gender differences are "obvious." However, numerous research studies have found that, especially in relation to multiple aspects of communication, men and women communicate much more similarly than differently. In summary, various cultural identities shape how we perceive others because beliefs, attitudes, and values of the cultural groups to which we belong are incorporated into our schema. Our personalities also present interesting perceptual advantages and challenges that we will now discuss.

Personality

Often during the hiring process employers will conduct an "employment verification" during which they ask former employers general questions about the applicant . While they may ask a few questions about intellectual ability or academic performance, they typically ask questions that try to create a personality profile of the applicant. They basically want to know what kind of leader, coworker, and person the applicant is. This is a smart move on their part, because our personalities greatly influence how we see ourselves in the world and how we perceive and interact with others.

Corporations and television studios spend millions of dollars on developing personality profiles and personality testing. Corporations can make hiring and promotion decisions based on personality test results, which can save them money and time if they can weed out those who don't "fit" the position before they get in the door and drain resources. Television studios make casting decisions based on personality profiles because they know that certain personalities evoke strong and specific reactions from viewers. The reality television show *Survivor* has done more than one season where they bring back "Heroes and Villains," which already indicates that the returning cast members made strong impressions on the show's producers and audience members. Think about the reality television stars that you love to root for, want to see lose, and can't stand to look at or look away from. Shows like *Celebrity Rehab* intentionally cast fading stars who already have strong personalities and emotional and addiction issues in order to create the kind of human train wrecks that attract millions of viewers. So why does this work?

It is likely that you have more in common with that reality TV star than you care to admit. We tend to focus on personality traits in others that we feel are important to our own personality. What we like in ourselves, we like in others, and what we dislike in ourselves, we dislike in others (McCornack, 2007). If you admire a person's loyalty, then loyalty is probably a trait that you think you possess as well. If you work hard to be positive and motivated and suppress negative and unproductive urges within yourself, you will likely think harshly about those negative traits in someone else. After all, if you can suppress your negativity, why can't they do the same? This way of thinking isn't always accurate or logical, but it is common.

The concept of **assumed similarity** refers to our tendency to perceive others as similar to us. When we don't have enough information about a person to know their key personality traits, we fill in the gaps—usually assuming they possess traits similar to those we see in ourselves. We also tend to assume that people have similar attitudes, or likes and dislikes, as us. If you set your friend up with a man you think she'll really like only to find out there was no chemistry when they met, you may be surprised to realize your friend doesn't have the same taste in men as you. Even though we may assume more trait and taste similarity between our significant others and ourselves than there actually is, research generally finds that while people do interpersonally group based on many characteristics including race, class, and intelligence, the findings don't show that people with similar personalities group together (Beer & Watson, 2008).

In summary, personality affects our perception, and we all tend to be amateur personality scholars given the amount of effort we put into assuming and evaluating others' personality traits. This bank of knowledge we accumulate based on previous interactions with people is used to help us predict how interactions will unfold and help us manage our interpersonal relationships. When we size up a person based on their personality, we are auditioning or interviewing them in a way to see if we think there is compatibility. We use these implicit personality theories to generalize a person's overall personality from the traits we can perceive. The theories are "implicit" because they are not of academic but of experience-based origin, and the information we use to theorize about people's personalities isn't explicitly known or observed but implied. In other words, we use previous experience to guess other people's personality traits. We then assume more about a person based on the personality traits we assign to them.

This process of assuming has its advantages and drawbacks. In terms of advantages, the use of implicit personality theories offers us a perceptual shortcut that can be useful when we first meet someone. Our assessment of their traits and subsequent assumptions about who they are as a person makes us feel like we "know the person," which reduces uncertainty and facilitates further interaction. In terms of drawbacks, our experience-based assumptions aren't always correct, but they are still persuasive and enduring. As we have already learned, first impressions carry a lot of weight in terms of how they influence further interaction. Positive and negative impressions formed early can also lead to a halo effect or a horn effect, which we discussed earlier. Personality-based impressions can also connect to impressions based on physical and environmental cues to make them even stronger. For example, perceiving another person as attractive can create a halo effect that then leads you to look for behavioral cues that you can then tie to positive personality traits. You may notice that the attractive person also says "please" and "thank you," which increases his or her likeability. You may notice that the person has clean and fashionable shoes, which leads you to believe he or she is professional and competent but also trendy and hip. Now you have an overall positive impression of this person that will affect your subsequent behaviors (Beer & Watson, 2008). But how accurate were your impressions? If on your way home you realize you just bought a car from this person, who happened to be a car salesperson, that was $7,000 over your price range, you might have second thoughts about how good a person he or she actually is.

Summary

- We use attributions to interpret perceptual information, specifically, people's behavior. Internal attributions connect behavior to internal characteristics such as personality traits. External attributions connect behavior to external characteristics such as situational factors.
- The halo effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial positive impressions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The horn effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial negative impressions lead us to view later interactions as negative.
- Cultural identities affect the perceptions that we make about basic sensory information such as sounds and smells as well as larger concepts such as marriage and privacy.
- We use observed and implied personality traits to form impressions of others, which then influence how we act toward them.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a recent conflict and how you explained the behavior that caused the conflict and subsequently formed impressions about the other person based on your perceptions. Briefly describe the conflict situation and then identify internal and external attributions for your behavior and the behavior of the other person. Is there any evidence of the fundamental attribution error or self-serving bias in this conflict encounter? If so, what?
2. Describe a situation in which you believe the primacy and/or recency effect influenced your perceptions of a person or event.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Replaced photos that were no longer available/had broken links
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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6.3 Improving Perception

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss strategies for improving self-perception.
- Discuss strategies for improving perception of others.
- Employ perception checking to improve perception of self and others.

So far, we have learned about the perception process and how we perceive. Now we will turn to a discussion of how to improve our perception by becoming aware of how schema, socializing forces, self-fulfilling prophecies, and negative patterns of thinking can distort our ability to describe and evaluate ourselves. How we perceive others can be improved by developing better listening and empathetic skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, developing self-awareness through self-reflection, and engaging in perception checking.

Improving Self-Perception

Our self-perceptions can and do change. Recall from module 1 that we have an overall self-concept and self-esteem that are relatively stable, and we also have context-specific self-perceptions. Context-specific self-perceptions vary depending on the person with whom we are interacting, our emotional state, and the subject matter being discussed. Becoming aware of the process of self-perception and the various components of our self-concept will help you understand and improve your self-perceptions.

Since self-concept and self-esteem are so subjective and personal, it would be inaccurate to say that someone's self-concept is "right" or "wrong." Instead, we can identify negative and positive aspects of self-perceptions as well as discuss common barriers to forming accurate and positive self-perceptions. We can also identify common patterns that people experience that interfere with their ability to monitor, understand, and change their self-perceptions. Changing your overall self-concept or self-esteem is not an easy task given that these are overall reflections on who we are and how we judge ourselves that are constructed over many interactions. A variety of life-changing events can relatively quickly alter our self-perceptions. Think of how your view of self changed when you moved from high school to college. Similarly, other people's self-perceptions likely change when they enter into a committed relationship, have a child, make a geographic move, or start a new job.

Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. As you actively try to change your self-perceptions, do not be surprised if you encounter some resistance from significant others. When you change or improve your self-concept, your communication will also change, which may prompt other people to respond to you differently. Although you may have good reasons for changing certain aspects of your self-perception, others may become unsettled or confused by your changing behaviors and communication. Remember, people try to increase predictability and decrease uncertainty within personal relationships. For example, many students begin to take their college education more seriously during their junior and senior years. As these students begin to change their self-concept to include the role of "serious student preparing to graduate and enter the professional world," they likely have friends that want to maintain the "semiserious student who doesn't exert much consistent effort and prefers partying to studying" role that used to be a shared characteristic of both students' self-concepts. As the first student's behavior changes to accommodate this new aspect of his or her self-concept, it may upset the friend who was used to weeknights spent hanging out rather than studying. Let's now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.

Avoid Reliance on Rigid Schema

As we learned earlier, schemata are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction. We rely on schemata almost constantly to help us make sense of the world around us. Sometimes schemata become so familiar that we use them as scripts, which prompts mindless communication and can lead us to overlook new information that may need to be incorporated into the schema. It's important to remain mindful of new or contradictory information that may warrant revision of a schema. Being mindful is difficult, however, especially since we often unconsciously rely on schemata. Think about how when you're driving a familiar route you sometimes fall under "highway hypnosis." Despite all the advanced psychomotor skills needed to drive, such as braking, turning, and adjusting to other drivers, we can pull into a familiar driveway or parking lot having driven the whole way on autopilot. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. But have you slipped into autopilot on a familiar route only to remember that you are actually going somewhere else after you've already missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.

Be Critical of Socializing Forces

In module 1 we learned that family, friends, sociocultural norms, and the media are just some of the socializing forces that influence our thinking and therefore influence our self-perception. These powerful forces serve positive functions but can also set into motion negative patterns of self-perception. Two examples can illustrate the possibility for people to critique and resist socializing forces in order to improve their self-perception. The first deals with physical appearance and notions of health, and the second deals with cultural identities and discrimination.

We have already discussed how the media presents us with narrow and often unrealistic standards for attractiveness. Even though most of us know that these standards don't represent what is normal or natural for the human body, we internalize these ideals, which results in various problems ranging from eating disorders, to depression, to poor self-esteem. A relatively overlooked but controversial and interesting movement that has emerged partially in response to these narrow representations of the body is the fat acceptance movement. The fat acceptance movement has been around for more than thirty years, but it has more recently gotten public attention due to celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Kirstie Alley, who after years of publicly struggling with weight issues have embraced a view that weight does not necessarily correspond to health. Conflicting scientific studies make it difficult to say conclusively how strong the correlation is between weight and health, but it seems clear that a view that promotes healthy living and positive self-esteem over unconditional dieting is worth exploring more given the potential public health implications of distorted body image and obesity.

Cultural influences related to identities and difference can also lead to distorted self-perceptions, especially for people who occupy marginalized or oppressed identities. While perception research has often been used to support the notion that individuals who are subjected to discrimination, like racial and ethnic minorities, are likely to have low self-esteem because they internalize negative societal views, this is not always the case (Armenta & Hunt, 2009). In fact, even some early perception research showed that minorities do not just passively accept the negative views society places on them. Instead, they actively try to maintain favorable self-perceptions in the face of discriminatory attitudes. Numerous studies have shown that people in groups that are the targets of discrimination may identify with their in-group more because of this threat, which may actually help them maintain psychological well-being. In short, they reject the negative evaluations of the out-group and find refuge and support in their identification with others who share their marginalized status.

Beware of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Self-fulfilling prophecies are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true (Guyll et al., 2010). For example, let's say a student's biology lab instructor is a Chinese person who speaks English as a second language. The student falsely believes that the instructor will not be a good teacher because he speaks English with an accent. Because of this belief, the student doesn't attend class regularly and doesn't listen actively when they do attend. Because of these behaviors, the student fails the biology lab, which then reinforces their original belief that the instructor wasn't a good teacher.

Although the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies was originally developed to be applied to social inequality and discrimination, it has since been applied in many other contexts, including interpersonal communication. This research has found that some people are chronically insecure, meaning they are very concerned about being accepted by others but constantly feel that other people will dislike them. This can manifest in relational insecurity, which is again based on feelings of inferiority resulting from social comparison with others perceived to be more secure and superior. Such people often end up reinforcing their belief that others will dislike them because of the behaviors triggered by their irrational belief. For example, an insecure person assumes that his date will not like him. During the date he doesn't engage in much conversation, discloses negative information about himself, and exhibits anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, his date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing his original belief that the date wouldn't like him. The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be successfully used to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking and has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinston et al., 2011).

Create and Maintain Supporting Interpersonal Relationships

Aside from giving yourself affirming messages to help with self-perception, it is important to find interpersonal support. Although most people have at least some supportive relationships, many people also have people in their lives who range from negative to toxic. When people find themselves in negative relational cycles, whether it is with friends, family, or romantic partners, it is difficult to break out of those cycles. But we can all make choices to be around people that will help us be who we want to be and not be around people who hinder our self-progress. This notion can also be taken to the extreme, however. It would not be wise to surround yourself with people who only validate you and do not constructively challenge you, because this too could lead to distorted self-perceptions.

Beware of Distorted Patterns of Thinking and Acting

You already know from our discussion of attribution errors that we all have perceptual biases that distort our thinking. Many of these are common, and we often engage in distorted thinking without being conscious of it. Learning about some of the typical negative patterns of thinking and acting may help us acknowledge and intervene in them. One such pattern involves self-esteem and overcompensation.

People with low self-esteem may act in ways that overcompensate for their feelings of low self-worth and other insecurities. Whether it's the businessman buying his midlife crisis Corvette, the "country boy" adding monster tires to his truck, or the community leader who wears several carats of diamonds everywhere she goes, people often turn to material possessions to try to boost self-esteem (Figure 6.12). While these purchases may make people feel better in the short term, they may have negative financial effects that can exacerbate negative self-perceptions and lead to interpersonal conflict. People also compensate for self-esteem with their relational choices. A person who is anxious about his career success may surround himself with people who he deems less successful than himself. In this case, being a big fish in a small pond helps some people feel better about themselves when they engage in social comparison.

Figure 6.12 Some people have speculated that men who have a midlife crisis may overcompensate for a perceived loss in status or power due to age by purchasing material things that make them appear more youthful. Midlife crisis car – Kevin Dooley - CC BY 2.0

People can also get into a negative thought and action cycle by setting unrealistic goals and consistently not meeting them. Similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy, people who set unrealistic goals can end up with negative feelings of self-efficacy, which as we learned earlier, can negatively affect self-esteem and self-concept. As we learned in module 3, the goals we set should be challenging but progressive, meaning we work to meet a realistic goal, then increase our expectations and set another goal, and so on.

Some people develop low self-esteem because they lack accurate information about themselves, which may be intentional or unintentional. A person can intentionally try to maintain high self-esteem by ignoring or downplaying negative comments and beliefs and focusing on positive evaluations. While this can be a good thing, it can also lead to a distorted self-concept. There is a middle ground between beating yourself up or dwelling on the negative and ignoring constructive feedback about weaknesses and missing opportunities to grow as a person. Conversely, people who have low self-esteem or negative self-concepts may discount or ignore positive feedback.

Overcoming Barriers to Perceiving Others

There are many barriers that prevent us from competently perceiving others. While some are more difficult to overcome than others, they can all be addressed by raising our awareness of the influences around us and committing to monitoring, reflecting on, and changing some of our communication habits. Whether it is our lazy listening skills, lack of empathy, or stereotypes and prejudice, various filters and blinders influence how we perceive and respond to others.

Develop Empathetic Listening Skills

Effective listening is not easy, and most of us do not make a concerted effort to overcome common barriers to listening. Our fast-paced lives and cultural values that emphasize speaking over listening sometimes make listening feel like a chore. But we shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can also help us expand our self- and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and taking on different perspectives. Empathetic listening is challenging because it requires cognitive and emotional investment that goes beyond the learning of a skill set.

If one person's biggest problem is getting enough money together to buy a new cell phone and another person's biggest problem is getting enough money together to get much needed medication, each of these people is likely experiencing a similar amount of stress. As an outsider, we might look at this example and think about how a cell phone isn't necessary to live but the medication is. But everyone's reality is his or her own reality, and when you can concede that someone's reality isn't like yours and you are OK with that, then you have overcome a significant barrier to becoming more aware of the perception process.

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are sets of beliefs that we develop about groups, which we then apply to individuals from that group. Stereotypes are schemata that are taken too far, as they reduce and ignore a person's individuality and the diversity present within a larger group of people. Stereotypes can be based on cultural identities, physical appearance, behavior, speech, beliefs, and values, among other things, and are often caused by a lack of information about the target person or group (Guyll et al., 2010). Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all run the risk of lowering the quality of our communication.

While the negative effects of stereotypes are pretty straightforward in that they devalue people and prevent us from adapting and revising our schemata, positive stereotypes also have negative consequences. For example, the "model minority" stereotype has been applied to some Asian cultures in the United States. Seemingly positive stereotypes of

Asian Americans as hardworking, intelligent, and willing to adapt to "mainstream" culture are not always received as positive and can lead some people within these communities to feel objectified, ignored, or overlooked.

Stereotypes can also lead to double standards that point to larger cultural and social inequalities. There are many more words to describe a sexually active female than a male, and the words used for females are disproportionately negative, while those used for males are more positive. Since stereotypes are generally based on a lack of information, we must take it upon ourselves to gain exposure to new kinds of information and people, which will likely require us to get out of our comfort zones. When we do meet people, we should base the impressions we make on describable behavior rather than inferred or secondhand information. When stereotypes negatively influence our overall feelings and attitudes about a person or group, prejudiced thinking results.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities. Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire a young man with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that one man. However, if pervasive cultural thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice. In another example, when the disease we know today as AIDS started killing large numbers of people in the early 1980s, response by some health and government officials was influenced by prejudice (Figure 6.13).

Figure 6.13 The red ribbon is used to bring awareness to HIV/AIDS research. AIDS Awareness – Sassy mom – CC BY-NC 2.0

Since the disease was primarily affecting gay men, Haitian immigrants, and drug users, the disease was prejudged to be a disease that affected only “deviants” and therefore didn’t get the same level of attention it would have otherwise. It took many years, investment of much money, and education campaigns to help people realize that HIV and AIDS do not prejudge based on race or sexual orientation and can affect any human.

Engage in Self-Reflection

A good way to improve your perceptions and increase your communication competence in general is to engage in self-reflection. If a communication encounter doesn’t go well and you want to know why, your self-reflection will be much more useful if you are aware of and can recount your thoughts and actions.

Self-reflection can also help us increase our cultural awareness. Our thought process regarding culture is often “other focused,” meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage “know thyself” is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because our taken-for-granted or deeply held beliefs and values may become less certain when we see the multiple perspectives that exist.

We can also become more aware of how our self-concepts influence how we perceive others. We often hold other people to the standards we hold for ourselves or assume that their self-concept should be consistent with our own. For example, if you consider yourself a neat person and think that sloppiness in your personal appearance would show that you are unmotivated, rude, and lazy, then you are likely to think the same of a person you judge to have a sloppy appearance. Asking questions like “Is my impression based on how this person wants to be, or how I think this person should want to be?” can lead to enlightening moments of self-reflection. Asking questions in general about the perceptions you are making is an integral part of perception checking.

Perception Checking

Perception checking is a strategy to help us monitor our reactions to and perceptions about people and communication. There are some internal and external strategies we can use to engage in perception checking. In terms of internal strategies, review the various influences on perception that we have learned about in this module and always be willing to ask yourself, “What is influencing the perceptions I am making right now?” Even being aware of what influences are acting on our perceptions makes us more aware of what is happening in the perception process. In terms of external strategies, we can use other people to help verify our perceptions.

The cautionary adage "Things aren't always as they appear" is useful when evaluating your own perceptions. Sometimes it's a good idea to bounce your thoughts off someone, especially if the perceptions relate to some high-stakes situation. But not all situations allow us the chance to verify our perceptions.

Perception checking helps us slow down perception and communication processes and allows us to have more control over both. Perception checking involves being able to describe what is happening in a given situation, provide multiple interpretations of events or behaviors, and ask yourself and others questions for clarification. Some of this process happens inside our heads, and some happens through interaction. Let's take an interpersonal conflict as an example.

Stefano and Patrick are roommates. Stefano is in the living room playing a video game when he sees Patrick walk through the room with his suitcase and walk out the front door. Since Patrick didn't say or wave good-bye, Stefano has to make sense of this encounter, and perception checking can help him do that. First, he needs to try to describe (not evaluate yet) what just happened. This can be done by asking yourself, "What is going on?" In this case, Patrick left without speaking or waving good-bye. Next, Stefano needs to think of some possible interpretations of what just happened. One interpretation could be that Patrick is mad about something (at him or someone else). Another could be that he was in a hurry and simply forgot, or that he didn't want to interrupt the video game. In this step of perception checking, it is good to be aware of the attributions you are making. You might try to determine if you are overattributing internal or external causes. Lastly, you will want to verify and clarify. So, Stefano might ask a mutual friend if they know what might be bothering Patrick or going on in his life that made him leave so suddenly. Or he may also just want to call, text, or speak to Patrick. Even though Stefano has already been thinking about this incident, and is experiencing some conflict, Patrick may have no idea that his actions caused Stefano to worry. If Stefano texts and asks why he's mad (which wouldn't be a good idea because it's an assumption) Patrick may become defensive, which could escalate the conflict. Stefano could just describe the behavior (without judging Patrick) and ask for clarification by saying, "When you left today you didn't say bye or let me know where you were going. I just wanted to check to see if things are OK."

The steps of perception checking as described in the previous scenario are as follows:

Step 1: Describe the behavior or situation without evaluating or judging it.

Step 2: Think of some possible interpretations of the behavior, being aware of attributions and other influences on the perception process.

Step 3: Verify what happened and ask for clarification from the other person's perspective.

Summary

- We can improve self-perception by avoiding reliance on rigid schemata, thinking critically about socializing institutions, intervening in self-fulfilling prophecies, finding supportive interpersonal networks, and becoming aware of cycles of thinking that distort our self-perception.
- We can improve our perceptions of others by developing empathetic listening skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, and engaging in self-reflection.
- Perception checking is a strategy that allows us to monitor our perceptions of and reactions to others and communication.

Discussion Questions

1. Which barrier(s) to self-perception do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
2. Which barrier(s) to perceiving others do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
3. Give an example of how perception checking might be useful to you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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Chapter 7: Interpersonal Communication

Think about the last interaction you had with a friend. What did you talk about? How did you talk about it? Did any miscommunication occur? If you are like most people, you've probably had positive and negative interactions with your friend throughout the time you've known them. These interactions are referred to as interpersonal communication.

In this chapter you will learn about interpersonal communication. You will learn various elements of interpersonal and intercultural communication skills, as well as speaking and listening. This will provide you with communication skills to engage in positive interpersonal interactions.

7.1 Elements of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the differences between the sender and receiver of a message.
- Describe the skills associated with effective interpersonal skills.
- Identify several different ways to create better intercultural interactions.

Interpersonal communication focuses on the exchange of messages between two people. Our days are full of interpersonal communication. When you wake up, roll over, and say good morning to your significant other, you've had your first interpersonal interaction of the day. You meet your best friend for coffee before work and discuss the ins and outs of children's lives; you're engaging in interpersonal communication again. At work you collaborate with a coworker on a project; once again, you're engaging in interpersonal communication. You then shoot off an email to your babysitter, reminding him to drop by the house at seven so you and your partner can have a night out. Yep, this is interpersonal communication too. You drop by your doctor's office for your annual physical, and the two of you talk about any health issues, this is also a form of interpersonal communication. You text your child to remind him that he has play practice at 5:00 pm and then needs to come home immediately afterward, you've engaged in interpersonal interaction. Hopefully, you're beginning to realize that our days are filled with many interpersonal interactions.

Interpersonal communication is also referred to as dyadic communication because it involves two people or a dyad. As you read above, the type of dyad can range from intimate partners, to coworkers, to doctor-patient, to friends, to parent-child, and many other dyadic partnerships. Now we can engage in these interactions through verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and mediated communication. When we use words during our interaction to convey specific meaning, then we're engaging in **verbal communication**. **Nonverbal communication**, on the other hand, refers to a range of other factors that can impact how we understand each other. For example, the facial expressions you have. You could be talking to your best friend over coffee about a coworker and "his problems" while rolling your eyes to emphasize how overly dramatic and nonsensical you find your coworker. A great deal of how we interpret the verbal message of someone is based on the nonverbal messages sent at the same time. Lastly, we engage in interpersonal interactions using **mediated communication** through the use of various technologies, like the cellphone, emailing, texts, Facebook posts, Tweets, etc. Your average professional spends a great deal of her day responding to emails that come from one person, so the email exchange is a form of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal Communication can be informal (the checkout line) or formal (lecture classroom) (Figure 7.1) Often, interpersonal communication occurs in face-to-face contexts. It is usually unplanned, spontaneous, and ungrammatical. Think about the conversations that you have with your friends and family. These are mainly interpersonal in nature. It is essential to learn about interpersonal communication because this is the type of communication that you will be doing for most of your life. At most colleges, public speaking is a required course. Yet, most people will not engage in making a public speech for the majority of their life, but they will communicate with one other person daily, which is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication can help us achieve our personal and professional goals. In this chapter, you will learn the concepts associated with interpersonal communication and how certain variables can help you achieve your goals.

a) b)

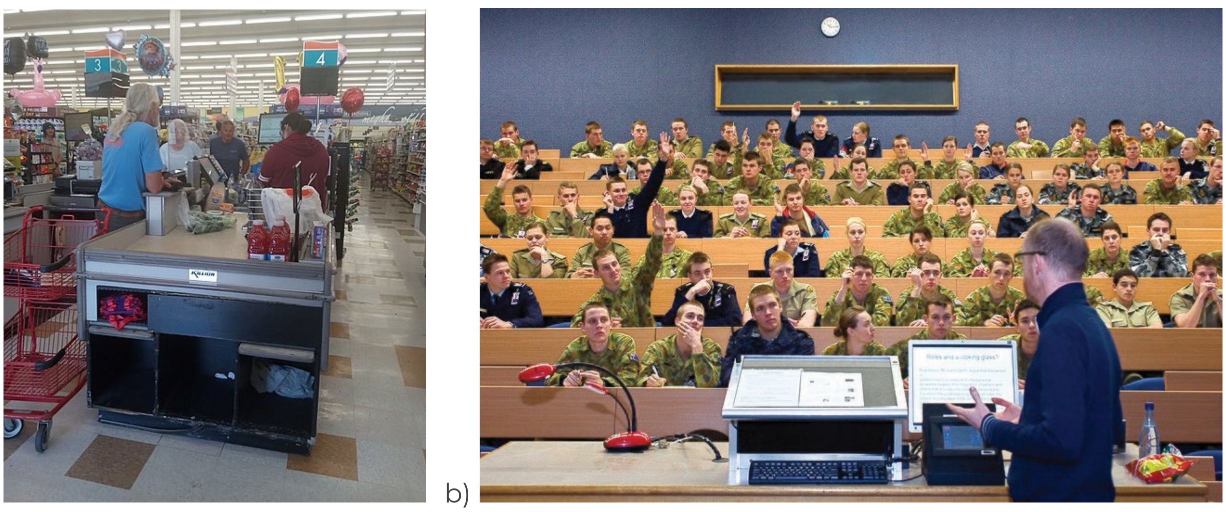

Figure 7.1 Interpersonal communication happens in all of our informal and formal interactions with other people. a) Checkout line for grocery store – Sonny Doe – CC BY-SA 4.0 b) ADFA Lecture Theatres – Kurt Barnett – CC BY-SA 3.0

Elements of Interpersonal Communication

You may think that communication is easy. However, at moments in your life, communicating with others might be challenging. We can study communication similar to the way we study other systems. There are elements to the communication process that are important to understand. Each interaction that we have will typically include a sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, and noise. Let’s take a closer look at each one.

Sender

Humans encode messages naturally, and we don't often consider this part of the process. However, if you have ever thought about the exact words that you would use to get a later curfew from your parents/guardians and how you might refute any counterpoints, then you intuitively know that choosing the right words – "encoding" – weighed heavily in your ability to influence your parents/guardians successfully. The language you chose mattered.

The **sender** is the encoder or source of the message. The sender is the person who initiates the communication and decides the intent of the message. The source may decide to send messages to entertain, persuade, inform, include, or escape. Often, the source will create a message based on their feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and past experiences. For instance, if you have feelings of affection towards someone but never communicate those feelings toward that person, they will never know. The sender can withhold or release information.

Receiver

The **receiver** is the individual who decodes the message and tries to understand the source of the message (Figure 7.2). Receivers have to filter messages based on their attitudes, beliefs, opinions, values, history, and prejudices. People will encode messages through their five senses. We have to pay attention to the source of the message to receive the message. If the receiver does not get the message, then communication did not occur. The receiver needs to obtain a message.

Daily, you will receive several messages. Some of these messages are intentional and some of these messages will be unintentional. For instance, a person waving in your direction might be waving to someone behind you, but you accidentally think they are waving at you.

Message

Messages include any type of textual, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication, in which individuals give meaning. People send messages intentionally (texting a friend to meet for coffee) or unintentionally (accidentally falling asleep during lectures). Messages can be verbal (saying hello to your parents/guardians), nonverbal (hugging your parents/guardians), or text (words on a computer screen) (Figure 7.2). Essentially, communication is how messages create meaning. Yet, meanings differ among people. For instance, a friend of yours promises to repay you for the money they borrowed, and they say "sorry" for not having any money to give you. You might think they were insincere, but another person might think that it was a genuine apology.

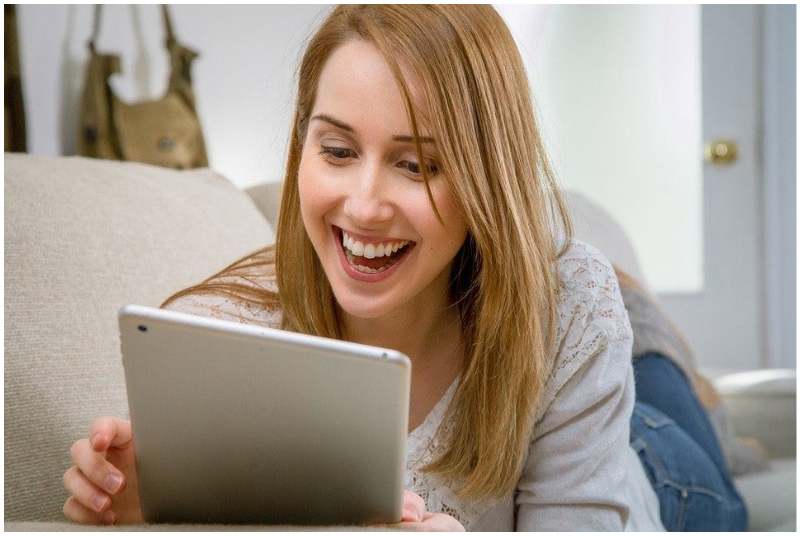

Figure 7.2 This woman is receiving a message on her tablet.
Woman Holding Tablet – PourquoiPas – Pixabay License

Channel

The **channel** is the medium in which we communicate our message and learn about information. With advances in technology, cell phones act as many different channels of communication at once. Consider that smartphones allow us to talk and text. Also, we can receive communication through Facebook, Twitter, Email, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, etc. All of these channels are in addition to our traditional channels, which were face-to-face communication, letter writing, telegram, and the telephone. The addition of these new communication channels has changed our lives forever (Figure 7.3). Think about breaking up a romantic relationship. Would you rather do it via face-to-face or via a text message? Why did you answer the way that you did? The channel can impact the message.

Now, think about how you hear important news. Do you learn about it from the Internet, social media, television, newspaper, or others?

It may seem like a silly thing to talk about channels, but a channel can make an impact on how people receive the message. For instance, a true story tells about NFL athlete, Roy Williams, who proposed marriage to his girlfriend, Brooke Daniels, by sending her the ring through the postal mail service. He sent her a ring and a recorded message asking her to marry him. She declined his proposal and refused to return the ring (NFL.com, 2011). In this case, the channel might have been better if he asked her face-to-face.

Just be mindful of how the channel can affect the way that a receiver reacts and responds to your message. For instance, a handwritten love letter might be more romantic than a typed email. On the other hand, if there was some tragic news about your family, you would probably want someone to call you immediately rather than sending you a letter.

Overall, people have cultural and social expectations that impact which channel they might use to send a message. In a research study focused on channels, college students were asked about the best channels for delivering messages (O'Sullivan, 2000). College students said that they would communicate face-to-face if the message was positive, but use mediated channels if the message was negative.

Figure 7.3 Modern channels of communication utilize various social media platforms. [Social Media Apps](#) – [Pixelkult](#) – [Pixabay License](#).

Feedback

Feedback is the response to the message. If there is no feedback, communication would not be effective. Feedback is important because the sender needs to know if the receiver got the message. Simultaneously, the receiver usually will give the sender some sort of message that they comprehend what has been said. If there is no feedback or if it seems that the receiver did not understand the message, then it is **negative feedback**. However, if the receiver understood the message, then it is positive feedback. **Positive feedback** does not mean that the receiver entirely agrees with the sender of the message, but rather the message was comprehended. Sometimes feedback is not positive or negative; it can be ambiguous. Examples of ambiguous feedback might include saying "hmmm" or "interesting." Based on these responses, it is not clear if the receiver of the message understood part or the entire message. It is important to note that feedback doesn't have to come from other people. Sometimes, we can be critical of our own words when we write them in a text or say them out loud. We might correct our words and change how we communicate based on our internal feedback.

Environment

The context or situation where communication occurs and affects the experience is referred to as the **environment**. We know that the way you communicate in a professional context might be different than in a personal context. In other words, you probably won't talk to your boss the same way you would talk to your best friend. (An exception might be if your best friend was also your boss). The environment will affect how you communicate. For instance, in a library, you might speak more quietly than normal so that you don't disturb other library patrons. However, in a nightclub or bar, you might speak louder than normal due to the other people talking and loud music. Hence, the environment makes a difference in the way in which you communicate with others.

It is also important to note that environments can be related to fields of experience or a person's past experiences or background. For instance, a town hall meeting that plans to cut primary access to lower socioeconomic residents might be perceived differently by individuals who use these services and those who do not. Environments might overlap, but sometimes they do not. Some people in college have had many family members who attended the same school, but other people do not have any family members that have ever attended college.

Noise

Anything that interferes with the message is called **noise**. Noise keeps the message from being completely understood by the receiver. If noise is absent, then the message would be accurate. However, usually, noise impacts the message in some way. Noise might be physical (e.g., television, cell phone, fan, etc.), or it might be psychological (e.g., thinking about your parents/guardians or missing someone you love). Noise is anything that hinders or distorts the message.

There are four types of noise. The first type is **physical noise**. This is noise that comes from a physical object. For instance, people talking, birds chirping, a jackhammer pounding concrete, a car revving by, are all different types of physical noise.

The second type of noise is **psychological noise**. This is the noise that no one else can see unless you are a mind reader. It is the noise that occurs in a person's mind, such as frustration, anger, happiness, or depression. When you talk to a person, they might act and behave like nothing is wrong, but deep inside their mind, they might be dealing with a lot of other issues or problems. Hence, psychological noise is difficult to see or understand because it happens in the other person's mind.

The third type of noise is **semantic noise**, which deals with language. This could refer to jargon, accents, or language use. Sometimes our messages are not understood by others because of the word choice. For instance, if a person used the word "lit," it would probably depend on the other words accompanying the word "lit" and or the context. To say that "this party is lit" would mean something different compared to "he lit a cigarette." If you were coming from another country, that word might mean something different. Hence, sometimes language-related problems, where the receiver can't understand the message, are referred to as semantic noise.

The fourth and last type of noise is called **physiological noise**. This type of noise is because the receiver's body interferes or hinders the acceptance of a message. For instance, if the person is blind, they are unable to see any written messages that you might send. If the person is deaf, then they are unable to hear any spoken messages. If the person is very hungry, then they might pay more attention to their hunger than any other message.

Interpersonal Communication Skills

In this section, we have learned about different aspects of interpersonal communication. Overall, some skills can make you a better interpersonal communicator. We will discuss each one in more detail below.

Listening Skills

The most important part of communication is not the actual speaking, but the listening part. If you are not a good listener, then you will not be a good communicator. One must engage in mindful listening. **Mindful listening** is when you give careful and thoughtful attention to the messages that you receive. People will often listen mindfully to important messages or to people that matter most. Think about how happy you get when you are talking to someone you really love or maybe how you pay more attention to what a professor says if they tell you it will be on the exam. In each of these scenarios, you are giving the speaker your undivided attention. Most of our listening isn't mindful, but there will be times where it will be important to listen to what others are telling us so that we can fulfill our personal and/or professional goals.

People Skills

People skills are a set of characteristics that will help you interact well with others (Thompson, 2015). These skills are most important in group situations and where cooperation is needed. These skills can also relate to how you handle social situations. They can make a positive impact on career advancement but also in relationship development (Hopkins, 2005). One of the most essential people skills to have is the ability to understand people. Being able to feel empathy or sympathy to another person's situation can go a long way. By putting yourself in other people's shoes and understanding their hardships or differences, you can put things into perspective. It can help you build a stronger and better interpersonal relationship.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotionally intelligent people can label their feelings appropriately and use this information to guide their behavior. EQ is highly associated with the ability to empathize with others. Furthermore, EQ can help people connect interpersonally. Research has demonstrated that people with higher levels of EQ are more likely to succeed in the workplace and have better mental health. They are often better leaders and effective managers of conflict.

Appropriate Skill Selection

The best interpersonal communicators are the ones who can use the appropriate skill in certain contexts. For instance, if it is a somber event, then they might not laugh. Or if it is a joyful occasion, they might not cry hysterically, unless they are tears of joy. The best politicians can sense the audience and determine what skills would be appropriate for which occasion. We know that humor can be beneficial in certain situations. However, humor can also be inappropriate for certain people. It is essential to know what skill is appropriate to use and when it is necessary to use it.

Communicating Ethically

The last interpersonal skill involves communication ethics. We have seen several people in the business world that have gotten in trouble for not communicating ethically. It is important to be mindful of what you say to others. You do not want people to think you are deceptive or that you are lying to them. Trust is a hard thing to build. Yet, trust can be taken away from you very quickly. It is essential that every time you communicate, you should consider the ethics behind your words. Words matter! So, what does it mean to communicate ethically interpersonally? Thankfully, the National Communication Association has created a general credo for ethical communication listed below (National Communication Association, 2017):

1. We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.
2. We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.
3. We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.
4. We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and society.
5. We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.
6. We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
7. We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.

8. We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.
9. We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

Intercultural Communication Skills

One of the latest buzz-words in the business world is "cultural intelligence," which was initially introduced by Earley and Ang (2003). In the past decade, a wealth of research has been conducted examining the importance of cultural intelligence during interpersonal interactions with people from other cultures. **Cultural intelligence (CQ)** is defined as an "individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity" (Ang and VanDyne, 2008a).

Become Culturally Intelligent

In their original study on the topic, Earley and Ang (2003) argued that cultural intelligence is based on four distinct factors: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions.

Cognitive CQ

First, cognitive CQ involves knowing about different cultures (intercultural knowledge). Many types of knowledge about a culture can be relevant during an intercultural interaction: rules and norms, economic and legal systems, cultural values and beliefs, the importance of art within a society, etc.… All of these different areas of knowledge involve facts that can help you understand people from different cultures. For example, in most of the United States, when you are talking to someone, eye contact is very important. You may have even been told by someone to "look at me when I'm talking to you" if you've ever gotten in trouble. However, this isn't consistent across cultures. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures often view direct eye contact when talking to someone superior as a sign of disrespect. Knowing how eye contact functions across cultures can help you know more about how to interact with people from various cultures (Morrison and Conaway, 2006).

Motivational CQ

Second, we have motivational CQ, or the degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to different cultural environments. Motivation is the key to effective intercultural interactions. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you are not motivated to have successful intercultural interactions, you will not have them.

Metacognitive CQ

Third, metacognitive CQ involves being consciously aware of your intercultural interactions in a manner that helps you have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures (intercultural understanding). All of the knowledge about cultural differences in the world will not be beneficial if you cannot use that information to understand and adapt your behavior during an interpersonal interaction with someone from a differing culture. As such, we must always be learning about cultures but also be ready to adjust our knowledge about people and their cultures through our interactions with them.

Behavioral CQ

Lastly, behavioral CQ is the next step following metacognitive CQ, which is behaving in a manner that is consistent with what you know about other cultures (Ang and VanDyne, 2008b). We should never expect others to adjust to us culturally. Instead, culturally intelligent people realize that it's best to adapt our behaviors (verbally and nonverbally) to bridge the gap between people culturally. When we go out of our way to be culturally intelligent, we will encourage others to do so as well.

As you can see, developing cultural intelligence involves a lot of work. As such, it's important to spend time and build your cultural intelligence if you are going to be an effective communicator in today's world.

Engaging Culturally Mindful Interactions

Admittedly, being culturally competent takes a lot of work and a lot of practice. Even if you're not completely culturally competent, you can engage with people from other cultures in a mindful way. We will now examine how the three-component model of mindfulness: attention, intention, and attitude, can aid us in becoming culturally competent (Shapiro and Carlson, 2017).

First, when it comes to engaging with people from other cultures, we need to be fully in the moment and not think about previous interactions with people from a culture or possible future interactions with people from a culture. Instead, it's essential to focus on the person you are interacting with. You also need to be aware of your stereotypes and prejudices that you may have of people from a different culture. Don't try to find evidence to support or negate these stereotypes or prejudices. If you focus on evidence-finding, you're just trying to satisfy your thoughts and feelings and not mindfully engaging with this other person. Also, if you find that your mind is shifting, recognize the shift and allow yourself to re-center on your interaction with the other person.

Second, go into an intercultural interaction knowing your intention. If your goal is to learn more about that person's culture, that's a great intention. However, that may not be the only intention we have when interacting with someone from another culture. For example, you may be interacting with someone from another culture because you're trying to sell them a product you represent. If your main intention is sales, then be aware of your intention and don't try to deceive yourself into thinking it's something more altruistic.

Lastly, go into all intercultural interactions with the right attitude. Remember, the goal of being mindful is to be open, kind, and curious. Although we often discuss mindful in terms of how we can be open, kind, and curious with ourselves, it's also important to extend that same framework when we are interacting with people from other cultures. So much of mindful relationships is embodying the right attitude during our interactions with others.

Overall, the goal of mindful intercultural interactions is to be present in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. When you face judgments, recognize them, and ask yourself where they have come from. Interrogate those judgments. At the same time, don't judge yourself for having these ideas. If we have stereotypes about another a specific culture, it's important to recognize those stereotypes, call them out, understand where they came from in the first place, and examine them for factualness.

For example, imagine you're talking to someone from the Republic of Kiribati. Chances are, you've probably never heard of the Republic of Kiribati, but it's a real country in Oceania. Let's say that all you know about the people from the Republic of Kiribati is that they like European-style football (or Soccer in the U.S.). During your interaction, you say, "So, what's your favorite football team?" In this moment, you've taken the one stereotype you had and used it to help engage in an interaction. However, if the person comes back and says, "I really don't care. Sports just aren't my thing." How do you respond? First, recognize that you attempted to use a stereotype that you had and call it out for what it was. That doesn't make you a bad person, but we must learn from these encounters and broaden our world views. Second, call out the stereotype in your mind. Before that moment, you may not have even realized that you had a stereotype of people from the Republic of Kiribati. Labeling our stereotypes of other people is important because it helps us recognize them faster, the more we engage in this type of mindful behavior. Third, figure out where that stereotype came from. Maybe you had been in New Zealand and saw a match on the television and saw the Kiribati national football team. In that one moment, you learned a tiny bit about an entire country and pocketed it away for future use. Sometimes it's easy to figure out where our stereotypes evolved from, but sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in us through our own culture that it's hard to really figure out their origin. Lastly, it's time to realize that your stereotype may not be that factual. At the same time, you may have found the one resident of the Republic of Kiribati who doesn't like football. We can often make these determinations by talking to the other person.

At the same time, it's important also to be mindfully open to the other person's stereotypes of people within your own culture. For example, someone from the Republic of Kiribati may have a stereotype that Americans know nothing about football (other than American football). If you're a fan of what we in the U.S. call soccer, then you correct that stereotype or at least provide that person a more nuanced understanding of your own culture. Sure, American football still is the king of sports in the U.S., but media trends for watching football (soccer) are growing, and more and more Americans are becoming fans.

Figure 7.4 Culturally mindful interactions can aid in positive workplace relationships. Wikimedia Diversity Conference 2017 – Walaa – CC BY-SA 4.0.

Summary

- Communication fulfills our physical, personal, and social needs.
- Communication is a process because senders and receivers act as senders and receivers simultaneously, with the receiver's feedback serving as a key element to continuing the process.
- The components of the communication process involve the source, sender, channel, message, environment, and noise.
- Skills associated with effective interpersonal communication are listening skills, people skills, emotional intelligence, appropriate skill selection, and ethical communication.
- Cultural intelligence involves the degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations. Cultural intelligence consists of four distinct parts: knowledge, motivation, understanding, and behavior.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of your most recent communication with another individual. Write down this conversation and, within the conversation, identify the components of the communication process.
2. Think about the different types of noise that affect communication. Can you list some examples of how noise can make communication worse?
3. We all do something well in relation to communication. What are your best communication skills? In what areas would you like to improve?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix combining 2.2 Elements of Interpersonal Communication, 2.5 Interpersonal Communication Skills, and 6.4 Improving Intercultural Communication Skills (Interpersonal Communication – Milne Publishing) into one chapter on interpersonal communication.
- Added all images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Reformatted in-text citations and references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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7.2 Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the motives and needs for interpersonal communication.
- Describe motives for self-disclosure.
- Compare and contrast the different types of listening.
- Discuss different types of listening responses.

We are constantly interacting with people. We interact with our family and friends. We interact with our teachers and peers at school. We interact with customer service representatives, office coworkers, physicians/therapists, and so many other different people in average day. Humans are inherently social beings, so speaking and listening to each other is a huge part of what we all do day-to-day.

The Importance of Everyday Conversations

Most of us spend a great deal of our day interacting with other people through what is known as a conversation. According to Judy Apps, the word "conversation" is comprised of the words *con* (with) and *versare* (turn): "conversation is turn and turnabout – you alternate" (Apps, 2014, p. 12). As such, a conversation isn't a monologue or singular speech act; it's a dyadic process where two people engage with one another in interaction that has multiple turns. Conversation is an important part of the interpersonal experience. Through conversations with others, we can build, maintain, and terminate relationships.

Coming up with an academic definition for the term "conversation" is not an easy task. Instead, Donald Allen and Rebecca Guy offer the following explanation: "Conversation is the primary basis of direct social relations between persons. As a process occurring in real-time, conversation constitutes a reciprocal and rhythmic interchange of verbal emissions. It is a sharing process which develops a common social experience" (Allen and Guy, 1974, p. 11). From this explanation, a conversation is how people engage in social interaction in their day-to-day lives. From this perspective, a conversation is purely a verbal process. For our purposes, we will use a definition provided by Brennan (2013, p. 202): "**Conversation** is a joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate interactively."

There is growing concern that in today's highly mediated world, the simple conversation is becoming a thing of the past. Sherry Turkle is one of the foremost researchers on how humans communicate using technology. She tells the story of an 18-year-old boy who uses texting for most of his fundamental interactions. The boy wistfully told Turkle, “Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I’d like to learn how to have a conversation.” (2012). When she asks Millennials across the nation what’s wrong with holding a simple conversation:

> I’ll tell you what’s wrong with having a conversation. It takes place in real-time and you can’t control what you’re going to say.” So that’s the bottom line. Texting, email, posting, all of these things let us present the self as we want to be. We get to edit, and that means we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch, the face, the voice, the flesh, the body–not too little, not too much, just right.

We should not take communication for granted. Communication is a vital component of our lives. A few years ago, a prison decided to lessen the amount of communication inmates could have with each other. The prison administrators decided that they did not want inmates to share information. Yet, over time, the prisoners developed a way to communicate with each other using codes on walls and tapping out messages through pipes. Even when inmates were not allowed to talk to each other via face-to-face, they were still able to find other ways to communicate (Duck, 2007).

Types of Conversations

Angel (2016) states that conversations can be categorized based on directionality (one-way or two-way) and tone/purpose (cooperative or competitive). One-way conversations are conversations where an individual is talking *at* the other person and not *with* the other person. Although these exchanges are technically conversations because of the inclusion of nonverbal feedback, one of the conversational partners tends to monopolize the bulk of the conversation while the other partner is more of a passive receiver. Two-way conversations, on the other hand, are conversations where there is mutual involvement and interaction. In two-way conversations, people are actively talking, providing nonverbal feedback, and listening.

In addition to one vs. two-way interactions, conversations can be broken down on whether they are cooperative or competitive. Cooperative conversations are marked by a mutual interest in what all parties within the conversation have to contribute. Conversely, individuals in competitive conversations are more concerned with their points of view than others within the conversation. Angel (2016) further breaks down his typology of conversations into four distinct types of conversation (Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5 Four Types of Conversations

Discourse

The first type of conversation, discourse, is one-way cooperative. The purpose of a **discourse** conversation is for the sender to transmit information to the receiver (Angel, 2016). For example, a professor delivering a lecture or a speaker giving a speech.

Dialogue

The second type is what most people consider to be a traditional conversation: the **dialogue** (two-way, cooperative). The purpose of a dialogue is to establish rapport and build relationships through information exchange (Angel, 2016). On a first date, the general purpose of most of our conversations in this context is dialogue (Figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6 If the dialogue is successful, two people might agree to another date. Dinner Date – StockSnap – Pixabay License.

Debate

The third type of conversation is the two-way, competitive conversation, referred to as a debate. The **debate** conversation occurs when the ultimate goal of the conversation is to win an argument or persuade someone to change their thoughts, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Angel, 2016). Imagine you're sitting in a study group and you're trying to advocate for a specific approach to your group's project. In this case, your goal is to persuade the others within the conversation to your point-of-view.

Diatribe

Lastly, Angel (2016) discusses the diatribe (one-way, competitive). The goal of the **diatribe** conversation is "to express emotions, browbeat those that disagree with you, and/or inspires those that share the same perspective." For example, imagine that your best friend has come over to your dorm room, apartment, or house to vent about the grade they received on a test.

Communication Needs

There are many reasons why we communicate with each other, but what are our basic communication needs? The first reason why we communicate is for physical needs. People who communicate their problems, feelings, and thoughts with others are less likely to hold grudges, anger, hostility, which in turn causes less stress on their minds and their bodies.

Another reason why we communicate with others is that it shapes who we are or our identity needs. Perhaps you never realized that you were funny until your friends told you that you were quite humorous. Sometimes, we become who we are based on what others say to us and about us.

The third reason we communicate is for social needs. We communicate with others to initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships with others. These relationships may be personal or professional. In either case, we have motives or objectives for communicating with other people.

The last reason we communicate is for practical needs. To exchange information or solve problems, we need to talk to others. Communication can prevent disasters from occurring. To create and/or sustain a daily balance in our lives, we need to communicate with other people. Hence, there is no escaping communication. We do it all the time.

Sharing Personal Information

One of the primary functions of conversations is sharing information about ourselves. Berger and Calabrese (1975) believed that when we meet new people, we are fraught with uncertainty about the new relationship and will seek to reduce this uncertainty and its resulting anxiety. As verbal communication increases between people when they first meet, the level of uncertainty decreases. Specifically, the type of verbal communication generally discussed in initial interactions is called self-disclosure (Sprecher, Treger, Wondra, Hilaire, & Wallpe, 2013). **Self-disclosure** is the process of purposefully communicating information about one's self. We can also think of self-disclosure as permitting one's "true self" to be known to others (Jourard, 1971).

As we introduce the concept of self-disclosure in this section, it's important to realize that there is no right or wrong way to self-disclose. People self-disclose for a wide range of reasons and purposes. Ignatius and Kokkonen (2007) list several influences on the ways that people self-disclose including:

- Personality traits (shy people self-disclose less than extraverted people)
- Cultural background (Western cultures disclose more than Eastern cultures)
- Emotional state (happy people self-disclose more than sad or depressed people)
- Biological sex (women self-disclose more than men)
- Psychological gender (androgynous people were more emotionally aware, topically involved, and invested in their interactions; feminine individuals disclosed more in social situations, and masculine individuals generally did not demonstrate meaningful self-disclosure across contexts)
- Status differential (lower status individuals are more likely to self-disclose personal information than higher-status individuals)
- Physical environment (soft, warm rooms encourage self-disclosure while hard, cold rooms discourage self-disclosure)
- Physical contact (touch can increase self-disclosure, unless the other person feels that their personal space is being invaded, which can decrease self-disclosure)
- Communication channel (people often feel more comfortable self-disclosing when they're not face-to-face; e.g., on the telephone or through computer-mediated communication)

As you can see, there are quite a few things that can impact how self-disclosure happens when people are interacting during interpersonal encounters. So, what ultimately motivates someone to self-disclose? There are two basic reasons for self-disclosure: social integration and impression management (Ignatius and Kokkonen, 2007).

Social Integration

The first reason people self-disclose information about themselves is simply to develop interpersonal relationships. Part of forming an interpersonal relationship is seeking to demonstrate that we have commonality with another person (Figure 7.7). For example, let's say that it's the beginning of a new semester, and you're sitting next to someone you've never met before. You quickly strike up a conversation while you're waiting for the professor to show up. During those first few moments of talking, you're going to try to establish some kind of commonality. Self-disclosure helps us find these areas where we have similar interests, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. As humans, we have an innate desire to be social and meet people. And research has shown us that self-disclosure is positively related to liking (Collins and Miller, 1994). The more we self-disclose to others, the more they like us and vice versa.

Figure 7.7 Students engage in self-disclosure before and after class. Students Talking – Pasqualon – Pixabay License

However, when we first meet someone, we do not expect that person to start self-disclosing their deepest darkest secrets. When this happens, then we experience an expectancy violation. **Expectancy violation theory (EVT)** analyzes what happens when individuals communicate nonverbally in a manner that was unexpected, such as standing too close while talking (Burgoon and Jones, 1976; Burgoon and Hale, 1988). Over the years, EVT has been expanded by many scholars to look at a range of different situations when communication expectations are violated. As a whole, EVT predicts that when individuals violate the norms of communication during an interaction, the interaction will be evaluated negatively. However, this does depend on the nature of the initial relationship. If we've been in a relationship with someone for a long time or if it's someone we want to be in a relationship with, we're more likely to overlook expectancy violations (Bachman and Guerrero, 2006).

So, how does this relate to self-disclosure? Mostly, there are ways that we self-disclose that are considered "normal" during different types of interactions and contexts. What you disclose to your best friend will be different than what you disclose to a stranger at the bus station. What you disclose to your therapist will be different than what you disclose to your professor. When you meet a stranger, the types of self-disclosure tend to be reasonably common topics: your major, sports teams, bands, the weather, etc. If, however, you decide to self-disclose information that is overly personal, this would be perceived as a violation of the types of topics that are normally disclosed during initial interactions. As such, the other person is probably going to try to get out of that conversation pretty quickly. When people disclose information that is inappropriate to the context, those interactions will generally be viewed more negatively Frisby and Sidelinger, 2013).

From a psychological standpoint, finding these commonalities with others helps reinforce our self-concept. We find that others share the same interests, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc., which demonstrates that how we think, feel, and behave are similar to those around us (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991).

Impression Management

The second reason we tend to self-disclose is to portray a specific impression of who we are as individuals to others. **Impression management** involves the use of verbal and nonverbal techniques of self-presentation to create as favorable of an impression of ourselves as possible (Ignatius and Kokkonen, 2007). Basically, we want people to view us in a specific way, so we communicate with others in an attempt to get others to see us that way. We commonly use six impression management techniques during interpersonal interactions: self-descriptions, accounts, apologies, entitlements and enhancements, flattery, and favors (Gardner and Martinko, 1988; Schlenker, 1980; Ignatius and Kokkonen, 2007).

Self-Descriptions

The first type of impression management technique we can use is **self-descriptions**, or talking about specific characteristics of ourselves. For example, if you want others to view you professionally, you would talk about the work that you've accomplished. If you want others to see you as someone fun to be around, you may talk about the parties you've thrown. In both of these cases, the goal is to describe ourselves in a manner that we want others to see.

Accounts

The second type of impression management is accounts. **Accounts** are explanations that attempt to minimize the severity of events (Schlenker, 1980). Accounts occur when an individual is attempting to explain something that their interactant may already know. However, they may try to deny that the event occurred or offer excuses or justifications for what occurred (Gardner and Martinko, 1988).

For the purposes of initial interactions, imagine that you're on a first date and your date has heard that you're a bit of a "player." An account may be given to downplay your previous relationships or explain away the rumors about your previous dating history.

Apologies

The third type of impression management tactics is apologies. According to Barry Schlenker, **Apologies** occur when someone admits that they have done something wrong while attempting to downplay the severity of the incident or the outcomes (Schlenker, 1980).

Imagine you just found out that a friend of yours told a personal story about you during class as an example. Your friend could offer an apology, admitting that they shouldn't have told the story, but also emphasize that it's not like anyone in the class knows who you are. In essence, the friend admits that they are wrong, but also downplays the possible outcomes from the inappropriate disclosure of your story.

Entitlements and Enhancements

The fourth type of impression management tactic is the use of entitlements and enhancements. **Entitlements** aid in emphasizing someone's role or responsibility for an event occurring (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). For example, imagine that you're talking to a new peer in class and they tell you about how they single-handedly organized a wildly popular concert that happened over the weekend. In this case, the individual is trying to maximize their responsibility for the party in an effort to look good.

Enhancements aid in emphasizing the favorability of an event itself (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). For example, imagine that in the same scenario, the individual talks less about how they did the event single-handedly and talks more about how amazing the event itself was. In this case, they're aligning themselves with the event, so the more amazing the event looks, the better you'll perceive them as an individual.

Flattery

The fifth impression management tactic is the use of **flattery**, or the use of compliments to get the other person to like you more. In this case, there is a belief that if you flatter someone, they will see you in a better light. Imagine there's a new player on your basketball team. Almost immediately, they start complimenting you on your form and how they wish they could be as good as you are. In this case, that person may be completely honest, but the use of flattery will probably get you to see that person more positively as well.

Favors

The last tactic that researches have described for impression management is favors. **Favors** involve an attempt to gain another person's approval by doing something nice for them (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). One way that we get others to like us is to do things for them. If we want our peers in class to like us, then maybe we'll share our notes with them when they're absent. We could also volunteer to let someone use our washer and dryer if they don't have one. There are all kinds of favors that we can do for others.

Although most of us don't think of favors as tactics for managing how people perceive us, they have an end result that does.

Listening

When it comes to daily communication, we spend about 45% of our communication listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing.[36] However, most people are not entirely sure what the word "listening" is or how to do it effectively.

Hearing refers to a passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through their ears (Figure 7.8a). Hearing is a physiological process that is continuously happening. We are constantly hearing sounds in the world around us, unless we are hearing impaired. Even in a sound-proof room, other sounds that are normally not heard like a beating heart or breathing will become more apparent as a result of the blocked background noise.

Listening, on the other hand, is generally seen as an active process. **Listening** involves focusing attention on the words of a speaker to understand the intended meanings of their speech (Wrench, Goding, Johnson, & Attias, 2017). From this perspective, hearing is more of an automatic response when we perceive sound; whereas, listening is what happens when we purposefully attend to different messages to understand their meanings.

We can even take this a step further and differentiate normal listening from critical listening. **Critical listening** involves using systematic and careful reasoning to determine whether a message is logical based on factual evidence (Wrench, Goding, Johnson, & Attias, 2017). From this perspective, it's one thing to attend to someone's message, but something very different to analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence to determine if the message is accurate or trustworthy.

a)  b) 

Figure 7.8 Hearing is the perceptual processing and interpretation of sound, whereas listening is an active process involving paying attention to someone's words. a) Hearing – RobinHiggins – Pixabay License b) Shimer College Susan Henking listening 2013 – Shimer College – CC BY 2.0

Listening Styles

Now that we have a better understanding of how listening works, let's talk about four different styles of listening. **Listening styles** involve our beliefs and attitudes about the various aspects of receiving and encoding information such as who, what, where, when, and how (Watson, Barker, & Waver, 1995). There are four different styles of listening; people, content, action, and time.

People-Oriented

The first listening style is the people-oriented listening style. **People-oriented** listeners tend to be more focused on the person sending the message than the content of the message. As such, people-oriented listeners focus on the emotional states of senders of information. One way to think about people-oriented listeners is to see them as highly compassionate, empathic, and sensitive, which allows them to put themselves in the shoes of the person sending the message.

People-oriented listeners often work well in helping professions where listening to the person and understanding their feelings is very important (e.g., therapist, counselor, social worker, etc.). People-oriented listeners are also very focused on maintaining relationships, so they are good at casual conservation where they can focus on the person.

Action-Oriented

The second listening style is the action-oriented listener. **Action-oriented** listeners are focused on what the source wants. The action-oriented listener wants a source to get to the point quickly. Instead of long, drawn-out lectures, the action-oriented speaker would prefer quick bullet points that get to what the source desires. Action-oriented listeners appreciate speakers who are direct and organized (Bodie and Worthington, 2010).

When dealing with an action-oriented listener, it's important to realize that they want you to be logical and get to the point. One of the things action-oriented listeners commonly do is search for errors and inconsistencies in someone's message, so it's important to be organized and have your facts straight.

Content-Oriented

The third type of listener is the content-oriented listener. **Content-oriented** listeners focus on the content of the message and process that message in a systematic way. Of the four different listening styles, content-oriented listeners are more adept at listening to complex information. Content-oriented listeners focus on the entire message before forming an opinion about the content of the message, whereas action-oriented listeners display frustration if they believe the speaker is wasting time (Bodie and Worthington, 2010). When it comes to analyzing messages, content-oriented listeners really want to dig into the message itself. They want as much information as possible in order to make the best evaluation of the message.

Time-Oriented

The final listening style is the time-oriented listening style. **Time-oriented** listeners are sometimes referred to as "clock watchers" because they're always in a hurry and want a source of a message to speed things up a bit. Time-oriented listeners are vocal about the amount of time they have available to listen and are likely to interrupt the speaker or display nonverbal signals of disinterest (Bodie, Worthington, & Gearhart, 2013).

Time-oriented listeners often feel that they are overwhelmed by so many different tasks that need to be completed (whether real or not), so they usually try to accomplish multiple tasks while they are listening to a source. Of course, multitasking often leads to someone's attention being divided, and information being missed.

Hopefully, this section has helped you further understand the complexity of listening. Many people do not only engage in one listening style or another. It's possible to be a combination of different listening styles. However, some of the listening style combinations are more common. For example, someone who is action-oriented and time-oriented will want the bare-bones information so they can make a decision. On the other hand, it's hard to be a people-oriented listener and time-oriented listener because being empathic and attending to someone's feelings takes time and effort.

Types of Listening Responses

Who do you think is a great listener? Why did you name that particular person? How can you determine that someone is a good listener? You probably recognize a good listener based on the nonverbal and verbal cues that they display. We don't all listen in the same way. Different contexts often require a distinct listening response that is appropriate for that situation. Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor II, 2013) found different types of listening responses: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising (Figure 7.9). We will examine each of these.

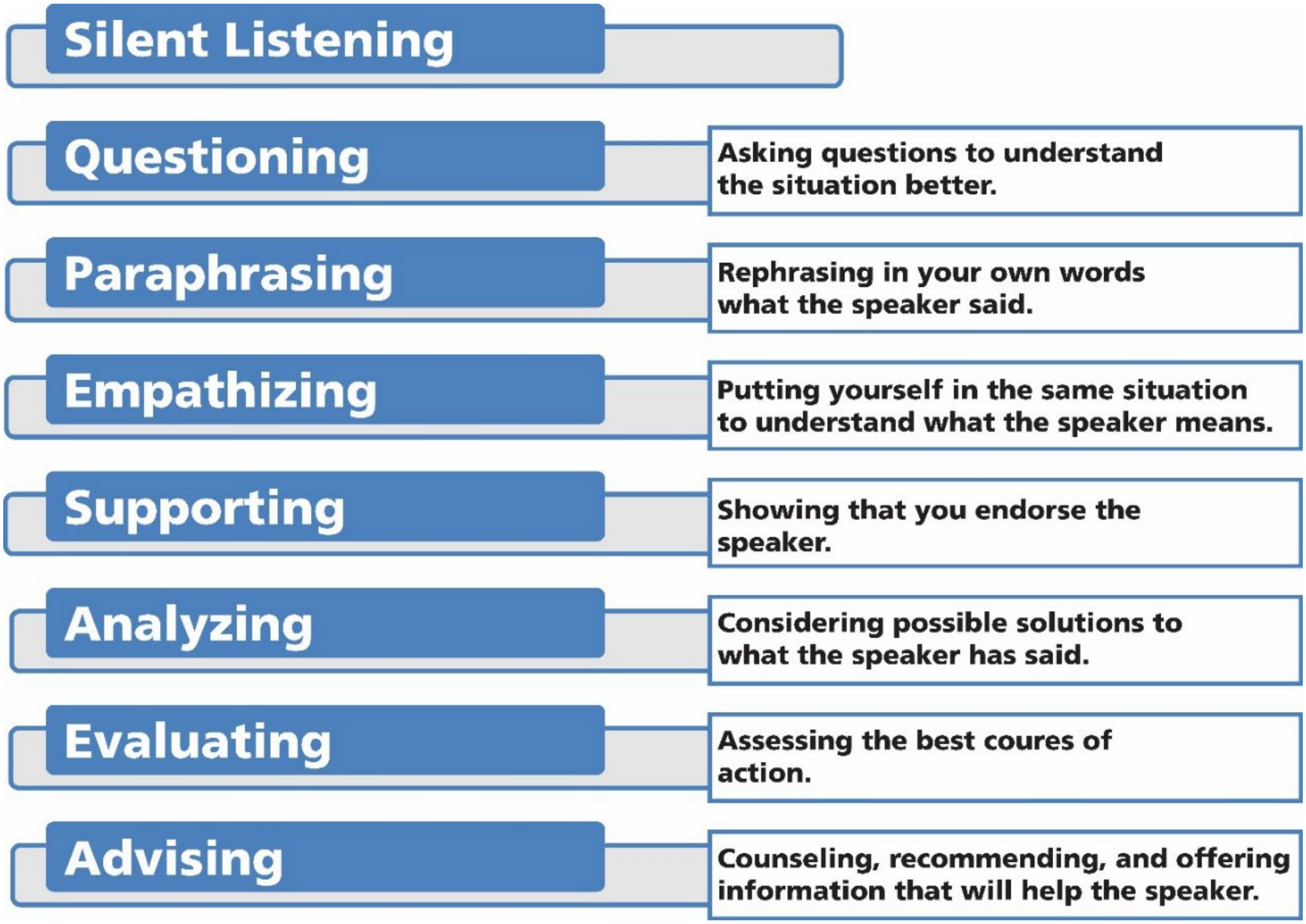

Figure 7.9. Types of Listening Responses

Silent Listening

Silent listening occurs when you say nothing. It is ideal in certain situations and awful in other situations. However, when used correctly, it can be very powerful. If misused, you could give the wrong impression to someone. It is appropriate to use when you don't want to encourage more talking. It also shows that you are open to the speaker's ideas. Sometimes people get angry when someone doesn't respond. They might think that this person is not listening or trying to avoid the situation. But it might be due to the fact that the person is just trying to gather their thoughts, or perhaps it would be inappropriate to respond. There are certain situations such as in counseling, where silent listening can be beneficial because it can help that person figure out their feelings and emotions.

Questioning

In situations where you want to get answers, it might be beneficial to use questioning. You can do this in a variety of ways. There are several ways to question in a sincere, nondirective way (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Five Reasons to use Questioning as a Listening Response

Reason	**Example**
To clarify meanings	A young child might mumble something and you want to make sure you understand what they said.
To learn about others' thoughts, feelings, and wants (**open/closed questions**)	When you ask your partner where they see your relationship going in the next few years.
To encourage elaboration	Nathan says "That's interesting!" Jonna has to ask him further if he means interesting in a positive or negative way.
To encourage discovery	Ask your parents how they met because you never knew.
To gather more facts and details	Police officers at the scene of the crime will question any witnesses to get a better understanding of what happened.

You might have different types of questions. **Sincere questions** are ones that are created to find a genuine answer. **Counterfeit questions** are disguised attempts to send a message, not to receive one. Sometimes, counterfeit questions can cause the listener to be defensive. For instance, if someone asks you, "Tell me how often you used crystal meth." The speaker implies that you have used meth, even though that has not been established. A speaker can use questions that make statements by emphasizing specific words or phrases, stating an opinion or feeling on the subject. They can ask questions that carry hidden agendas, like "Do you have $5?" because the person would like to borrow that money. Some questions seek "correct" answers. For instance, when a friend says, "Do I look fat?" You probably have a correct or ideal answer. There are questions that are based on unchecked assumptions. An example would be, "Why aren't you listening?" This example implies that the person wasn't listening, when in fact they are listening.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is defined as restating in your own words, the message you think the speaker just sent. There are three types of paraphrasing. First, you can change the speaker's wording to indicate what you think they meant. Second, you can offer an example of what you think the speaker is talking about. Third, you can reflect on the underlying theme of a speaker's remarks. Paraphrasing represents mindful listening in the way that you are trying to analyze and understand the speaker's information. Paraphrasing can be used to summarize facts and to gain consensus in essential discussions. This could be used in a business meeting to make sure that all details were discussed and agreed upon. Paraphrasing can also be used to understand personal information more accurately. Think about being in a counselor's office. Counselors often paraphrase information to understand better exactly how you are feeling and to be able to analyze the information better.

Empathizing

Empathizing is used to show that you identify with a speaker's information. When you are able to view the information from the speaker's perspective, you can gain a better understanding of the meaning of their message. However, you are not empathizing when you deny others the rights to their feelings. Examples of this are statements such as, "It's really not a big deal" or "Who cares?" This indicates that the listener is trying to make the speaker feel a different way and passing judgment.

Supporting

Sometimes, in a discussion, people want to know how you feel about them instead of a reflection on the content. Several types of supportive responses are: agreement, offers to help, praise, reassurance, and diversion. The value of receiving support when faced with personal problems is very important. This has been shown to enhance psychological, physical, and relational health. To effectively support others, you have to make sure that your expression of support is sincere, be sure that other person can accept your support, and focus on "here and now" rather than "then and there."

Analyzing

Analyzing is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message. However, this can be problematic at times. Sometimes the speaker might not be able to understand your perspective or may become more confused by accepting it. To avoid this, steps must be taken in advance. These include tentatively offering your interpretation instead of as an absolute fact. By being more sensitive about it, it might be more comfortable for the speaker to accept. You can also make sure that your analysis has a reasonable chance of being correct. If it were inaccurate, it would leave the person more confused than before. Also, you must make sure the person will be receptive to your analysis and that your motive for offering is to truly help the other person. An analysis offered under any other circumstances is useless.

Evaluating

Evaluating appraises the speaker's thoughts or behaviors. The evaluation can be favorable ("That makes sense") or negative (passing judgment). Negative evaluations can be critical or non-critical (constructive criticism). Two conditions offer the best chance for evaluations to be received: if the person with the problem requested an evaluation, and if it is genuinely constructive and not designed as a putdown.

Advising

Advising differs from evaluations. It is not always the best solution and can sometimes be harmful. In order to avoid this, you must make sure four conditions are present: be sure the person is receptive to your suggestions, make sure they are truly ready to accept it, be confident in the correctness of your advice, and be sure the receiver won't blame you if it doesn't work out.

Summary

- There are six communication motives: control, affection, relaxation, pleasure, inclusion, and escape. There are four communication needs: physical, identity, social, and practical.
- We self-disclose to share information with others. It allows us to express our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- The listening process includes: having the motivation to listen, clearly hearing the message, paying attention, interpreting the message, evaluating the message, remembering and responding appropriately.
- There are many types of listening styles: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented.
- The different types of listening responses are silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising.
- Questioning can be to clarify meanings, encourage elaboration, learn about others, increase discovery, or obtain more information.

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on how you introduce yourself in a new situation. Write down what you typically say to a stranger. You can role play with a friend and then switch roles. What did you notice? How many of those statements are habitual? Why?
2. For the next week, do a listening diary. Take notes of all the things you listen to and analyze to see if you are truly a good listener. Do you ask people to repeat things? Do you paraphrase?
3. Write down an example of each of the listening responses and why it is appropriate for that situation. Why did you write down what you did?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course, as well as follow APA 7th edition in-text citation formatting.
- Remix of Chapter 7: Talking and Listening (Interpersonal Communication – Milne Publishing).
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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Chapter 8: Stress

Have you ever forgotten where you left your keys and it caused you to be late? Or perhaps you have had multiple assignments due and not enough time to get them all done? These events can cause us to feel overwhelmed and experience stress.

In this chapter you will learn about stress. You will learn about sources of stress, how to cope with stress, and what to do about workplace stress. This will provide you with coping skills to handle the stress you experience.

8.1 What is Stress?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe various definitions of stress, including the difference between stimulus-based and response-based stress and good stress and bad stress.
- Describe different types of possible stressors.
- Differentiate between good stress and bad stress.

You are exhausted. When you get home, you drop your work bag and realize you forgot to send an e-mail to your supervisor about an upcoming project. You groan as you run downstairs to your computer. The clock says 7:03 p.m. and you feel like you haven't had a minute to yourself since this morning. As you think about your day, you realize, you haven't! It is your company's busy time so the last few days have been booked with meetings and a huge project, with a Friday deadline. You send the e-mail, make a quick sandwich for dinner, and sit back down at your computer. You are hoping to get a few more things done on the project before tomorrow morning. As you work, you receive text messages from a colleague who is working on one portion of the project. You answer her texts and think about checking Facebook but decide against it as you just have too much to do. Your status update meeting is at 9 a.m. and you want to be able to show extensive progress on the project. At 10:30 p.m., you shut your computer, go to bed, and have a hard time falling asleep because you are thinking about everything you need to finish this week.

Does this sound like someone you know? Many people today are struggling with the ability to manage time with so much work/school to do and personal/family lives to manage. Technology has certainly made working longer hours easier, as we are always in touch with the office. What we can tend to forget is the importance of managing our stress levels so we can function more effectively. In this situation, having no free time during the day may work for a few days but isn't a healthy long-term solution. This chapter will discuss some types of stress, the effects of stress, and what you can do to reduce stress.

You probably know exactly what it's like to feel stress, but what you may not know is that it can objectively influence your health. Answers to questions like, "How stressed do you feel?" or "How overwhelmed do you feel?" can predict your likelihood of developing both minor illnesses as well as serious problems like future heart attack (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007).

The term stress as it relates to the human condition first emerged in scientific literature in the 1930s, but it did not enter the popular vernacular until the 1970s (Lyon, 2012). Today, we often use the term loosely in describing a variety of unpleasant feeling states; for example, we often say we are stressed out when we feel frustrated, angry, conflicted, overwhelmed, or fatigued. Despite the widespread use of the term, stress is a fairly vague concept that is difficult to define with precision.

Researchers have had a difficult time agreeing on an acceptable definition of stress. Some have conceptualized stress as a demanding or threatening event or situation (e.g., a high-stress job, overcrowding, and long commutes to work). Such conceptualizations are known as **stimulus-based** definitions because they characterize stress as a stimulus that causes certain reactions. Stimulus-based definitions of stress are problematic, however, because they fail to recognize that people differ in how they view and react to challenging life events and situations. For example, a conscientious student who has studied diligently all semester would likely experience less stress during final exams week than would a less responsible, unprepared student.

Others have conceptualized stress in ways that emphasize the physiological responses that occur when faced with demanding or threatening situations (e.g., increased arousal). These conceptualizations are referred to as **response-based** definitions because they describe stress as a response to environmental conditions. For example, the endocrinologist Hans Selye, a famous stress researcher, once defined stress as the "response of the body to any demand, whether it is caused by, or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions" (Selye, 1976, p. 74). Selye's definition of stress is response-based in that it conceptualizes stress chiefly in terms of the body's physiological reaction to any demand that is placed on it. Neither stimulus-based nor response-based definitions provide a complete definition of stress. Many of the physiological reactions that occur when faced with demanding situations (e.g., accelerated heart rate) can also occur in response to things that most people would not consider to be genuinely stressful, such as receiving unanticipated good news: an unexpected promotion or raise.

A useful way to conceptualize **stress** is to view it as a process whereby an individual perceives and responds to events that they appraise as overwhelming or threatening to their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A critical element of this definition is that it emphasizes the importance of how we appraise—that is, judge—demanding or threatening events (often referred to as stressors); these appraisals, in turn, influence our reactions to such events. Two kinds of appraisals of a stressor are especially important in this regard: primary and secondary appraisals. A **primary appraisal** involves judgment about the degree of potential harm or threat to well-being that a stressor might entail. A stressor would likely be appraised as a threat if one anticipates that it could lead to some kind of harm, loss, or other negative consequence; conversely, a stressor would likely be appraised as a challenge if one believes that it carries the potential for gain or personal growth. For example, an employee who is promoted to a leadership position would likely perceive the promotion as a much greater threat if they believed the promotion would lead to excessive work demands than if they viewed it as an opportunity to gain new skills and grow professionally. Similarly, a college student on the cusp of graduation may face the change as a threat or a challenge (Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1 Graduating from college and entering the workforce can be viewed as either a threat (loss of financial support) or a challenge (opportunity for independence and growth). Graduation – Leo_Fontes – Pixabay License

The perception of a threat triggers a **secondary appraisal**, a judgment of the options available to cope with a stressor, as well as perceptions of how effective such options will be (Lyon, 2012) (Figure 8.2). As you may recall from what you learned about self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to complete a task is important (Bandura, 1994). A threat tends to be viewed as less catastrophic if one believes something can be done about it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Imagine that two middle-aged people, Robin and Madhuri, perform breast self-examinations one morning and each notices a lump on the lower region of their left breast. Although both view the breast lump as a potential threat (primary appraisal), their secondary appraisals differ considerably. In considering the breast lump, some of the thoughts racing through Robin's mind are, "Oh my God, I could have breast cancer! What if the cancer has spread to the rest of my body and I cannot recover? What if I have to go through chemotherapy? I've heard that experience is awful! Oh, this is just horrible…I can't deal with it!" On the other hand, Madhuri thinks, "Hmm, this may not be good. Although most times these things turn out to be benign, I need to have it checked out. If it turns out to be breast cancer, there are doctors who can take care of it because the medical technology today is quite advanced. I'll have a lot of different options, and I'll be just fine." Clearly, Robin and Madhuri have different outlooks on what might turn out to be a very serious situation. As such, Robin would clearly experience greater stress than would Madhuri.

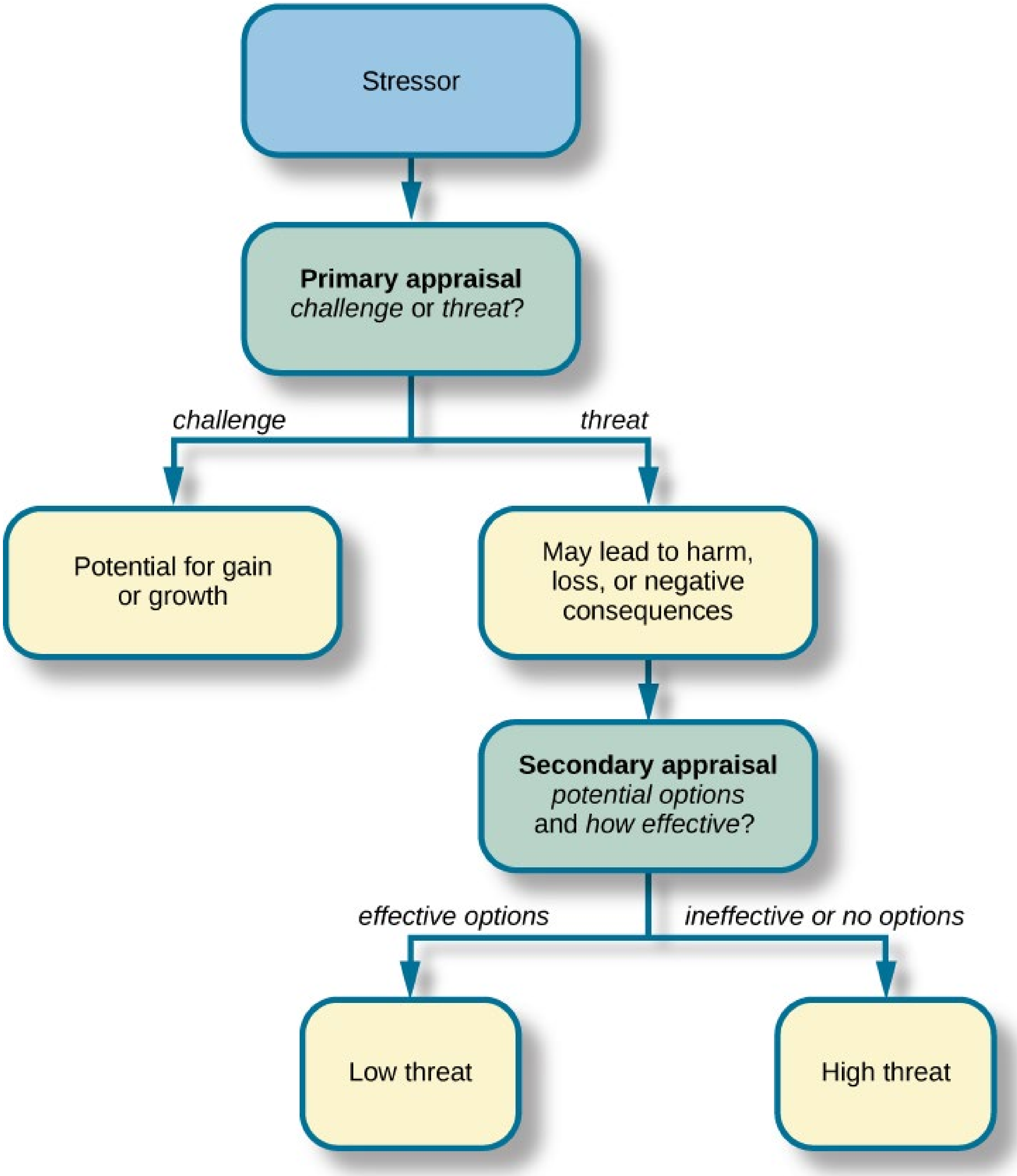

Figure 8.2 When encountering a stressor, a person judges its potential threat (primary appraisal) and then determines if effective options are available to manage the situation. Stress is likely to result if a stressor is perceived as extremely threatening or threatening with few or no effective coping options available.

To be sure, some stressors are inherently more stressful than others in that they are more threatening and leave less potential for variation in cognitive appraisals (e.g., objective threats to one's health or safety). Nevertheless, appraisal will still play a role in augmenting or diminishing our reactions to such events (Everly & Lating, 2002).

If a person appraises an event as harmful and believes that the demands imposed by the event exceed the available resources to manage or adapt to it, the person will subjectively experience a state of stress. In contrast, if one does not appraise the same event as harmful or threatening, they are unlikely to experience stress. According to this definition, environmental events trigger stress reactions by the way they are interpreted and the meanings they are assigned. In short, stress is largely in the eye of the beholder: it's not so much what happens to you as it is how you respond (Selye, 1976).

Stressors

For an individual to experience stress, they must first encounter a potential stressor. In general, stressors can be placed into one of two broad categories: chronic and acute. **Chronic stressors** include events that persist over an extended period of time, such as caring for a parent with dementia, long-term unemployment, or imprisonment. **Acute stressors** involve brief focal events that sometimes continue to be experienced as overwhelming well after the event has ended, such as falling on an icy sidewalk and breaking your leg (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007). Whether chronic or acute, potential stressors come in many shapes and sizes. They can include major traumatic events, significant life changes, daily hassles, as well as other situations in which a person is regularly exposed to threat, challenge, or danger.

Traumatic Events

Some stressors involve traumatic events or situations in which a person is exposed to actual or threatened death or serious injury. Stressors in this category include exposure to military combat, threatened or actual physical assaults (e.g., physical attacks, sexual assault, robbery, childhood abuse), terrorist attacks, natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, floods, hurricanes), and automobile accidents. Men, People of Color, and individuals in lower socioeconomic status (SES) groups report experiencing a greater number of traumatic events than do women, Whites, and individuals in higher SES groups (Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007). Some individuals who are exposed to stressors of extreme magnitude develop **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, a chronic stress reaction characterized by experiences and behaviors that may include intrusive and painful memories of the stressor event, jumpiness, persistent negative emotional states, detachment from others, angry outbursts, and avoidance of reminders of the event (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013).

Significant Life Changes

Most stressors that we encounter are not nearly as intense as the ones described above. Many potential stressors we face involve events or situations that require us to make changes in our ongoing lives and require time as we adjust to those changes. Examples include death of a close family member, marriage, divorce, and moving (Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3 Some fairly typical life events, such as moving, can be significant stressors. Even when the move is intentional and positive, the amount of resulting change in daily life can cause stress. [Moving Day](#) – [Jellaluna](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

In the 1960s, psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe wanted to examine the link between life stressors and physical illness, based on the hypothesis that life events requiring significant changes in a person's normal life routines are stressful, whether these events are desirable or undesirable. They developed the **Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)**, consisting of 43 life events that require varying degrees of personal readjustment (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Many life events that most people would consider pleasant (e.g., holidays, retirement, marriage) are among those listed on the SRRS; these are examples of eustress. Holmes and Rahe also proposed that life events can add up over time, and that experiencing a cluster of stressful events increases one's risk of developing physical illnesses.

In developing their scale, Holmes and Rahe asked 394 participants to provide a numerical estimate for each of the 43 items; each estimate corresponded to how much readjustment participants felt each event would require (Table 8.1). These estimates resulted in mean value scores for each event—often called life change units (LCUs) (Rahe, McKeen, & Arthur, 1967). The numerical scores ranged from 11 to 100, representing the perceived magnitude of life change each event entails. Death of a spouse ranked highest on the scale with 100 LCUs, and divorce ranked second highest with 73 LCUs. In addition, personal injury or illness, marriage, and job termination also ranked highly on the scale with 53, 50, and 47 LCUs, respectively. Conversely, change in residence (20 LCUs), change in eating habits (15 LCUs), and vacation (13 LCUs) ranked low on the scale (Table 1). Minor violations of the law ranked the lowest with 11 LCUs. To complete the scale, participants checked yes for events experienced within the last 12 months. LCUs for each checked item are totaled for a score quantifying the amount of life change. Agreement on the amount of adjustment required by the various life events on the SRRS is highly consistent, even cross-culturally (Holmes & Masuda, 1974).

Table 8.1 Stressors on the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967)

Life Event	Life Change Units
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Dismissal from work	47
Change in financial state	38
Change to different line of work	36
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Beginning or ending school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Change in working hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in schools	20
Change in social activities	18
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in eating habits	15
Minor violation of the law	11

Extensive research has demonstrated that accumulating a high number of life change units within a brief period of time (one or two years) is related to a wide range of physical illnesses (even accidents and athletic injuries) and mental health problems (Monat & Lazarus, 1991; Scully, Tosi, & Banning, 2000). In an early demonstration, researchers obtained LCU scores for U.S. and Norwegian Navy personnel who were about to embark on a six-month voyage. A later examination of medical records revealed positive (but small) correlations between LCU scores prior to the voyage and subsequent illness symptoms during the ensuing six-month journey (Rahe, 1974). In addition, people tend to experience more physical symptoms, such as backache, upset stomach, diarrhea, and acne, on specific days in which self-reported LCU values are considerably higher than normal, such as the day of a family member's wedding (Holmes & Holmes, 1970).

The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) provides researchers a simple, easy-to-administer way of assessing the amount of stress in people's lives, and it has been used in hundreds of studies (Thoits, 2010). Despite its widespread use, the scale has been subject to criticism. First, many of the items on the SRRS are vague; for example, death of a close friend could involve the death of a long-absent childhood friend that requires little social readjustment (Dohrenwend, 2006). In addition, some have challenged its assumption that undesirable life events are no more stressful than desirable ones (Derogatis & Coons, 1993). However, most of the available evidence suggests that, at least as far as mental health is concerned, undesirable or negative events are more strongly associated with poor outcomes (such as depression) than are desirable, positive events (Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007). Perhaps the most serious criticism is that the scale does not take into consideration respondents' appraisals of the life events it contains. As you recall, appraisal of a stressor is a key element in the conceptualization and overall experience of stress. Being fired from work may be devastating to some but a welcome opportunity to obtain a better job for others. The SRRS remains one of the most well-known instruments in the study of stress, and it is a useful tool for identifying potential stress-related health outcomes (Scully et al., 2000).

Daily Hassles

Potential stressors do not always involve major life events. **Daily hassles** are the minor irritations and annoyances that are part of our everyday lives (e.g., rush hour traffic, lost keys, obnoxious coworkers, inclement weather, arguments with friends or family) and can build on one another and leave us just as stressed as significant life changes (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981).

Researchers have demonstrated that the frequency of daily hassles is actually a better predictor of both physical and psychological health than are life change units. In a well-known study of San Francisco residents, the frequency of daily hassles was found to be more strongly associated with physical health problems than were life change events (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982). In addition, daily minor hassles, especially interpersonal conflicts, often lead to negative and distressed mood states (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989). Cyber hassles that occur on social media may represent a modern and evolving source of stress. In one investigation, social media stress was tied to loss of sleep in adolescents, presumably because ruminating about social media caused a physiological stress response that increased arousal (van der Schuur, Baumgartner, & Sumter, 2018). Clearly, daily hassles can add up and take a toll on us both emotionally and physically.

Figure 8.4 The importance of likes and online harassment through social media are increasing sources of stress for today's youth. Girl with Smartphone – MarieXMartin – Pixabay License

Is There Good Stress?

Stress is everywhere and has been on the rise over the last several years (Figure 8.5). Each of us is acquainted with stress—some are more familiar than others. In many ways, stress feels like a load you just can't carry—a feeling you experience when, for example, you have to drive somewhere in a blizzard, when you wake up late the morning of an important job interview, when you run out of money before the next pay period, and before taking an important exam for which, you realize you are not fully prepared.

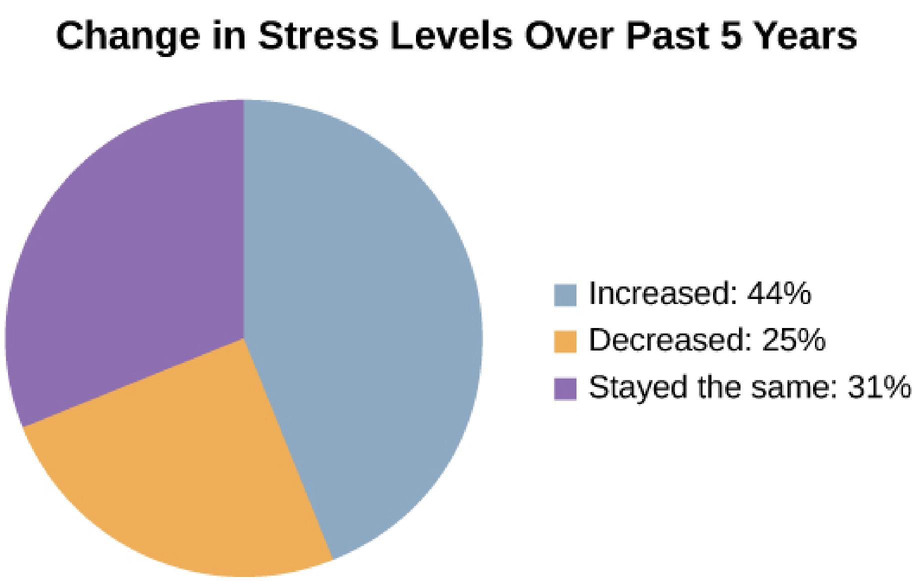

Figure 8.5 Nearly half of U.S. adults indicated that their stress levels have increased over the last five years (Neelakantan, 2013).

Although stress carries a negative connotation, at times it may be of some benefit. Stress can motivate us to do things in our best interests, such as study for exams, visit the doctor regularly, exercise, and perform to the best of our ability at work. Indeed, Selye (1974) pointed out that not all stress is harmful. He argued that stress can sometimes be a positive, motivating force that can improve the quality of our lives. This kind of stress, which Selye called **eustress** (from the Greek *eu* = "good"), is a good kind of stress associated with positive feelings, optimal health, and performance. A moderate amount of stress can be beneficial in challenging situations. For example, students may experience beneficial stress before a major exam. Research shows that moderate stress can enhance both immediate and delayed recall of educational material. Participants in one study who memorized a scientific text passage showed improved memory of the passage immediately after exposure to a mild stressor as well as one day following exposure to the stressor (Hupbach & Fieman, 2012).

Increasing one's level of stress will cause performance to change in a predictable way. As stress increases, so do performance and general well-being (eustress); when stress levels reach an optimal level (the highest point of the curve), performance reaches its peak (Figure 8.6). A person at this stress level will feel fully energized, focused, and can work with minimal effort and maximum efficiency. But when stress exceeds this optimal level, it is no longer a positive force—it becomes excessive and debilitating, or what Selye termed **distress** (from the Latin *dis* = "bad"). People who reach this level of stress feel burned out; they are fatigued, exhausted, and their performance begins to decline. If the stress remains excessive, health may begin to erode as well (Everly & Lating, 2002). A good example of distress is severe test anxiety. When students are feeling very stressed about a test, negative emotions combined with physical symptoms may make concentration difficult, thereby negatively affecting test scores.

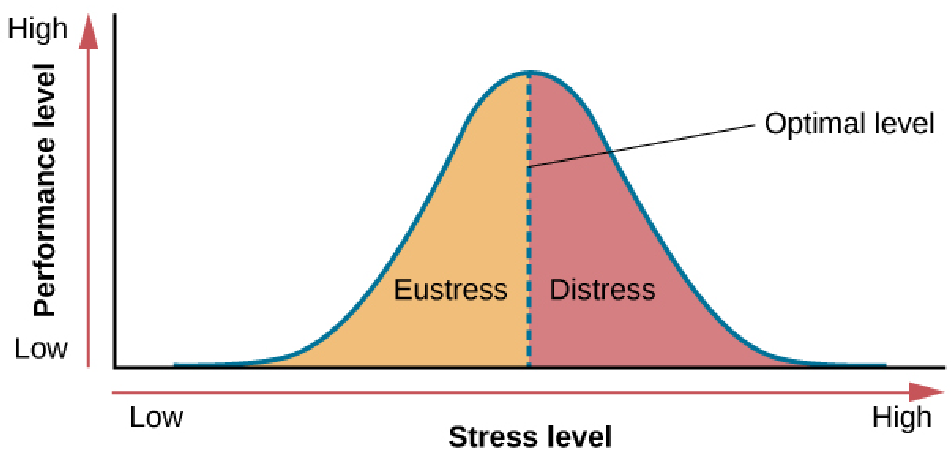

Figure 8.6 As the stress level increases from low to moderate, so does performance (eustress). At the optimal level (the peak of the curve), performance has reached its peak. If stress exceeds the optimal level, it will reach the distress region, where it will become excessive and debilitating, and performance will decline (Everly & Lating, 2002).

Summary

- Stress is a process whereby an individual perceives and responds to events appraised as overwhelming or threatening to one's well-being.
- Stressors can be chronic (long term) or acute (short term), and can include traumatic events, significant life changes, daily hassles, and situations in which people are frequently exposed to challenging and unpleasant events.
- Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe developed the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) to measure stress by assigning a number of life change units to life events that typically require some adjustment, including positive events.
- Many potential stressors also include daily hassles, which are minor irritations and annoyances that can build up over time.
- Stress can be positive (eustress) or negative (distress).

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss an example of a situation or event that could be appraised as either threatening or challenging.
2. Compare and contrast examples of chronic stress and acute stress. Discuss an example of when chronic stress might contribute to more negative effects on your life than acute stress. Discuss an example of when acute stress might contribute to more negative effects on your life than chronic stress.
3. Describe an example of how a daily hassle could contribute to chronic stress.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of combining sections What is Stress and Stressors (Psychology 2e – Openstax).
- Added and changed some images as well as changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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8.2 Coping With Stress

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define coping and differentiate between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping
- Describe the importance of perceived control in our reactions to stress
- Explain how social support is vital in health and longevity

As we learned in the previous section, stress—especially if it is chronic—takes a toll on our bodies and can have enormously negative health implications. When we experience events in our lives that we appraise as stressful, it is essential that we use effective coping strategies to manage our stress. **Coping** refers to mental and behavioral efforts that we use to deal with problems relating to stress.

Coping Styles

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguished two fundamental kinds of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. In **problem-focused coping**, one attempts to manage or alter the problem that is causing one to experience stress (i.e., the stressor). Problem-focused coping strategies are similar to strategies used in everyday problem-solving: they typically involve identifying the problem, considering possible solutions, weighing the costs and benefits of these solutions, and then selecting an alternative (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As an example, suppose Bradford receives a midterm notice that he is failing statistics class. If Bradford adopts a problem-focused coping approach to managing his stress, he would be proactive in trying to alleviate the source of the stress. He might contact his professor to discuss what must be done to raise his grade, he might also decide to set aside two hours daily to study statistics assignments, and he may seek tutoring assistance. A problem-focused approach to managing stress means we actively try to do things to address the problem.

Emotion-focused coping, in contrast, consists of efforts to change or reduce the negative emotions associated with stress. These efforts may include avoiding, minimizing, or distancing oneself from the problem, or positive comparisons with others ("I'm not as bad off as she is"), or seeking something positive in a negative event ("Now that I've been fired, I can sleep in for a few days"). In some cases, emotion-focused coping strategies involve **reappraisal**, whereby the stressor is construed differently (and somewhat self-deceptively) without changing its objective level of threat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, a person sentenced to federal prison who thinks, "This will give me a great chance to network with others," is using reappraisal. If Bradford adopted an emotion-focused approach to managing his midterm deficiency stress, he might watch a comedy movie, play video games, or spend hours on social media to take his mind off the situation. In a certain sense, emotion-focused coping can be thought of as treating the symptoms rather than the actual cause.

While many stressors elicit both kinds of coping strategies, problem-focused coping is more likely to occur when encountering stressors, we perceive as controllable, while emotion-focused coping is more likely to predominate when faced with stressors that we believe we are powerless to change (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Clearly, emotion-focused coping is more effective in dealing with uncontrollable stressors. For example, the stress you experience when a loved one dies can be overwhelming. You are simply powerless to change the situation as there is nothing you can do to bring this person back. The most helpful coping response is emotion-focused coping aimed at minimizing the pain of the grieving period.

Fortunately, most stressors we encounter can be modified and are, to varying degrees, controllable. A person who cannot stand her job can quit and look for work elsewhere; a middle-aged divorcee can find another potential partner; the freshman who fails an exam can study harder next time, and a breast lump does not necessarily mean that one is fated to die of breast cancer.

Control and Stress

The desire and ability to predict events, make decisions, and affect outcomes—that is, to enact control in our lives—is a basic tenet of human behavior (Everly & Lating, 2002). Albert Bandura (1997) stated that "the intensity and chronicity of human stress is governed largely by perceived control over the demands of one's life" (p. 262). As cogently described in his statement, our reaction to potential stressors depends to a large extent on how much control we feel we have over such things. **Perceived control** is our beliefs about our personal capacity to exert influence over and shape outcomes, and it has major implications for our health and happiness (Infurna & Gerstorf, 2014). Extensive research has demonstrated that perceptions of personal control are associated with a variety of favorable outcomes, such as better physical and mental health and greater psychological well-being (Diehl & Hay, 2010). Greater personal control is also associated with lower reactivity to stressors in daily life. For example, researchers in one investigation found that higher levels of perceived control at one point in time were later associated with lower emotional and physical reactivity to interpersonal stressors (Neupert, Almeida, & Charles, 2007). Further, a daily diary study with 34 older widows found that their stress and anxiety levels were significantly reduced on days during which the widows felt greater perceived control (Ong, Bergeman, & Bisconti, 2005).

People who report higher levels of perceived control view their health as controllable, thereby making it more likely that they will better manage their health and engage in behaviors conducive to good health (Bandura, 2004). Not surprisingly, greater perceived control has been linked to lower risk of physical health problems, including declines in physical functioning (Infurna, Gerstorf, Ram, Schupp, & Wagner, 2011), heart attacks (Rosengren et al., 2004), and both cardiovascular disease incidence (Stürmer, Hasselbach, & Amelang, 2006) and mortality from cardiac disease (Surtees et al., 2010). In addition, longitudinal studies of British civil servants have found that those in low-status jobs (e.g., clerical and office support staff) in which the degree of control over the job is minimal are considerably more likely to develop heart disease than those with high-status jobs or considerable control over their jobs (Marmot, Bosma, Hemingway, & Stansfeld, 1997).

The link between perceived control and health may provide an explanation for the frequently observed relationship between social class and health outcomes (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012). In general, research has found that more affluent individuals experience better health partly because they tend to believe that they can personally control and manage their reactions to life's stressors (Johnson & Krueger, 2006). Perhaps buoyed by the perceived level of control, individuals of higher social class may be prone to overestimating the degree of influence they have over particular outcomes. For example, those of higher social class tend to believe that their votes have greater sway on election outcomes than do those of lower social class, which may explain higher rates of voting in more affluent communities (Krosnick, 1990). Other research has found that a sense of perceived control can protect less affluent individuals from poorer health, depression, and reduced life-satisfaction—all of which tend to accompany lower social standing (Lachman & Weaver, 1998).

Taken together, findings from these and many other studies clearly suggest that perceptions of control and coping abilities are important in managing and coping with the stressors we encounter throughout life.

Social Support

The need to form and maintain strong, stable relationships with others is a powerful, pervasive, and fundamental human motive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Building strong interpersonal relationships with others helps us establish a network of close, caring individuals who can provide social support in times of distress, sorrow, and fear. **Social support** can be thought of as the soothing impact of friends, family, and acquaintances (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Social support can take many forms, including advice, guidance, encouragement, acceptance, emotional comfort, and tangible assistance (such as financial help). Thus, other people can be very comforting to us when we are faced with a wide range of life stressors, and they can be extremely helpful in our efforts to manage these challenges. Even in nonhuman animals, species mates can offer social support during times of stress. For example, elephants seem to be able to sense when other elephants are stressed and will often comfort them with physical contact—such as a trunk touch—or an empathetic vocal response (Krumboltz, 2014).

Scientific interest in the importance of social support first emerged in the 1970s when health researchers developed an interest in the health consequences of being socially integrated (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996). Interest was further fueled by longitudinal studies showing that social connectedness reduced mortality. In one classic study, nearly 7,000 Alameda County, California, residents were followed over 9 years. Those who had previously indicated that they lacked social and community ties were more likely to die during the follow-up period than those with more extensive social networks. Compared to those with the most social contacts, isolated men and women were, respectively, 2.3 and 2.8 times more likely to die. These trends persisted even after controlling for a variety of health-related variables, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, self-reported health at the beginning of the study, and physical activity (Berkman & Syme, 1979).

Since the time of that study, social support has emerged as one of the well-documented psychosocial factors affecting health outcomes (Uchino, 2009). A statistical review of 148 studies conducted between 1982 and 2007 involving over 300,000 participants concluded that individuals with stronger social relationships have a 50% greater likelihood of survival compared to those with weak or insufficient social relationships (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). According to the researchers, the magnitude of the effect of social support observed in this study is comparable with quitting smoking and exceeded many well-known risk factors for mortality, such as obesity and physical inactivity (Figure 8.7).

Figure 8.7 Close relationships with others provide more than happiness and fulfillment—they can help foster good health. Modification of [Group of Friends](#) – [Damian Gadal/Flickr](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

A number of large-scale studies have found that individuals with low levels of social support are at greater risk of mortality, especially from cardiovascular disorders (Brummett et al., 2001). Further, higher levels of social supported have been linked to better survival rates following breast cancer (Falagas et al., 2007) and infectious diseases, especially HIV infection (Lee & Rotheram-Borus, 2001). In fact, a person with high levels of social support is less likely to contract a common cold. In one study, 334 participants completed questionnaires assessing their sociability; these individuals were subsequently exposed to a virus that causes a common cold and monitored for several weeks to see who became ill. Results showed that increased sociability was linearly associated with a decreased probability of developing a cold (Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003).

For many of us, friends are a vital source of social support. But what if you find yourself in a situation in which you have few friends and companions? Many students who leave home to attend and live at college experience drastic reductions in their social support, which makes them vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Social media can sometimes be useful in navigating these transitions (Raney & Troop Gordon, 2012) but might also cause increases in loneliness (Hunt, Marx, Lipson, & Young, 2018). For this reason, many colleges have designed first-year programs, such as peer mentoring (Raymond & Shepard, 2018), that can help students build new social networks. For some people, our families—especially our parents—are a major source of social support.

Social support appears to work by boosting the immune system, especially among people who are experiencing stress (Uchino, Vaughn, Carlisle, & Birmingham, 2012). In a pioneering study, spouses of cancer patients who reported high levels of social support showed indications of better immune functioning on two out of three immune functioning measures, compared to spouses who were below the median on reported social support (Baron, Cutrona, Hicklin, Russell, & Lubaroff, 1990). Studies of other populations have produced similar results, including those of spousal caregivers of dementia sufferers, medical students, elderly adults, and cancer patients (Cohen & Herbert, 1996; Kiecolt-Glaser, McGuire, Robles, & Glaser, 2002).

In addition, social support has been shown to reduce blood pressure for people performing stressful tasks, such as giving a speech or performing mental arithmetic (Lepore, 1998). In these kinds of studies, participants are usually asked to perform a stressful task either alone, with a stranger present (who may be either supportive or unsupportive), or with a friend present. Those tested with a friend present generally exhibit lower blood pressure than those tested alone or with a stranger (Fontana, Diegnan, Villeneuve, & Lepore, 1999). In one study, 112 female participants who performed stressful mental arithmetic exhibited lower blood pressure when they received support from a friend rather than a stranger, but only if the friend was a male (Phillips, Gallagher, & Carroll, 2009). Although these findings are somewhat difficult to interpret, the authors mention that it is possible that females feel less supported and more evaluated by other females, particularly females whose opinions they value.

Taken together, the findings above suggest one of the reasons social support is connected to favorable health outcomes is because it has several beneficial physiological effects in stressful situations. However, it is also important to consider the possibility that social support may lead to better health behaviors, such as a healthy diet, exercising, smoking cessation, and cooperation with medical regimens (Uchino, 2009).

Stress Reduction Techniques

Beyond having a sense of control and establishing social support networks, there are numerous other means by which we can manage stress (Figure 8.8). A common technique people use to combat stress is exercise (Salmon, 2001). It is well-established that exercise, both of long (aerobic) and short (anaerobic) duration, is beneficial for both physical and mental health (Everly & Lating, 2002). There is considerable evidence that physically fit individuals are more resistant to the adverse effects of stress and recover more quickly from stress than less physically fit individuals (Cotton, 1990). In a study of more than 500 Swiss police officers and emergency service personnel, increased physical fitness was associated with reduced stress, and regular exercise was reported to protect against stress-related health problems (Gerber, Kellman, Hartman, & Pühse, 2010).

Figure 8.8 Exercise is one primary stress reduction technique. [Sport UNE Gym](#) – [UNE Photos](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

One reason exercise may be beneficial is because it might buffer some of the deleterious physiological mechanisms of stress. One study found rats that exercised for six weeks showed a decrease in hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal responsiveness to mild stressors (Campeau et al., 2010). In high-stress humans, exercise has been shown to prevent telomere shortening, which may explain the common observation of a youthful appearance among those who exercise regularly (Puterman et al., 2010). Further, exercise in later adulthood appears to minimize the detrimental effects of stress on the hippocampus and memory (Head, Singh, & Bugg, 2012). Among cancer survivors, exercise has been shown to reduce anxiety (Speck, Courneya, Masse, Duval, & Schmitz, 2010) and depressive symptoms (Craft, VanIterson, Helenowski, Rademaker, & Courneya, 2012). Clearly, exercise is a highly effective tool for regulating stress.

In the 1970s, Herbert Benson, a cardiologist, developed a stress reduction method called the **relaxation response technique** (Greenberg, 2006). The relaxation response technique combines relaxation with transcendental meditation, and consists of four components (Stein, 2001):

1. sitting upright on a comfortable chair with feet on the ground and body in a relaxed position,
2. being in a quiet environment with eyes closed,
3. repeating a word or a phrase—a mantra—to oneself, such as “alert mind, calm body,”
4. passively allowing the mind to focus on pleasant thoughts, such as nature or the warmth of your blood nourishing your body.

The relaxation response approach is conceptualized as a general approach to stress reduction that reduces sympathetic arousal, and it has been used effectively to treat people with high blood pressure (Benson & Proctor, 1994) (Figure 8.9).

Figure 8.9 Meditation and relaxation are also effective stress reduction techniques. Meditate – Caleb Roenigk – CC BY 2.0

Another technique to combat stress, **biofeedback**, was developed by Gary Schwartz at Harvard University in the early 1970s. Biofeedback is a technique that uses electronic equipment to accurately measure a person’s neuromuscular and autonomic activity—feedback is provided in the form of visual or auditory signals (Figure 8.10). The main assumption of this approach is that providing somebody biofeedback will enable the individual to develop strategies that help gain some level of voluntary control over what are normally involuntary bodily processes (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1995). A number of different bodily measures have been used in biofeedback research, including facial muscle movement, brain activity, and skin temperature, and it has been applied successfully with individuals experiencing tension headaches, high blood pressure, asthma, and phobias (Stein, 2001).

Figure 8.10 Biofeedback is one type of stress reduction technique used to treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). [Biofeedback training program](#) - [Dr. Carmen Russoniello](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

Understanding your current coping mechanisms for stress can help you determine what works to manage stress—and what doesn't. Once we do some self-analysis, we can use a method called the four A's (Sparks, 2019). The four A's gives us four choices for dealing with a stressor (Figure 8.11):

1. **Avoid the stressor.** We can try to avoid situations that stress us out. If watching certain television programs causes stress, stop watching them! Spend time with people who help you relax. We can also look at saying no more often if we do not have the time necessary to complete everything we are doing.
2. **Alter the stressor.** Another option in dealing with stress is to try to alter it, if you can't avoid it. This often involved problem-focused coping techniques. When changing a situation, you can be more assertive, manage time better, and communicate your own needs and wants better. For example, Karen can look at the things causing her stress, such as her home and school commitments; while she can't change the workload, she can examine ways to avoid a heavy workload in the future. If Karen is stressed about the amount of homework she has and the fact that she needs to clean the house, asking for help from roommates, for example, can help alter the stressor. Often this involves the ability to communicate well.
3. **Adapt to the stressor.** If you are unable to avoid or change the stressor, getting comfortable with the stressor is a way to handle it. Creating your own coping mechanisms for the stress and learning to handle it can be an effective way to handle the stress. These will likely employ emotion-focused coping techniques. For example,

we can try looking at stressful situations in a positive light, consider how important the stressor is in the long run, and adjust our standards of perfectionism.

4. **Accept the stressor.** Some stressors are unavoidable. We all have to go to work and manage our home life. So, learning to handle the things we cannot change by forgiving, developing tolerances, and letting going of those things we cannot control is also a way to deal with a stressor. This also involves emotion-focused coping. For example, if your mother-in-law's yearly visits and criticisms cause stress, obviously you are not able to avoid or alter the stress, but you can adapt to it and accept it. Since we cannot control another person, accepting the stressor and finding ways of dealing with it can help minimize some negative effects of the stress we may experience.

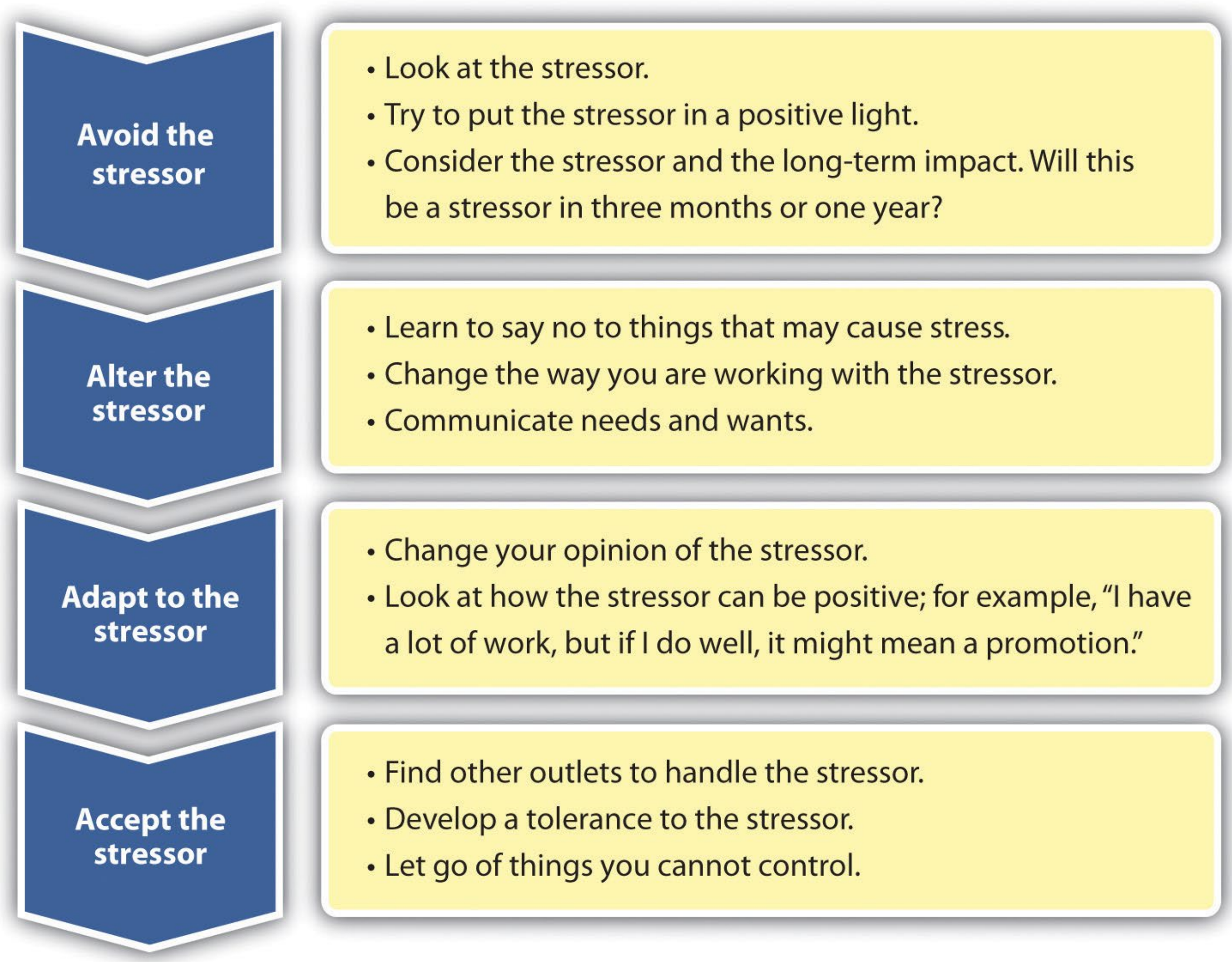

Figure 8.11 The Four As for Dealing with Stress

Summary

- When faced with stress, people must attempt to manage or cope with it.
- In general, there are two basic forms of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.
- Those who use problem-focused coping strategies tend to cope better with stress because these strategies address the source of stress rather than the resulting symptoms.
- To a large extent, perceived control greatly impacts reaction to stressors and is associated with greater physical and mental well-being.
- Social support has been demonstrated to be a highly effective buffer against the adverse effects of stress.
- The four As of stress reduction can help us reduce stress. They include: avoid, alter, adapt, and accept. By using the four As to determine the best approach to deal with a certain stressor, we can begin to have a more positive outlook on the stressor and learn to handle it better.

Discussion Questions

1. Although problem-focused coping seems to be a more effective strategy when dealing with stressors, do you think there are any kinds of stressful situations in which emotion-focused coping might be a better strategy?
2. Describe how social support can affect health both directly and indirectly.
3. Of the ways to handle stress listed in this chapter, which ones do you already integrate in your life? Do you engage in other methods not listed here? Share your ideas for stress reduction in small groups.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course and removal of some content.
- Remix of 3.4 Reducing Stress (Human Relations – Saylor) added to 14.4 Regulation of Stress (Psychology 2e – Openstax).
- Provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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8.3 Stress in the Workplace

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the individual, organizational, and environmental factors that lead to stress in the workplace.
- Discuss managerial and organizational approaches to stress management in the work place.

Sources of Workplace Stress

In most surveys on stress and its causes, Money, Work, Family Responsibilities, and Health Concerns have been at the top of the list for quite a long time. All four of these factors are either directly or indirectly impact and are impacted by the workplace.

There are many differences among individuals and their stressors. Why is one person's mind-crippling stress another person's biggest motivation and challenge? We're going to attempt to answer this by looking at the three sources of stress—individual, organizational, and environmental—and then add in the concept of human perception in an attempt to understand this conundrum.

Individual Factors

Individuals might experience stressful commutes to work, or a stressful couple of weeks helping at a work event, but those kinds of temporary, individual stresses are not what we're looking at here. We're looking for a deeper, longer-term stress. Family stress—marriages that are ending, issues with children, an ailing parent—these are stressful situations that an employee really can't leave at home when he or she comes to work. Financial stress, like the inability to pay bills or an unexpected new demand on a person's cash flow might also be an issue that disturbs an employee's time at work. Finally, an individual's own personality might actually contribute to his or her stress. People's dispositions—how they perceive things as negative or positive—can be a factor in each person's stress as well.

Organizational Factors

There are several organizational sources of stress (Figure 8.12):

- **Task or role demands:** these are factors related to a person's role at work, including the design of a person's job or working conditions. A stressful task demand might be a detailed, weekly presentation to the company's senior team. A stressful role demand might be where a person is expected to achieve more in a set amount of time than is possible.

- **Interpersonal demands:** these are stressors created by co-workers. Perhaps an employee is experiencing ongoing conflict with a co-worker he or she is expected to collaborate closely with. Or maybe employees are experiencing a lack of social support in their roles.
- **Organizational structure:** this refers to the level of differentiation within an organization, the degree of rules and regulations, and where decisions are made. If employees are unable to participate in decisions that affect them, they may experience stress.
- **Organizational leadership:** this refers to the organization's style of leadership, particularly the managerial style of its senior executives. Leaders can create an environment of tension, fear and anxiety and can exert unrealistic pressure and control. If employees are worried that they'll be fired for not living up to leadership's standards, this can definitely be a source of stress.
- **Organizational life stage:** an organization goes through a cycle of stages (birth, growth, maturity, decline). For employees, the birth and decline of an organization can be particularly stressful, as those stages tend to be filled with heavy workloads and a level of uncertainty about the future.

Figure 8.12 There are many sources of stress at work.
Workplace Stress – CIPHR Connect – CC BY 2.0

Environmental Factors

Finally, there are environmental sources of stress. The economy may be in a downturn, creating uncertainty for job futures and bank accounts. There may be political unrest or change creating stress. Finally, technology can cause stress, as new developments are constantly making employee skills obsolete, and workers fear they'll be replaced by a machine that can do the same. Employee are also often expected to stay connected to the workplace 24/7 because technology allows it.

As a side note, it's important to understand that these stressors are additive. In other words, stress builds up, and new elements add to a person's stress level. So, a single element of stress might not seem important in itself, but when added to other stresses the worker is experiencing, it can, as the old adage says, be the straw that broke the camel's back (Figure 8.13).

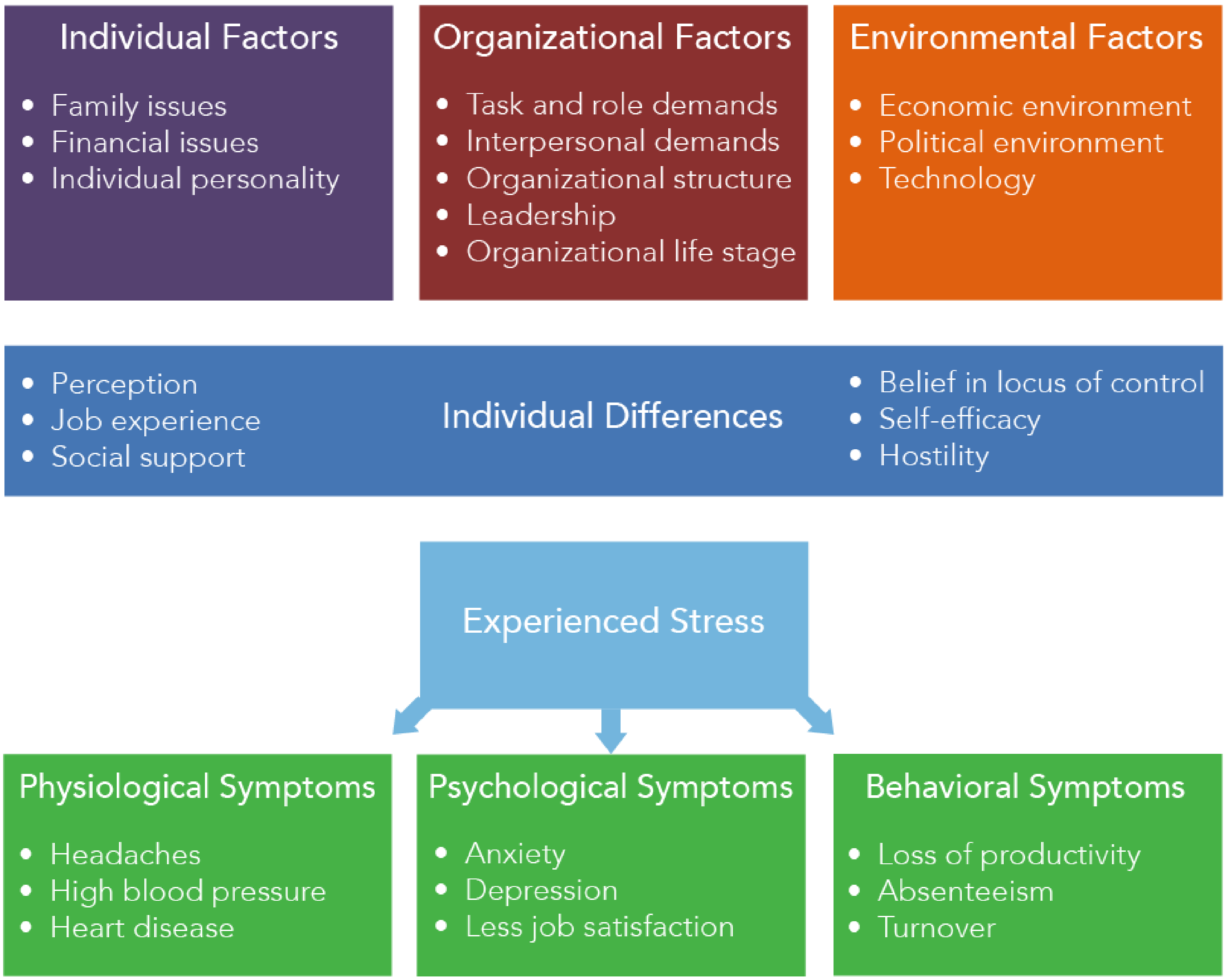

Figure 8.13 Diagram of the sources of stress. Factors of Stress – Freedom Learning Group – CC BY 4.0

Individual Differences

Those are the sources of stress, but differences within an individual determine whether that stress will be positive or negative. Those individual differences include:

- **Perception.** This is what moderates the individual's relationship to the stressor. For instance, one person might see a potential layoff as a stressful situation, while another person might see that same layoff as an opportunity for a nice severance package and the opportunity to start a new business.

- **Job Experience.** Because stress is associated with turnover, it would stand to reason that those employees with a long tenure are the most stress-resistant of the bunch.
- **Social Support.** Co-workers, especially those who are caring or considered to be friends, can help protect a fellow employee against the effects of stress.
- **Belief in locus of control.** Those who have a high internal locus of control (those that believe they are in control of their own fate) are, unsurprisingly, not as affected by stress as those who feel they are not in control.
- **Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that he or she can complete a task. Research shows that employees who have strong levels of self-efficacy are more resistant to the effects of stress.
- **Hostility.** Some employees carry around a high level of hostility as a part of their personalities, and they're often suspicious and distrustful of their co-workers. These personality traits make a person more susceptible to stress.

If those potential sources of stress sneak through the individual difference filters and manifest themselves as stress, they will appear in a variety of physiological, psychological and behavioral symptoms. We reviewed the physiological symptoms when we talked about the definition of stress. Add to that psychological symptoms, like tension and anxiety, but also job dissatisfaction and boredom, and behavioral symptoms, like turnover and absenteeism, and you can see how stress can become an organizational problem.

Consequences and Costs of Stress

Today's typical workplace expects quite a bit from its employees. In a climate of layoffs and downsizing, employees are typically expected to do "more with less"—that is, additional work for the same pay, often without updated resources and in a short amount of time. Demands for increased efficiency, quality and innovation can come at quite the cost, and employees are caving under the pressure.

A study conducted by Mental Health America (formerly the National Mental Health Association) suggests that stress costs US employers an estimated $500 billion dollars in lost productivity annually.

What does lost productivity mean? Let's take a look at how employees responded to that 2017 survey, and talk about how it can directly (and indirectly) impact a company's bottom line.

Absenteeism

What employees are saying (Hellebuyck, Nguyen, Halphern, Fritze, & Kennedy, 2017):

- A third of employees surveyed reported staying away from work at least two or more days a month because their work environments were so stressful

- Of those that responded that they missed two or more days of work
    - 35% said they missed between three and five days a month
    - 38% said they missed six days or more

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), absenteeism alone costs US employers $225.8 billion annually, or about $1,685 per employee. This cost, they say, comes from (CDC Foundation, 2015):

- Wages associated with unreported paid time off
- High cost of replacement workers
- Overtime pay for employees picking up their additional work
- Overall administrative costs of managing absenteeism

It isn't just the loss of productivity of the absentees, but their co-workers who are affected by this. In an article for BenefitsPro.com, Mental Health American CEO Paul Gionfriddo said, "Overstressed and unhealthy employees contribute to unhappy workplaces. This means that the indirect effects on everyone else—the people who dread coming to work—may not show up in the calculated productivity losses, but contribute to them nevertheless" (Hellebuyck, et al., 2017). Indeed, this low morale, combined with possible safety and quality issues that can result, are uncalculated effects.

Burn-Out

Burn-out is characterized as a symptom of long-term, unmanaged chronic stress in the workplace (World Health Organization, 2019). It includes constant exhaustion, feelings of distance or negative views of the workplace, and lowered professional efficacy. Burn-out is specific to the workplace and should not be considered as a phenomenon in other life areas.

Burn-out has become an increasing concern in the U.S. In 2021, 79% of adult workers who completed the American Psychological Association's Work and Well-Being Survey reported experiencing stress in their workplaces. Additionally, 3 of 5 employees reported that their workplace stress also reduced their motivation, interest, and effort in their jobs and job performance (Abramson, 2022).

A 2015 Gallup poll found the main reasons for employee burn-out have to do with how employees are managed, rather than performance expectations (Wigert and Agrawal, 2018). The five factors that were most correlated with burn-out were:

1. **Being treated unfairly at work**
   Unfair treatment can include mistreatment, favoritism, and bias by coworkers, supervisors, or company policies.

2. **A workload that is difficult to manage**
   Employees often look to their supervisors to help regulate their workloads and look for others who can assist in completing tasks.

3. **Ambiguity in workplace role**
   40% of employees report being unsure of what is expected of them at work. Lack of clarity about job responsibilities can lead to exhaustion

4. **Supervisor's lack of support and communication**
   Supervisors who are negligent or hostile create defensive employees who are often uninformed.

5. **Unrealistic deadlines**
   Supervisors who set unreasonable deadlines increase the stress their employees experience. Continually aggressive deadlines will eventually cause employees to fall behind.

Turnover

Here's what employees are saying about the effects of stress on their workplaces (Hellebuyck, et al., 2017):

- Two-thirds felt they worked in an unsupportive or even hostile environment
- Two-thirds said they didn't often trust their coworkers to support them at work
- Two-thirds said their supervisor was unsupportive
- More than eight in 10 said the stress at work directly caused stress with family and friend relationships
- More than seven in 10 admitted they bad-mouth their employer outside of work

It's easy to see why, considering these sentiments, that nearly three quarters of the employees surveyed are either actively seeking new employment or thinking of doing so.

The Work Institute's 2017 Retention Report suggested that replacing an employee costs about 33% of that employee's salary, meaning that the average worker making $45,000 a year will cost about $15,000 to replace, when you consider advertising, screening and testing applicants, training, and onboarding costs (among others). For some harder-to-fill positions, this cost could increase to 50% of the worker's salary (Sears, 2017).

Turnover also lowers productivity in that there is a shift of work while the position is empty and even after when the new employee is learning her position, and the employee leaving takes with him knowledge of the company that may not be recaptured.

Sadly, the Work Institute's 2017 Retention Report also captured data that led them to determine that roughly 75% of all turnover could be avoided. When surveying their

34,000 respondents, the top reasons for turnover were cited as career development, compensation and benefits…and then three that are directly related to stress: work-life balance, manager's behavior and well-being (Sears, 2017)

Workplace Violence

Workplace violence is on the rise, and it is the third leading cause of death for workers on the job. Of course, some workplace violence, like an active shooter or even an angry retail customer who takes a swing, is not due to workplace stress. Still, this kind of activity takes a toll on businesses, adding yet another layer of stress and a price tag of about $55 million in lost wages for the 1.8 million work days lost each year due to workplace violence (Lower & Associates, 2019).

But workplace violence rears its ugly head on a smaller level as well. **Desk rage** is a term used to describe extreme or violent anger shown by someone in an office, especially when this is caused by worry or a difficult situation. This can manifest itself in screaming and shouting, throwing or angrily destroying office equipment, or it can be more subtle, like damaging water cooler gossip, theft or abuse of sick time. The people who work with someone experiencing desk rage are as much victims of workplace stress here as the "desk rager."

These are some of the results of stress that drive down productivity, but stress also affects the cost of health benefits and medical needs that an employer will pick up by providing health insurance. Stress factors into five of the six leading causes of death in the US, and a staggering number of medical office visits will, in part, address symptoms related to stress.

It's no surprise to hear that a company like General Motors spends more money on healthcare than it does on steel. And (surprise!) workplace stress is responsible for up to $190 billion in annual US healthcare costs.

Goh, Pfeffer, and Zenios (2016) cited ten major factors of workplace stress and then mathematically examined their occurrences (and co-occurrences), concluding that workplace stress contributes to approximately 120,000 deaths each year. That, and additional healthcare expenses related to addressing stress related problems, accounted for $125 to $190 billion in healthcare costs, or about 5% to 8% of the nation's total expenditure.

Managerial Approaches to Stress Management

Employees don't just get distracted from work but get distracted from work by other work. Workers are sitting down to thoughtful tasks and being lured away by client emails, experiencing a new interruption every few minutes and working at a frantic pace. "Managing your time" used to be synonymous with "managing your attention," but the workplace doesn't function like that anymore. Time management training needs to change with the times.

Thomas (2015) suggests that, rather than training individuals on time management techniques, managers should spend more time on clarity around role priorities rather than specific task priorities. When managers can make clear to an employee what the expectations of their role is and how they match up with the priorities of the company, the employee can gain a new clarity on how to prioritize incoming work. Job design, its initial conception and its constant evaluation, are important in managing workplace stress.

Job design is also key in motivating employees. Skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback are all components that should be considered when designing a job, no matter how complicated or repetitive the job might be. Job design should reinforce the effort-to-performance link on the expectancy framework.

If job design provides the challenge that motivates an employee, it can also tip the scales toward stress. Managers can reevaluate job design to ensure that expectations for the role don't exceed the employee's abilities. They can also reduce role ambiguity by aligning employees around company objectives and helping them prioritize need-to-do tasks over day-to-day minutiae (Thomas, 2015).

While certain jobs are more stressful than others—consider an air traffic controller's daily stress versus that of a clerical worker—individual responses to stress are also very specific to an employee's personality. Managers should take into consideration how an individual might adapt to a high-stress role during the selection and placement process. Previous experience is often a good indicator of a potential employee's suitability.

Another motivating factor for employees is goal-setting. As we learned in chapter 3, individuals should have specific, measurable goals that they can achieve if they stretch themselves. Managers should take care that they're achieving good, and not bad, levels of stress when working with employees to set goals. Goals that tie into company objectives work to clarify role responsibilities, and managers who review their employees' progress can protect them from demotivation and stress.

Finally, there's the managerial option of job redesign to help with stress management. Redesigning jobs to make them richer for the employees can alleviate stress and add new motivation. A job redesign that gives the team member more responsibility, more say in decisions that involve them, and more meaningful work can give an employee more control over work activities and lessen his reliance on others. Each of these managerial approaches to stress management can be used as a motivational tool for employees.

But what about the effects of an organization's culture on stress levels? Some organizations expect an employee to put in far more than the standard 40 hours of work in a week. Employees feel an increasing need to stay connected to email and voice mail when not in the office, and often their managers expect to be able to contact them by phone or text well after working hours. International companies expect employees to navigate time differences, and employees in the U.S. find themselves staying at work late or coming in early to have necessary conversations with Europe and Asia.

Organizational Approaches to Stress Management

In addition to careful job design and managing stifling company cultures, organizations are taking steps to help employees battle stress by offering programs, benefits and office "perks" that allow workers to make choices about managing stress as it best suits their needs.

Healthcare is an expensive endeavor for employers these days, and smaller, privately held companies are looking for clever benefit package designs that reduce an organization's costs without costing the employee too much more. Stress and stress-related illness has a significant impact on healthcare costs, given annual costs for those stress-related health issues could be anywhere from $125 to $190 billion.

It's not unusual for a company to offer their employees smoking cessation programs or asthma management programs to help keep healthcare costs in check. Now employers are looking to implement other wellness programs, knowing that stress-related health issues are driving the cost of medical benefits. In fact, health care providers are starting to support these client endeavors, too, recognizing the need to cut spending however they can.

Wellness programs are organizational efforts to help employees improve their health and mental well-being by offering company-sponsored exercise, weight-loss competitions, health screenings and more. Some companies are looking at a more holistic view of stress release by concentrating not just on employee physical health, but also offering financial management classes and opportunities to give back to the community.

Nationwide, companies are seeing the benefits of offering their employees wellness programs. 91% of all large companies (with more than 10,000 employees) offer some type of wellness program (Figure 8.14).

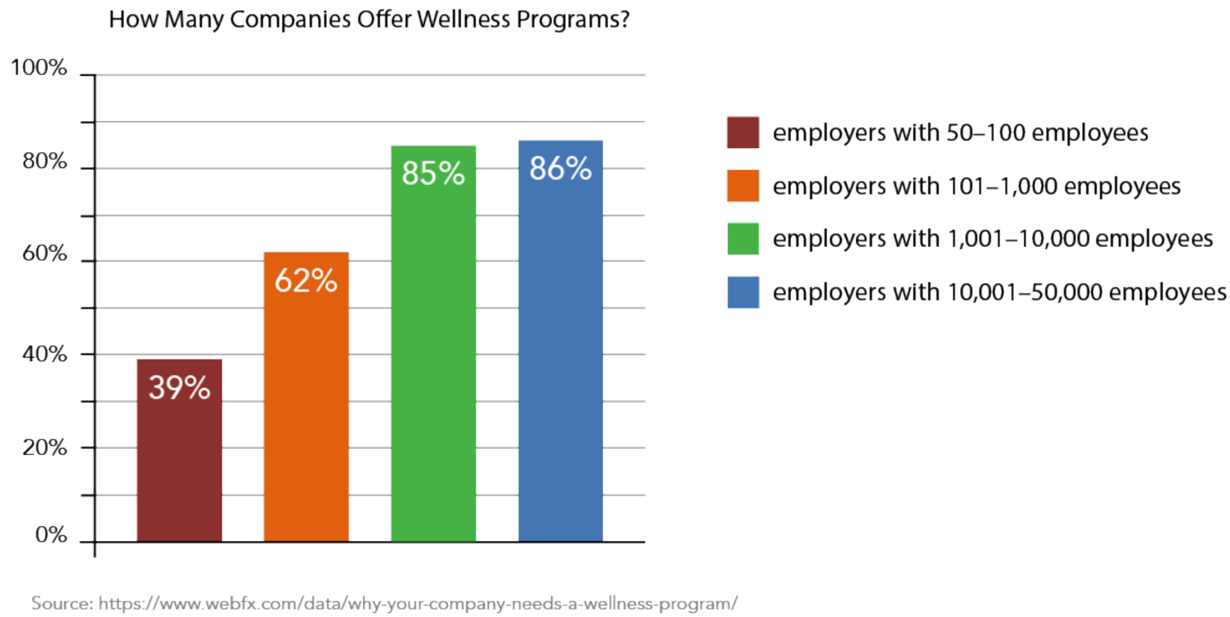

Figure 8.14 Wellness programs are increasingly used to reduce workplace stress.

They're a cost-effective solution to a very expensive problem. Furthermore, as shown in the second graph below, a majority of employees are open to participating in them (Figure 8.15). Wellness programs are a win-win for companies and their employees.

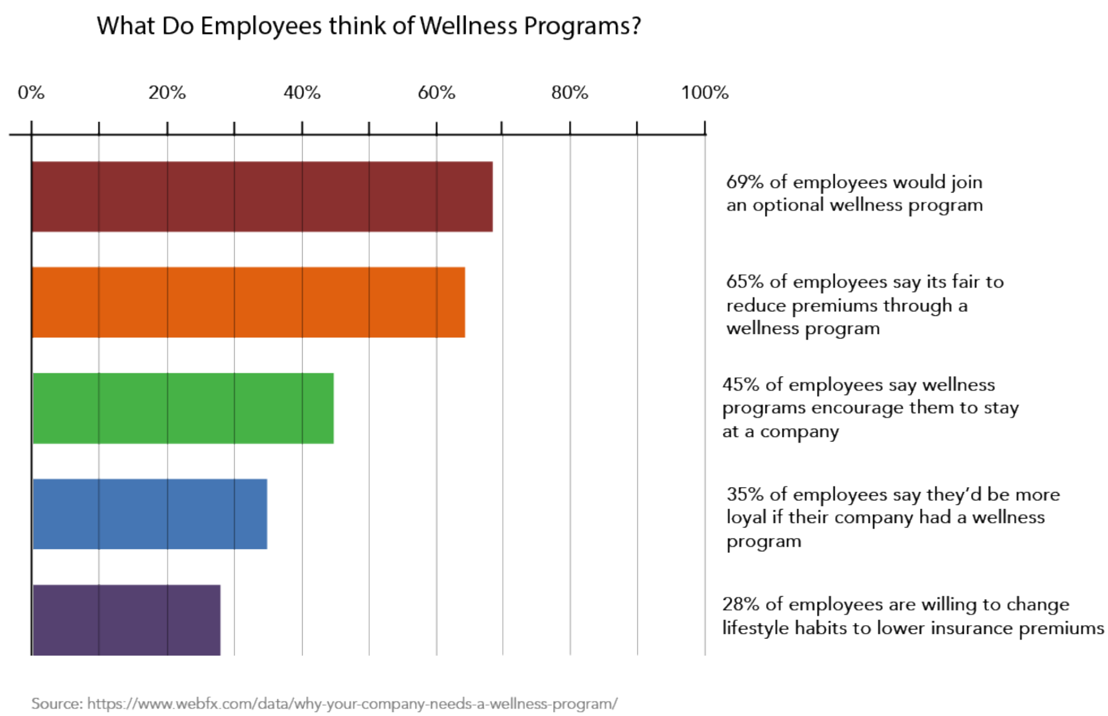

Figure 8.15 Employee opinions of wellness programs.

Now, some employers offer these types of programs and then get in the way of their effectiveness. In Joel Goh's study, he pointed out that, while US employers recognize that stress leads to costly health issues and put programs in place to combat them, those same employers sometimes undermine those programs with stress-inducing employment practices. These programs don't work if the employee is too stressed and overloaded with work to participate!

Some younger companies are going the extra mile to incorporate wellness into their culture and work environment. Google and Apple are headliners among organizations that offer their employees multiple choices in stress-burning activities throughout the day—like ping-pong tables, foosball, bowling alleys—and other perks that allow their employees to eliminate stress from their lives, such as free meals and free rides to work. Masseuses, available for booking during work hours, and family-room like areas where employees can relax and put up their feet go a long way toward employee stress relief and comfort. These are great examples of companies taking a cue from the ways individuals pursue stress release and making some of those methods available in the workplace.

Companies can incorporate stress release into their benefits packages in other ways as well. Companies offering a nice paid-time-off package that features use-it-or-lose-it vacation time encourages their employees to step away from the office and enjoy time with their families. Discounted gym memberships can encourage employees to stay physically fit, and companies are starting to offer easy, direct-deposit college savings plans so that employees can more easily provide for the education of their offspring. Some companies have gone as far as providing on-site day care for employees, making child care convenient and cost-effective. Other companies have a dogs-allowed policy at the office, where people can bring in their pets and combat stressful situations with a furry hug.

Finally, mental health is an ever-present issue in today's society, and employers offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) for those employees who are struggling with issues at work or in their personal lives. Employee assistance programs offer short-term, confidential counseling to employees, complete with referrals, free assessments and follow up services. Where wellness programs and company benefits can't address mental health and wellbeing, employee assistance programs step in and make it easier for struggling workers to find help.

These wellness programs and benefits offerings are companies' responses to the individual needs of their employees and their ongoing quest for work/life balance. Not only do they foster excellent perception that they care about their employees, but they also address the very costly issue of stress in the workplace.

Summary

- There are three major contributing factors to stress experienced by employees in the workplace, these are individual, organizational, and environmental factors.
- Individual factors contributing to stress are family issues, financial issues, and personality.
- Organizational factors contributing to stress are task and role demands, interpersonal demands, organizational structure, leaderships, and organizational life stage.
- Environmental factors contributing to stress are economic and political environment and technology.
- The consequences of stress include absenteeism, burn-out, turnover, and workplace violence.
- Organizational approaches to addressing stress include job design and wellness programs.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the benefits of wellness programs? What are the drawbacks of wellness programs? How can companies/organizations develop effective wellness programs for their employees?
2. Discuss a job in which you experienced one of the consequences of stress (absenteeism, burn-out, turnover, violence). What conditions led to this outcome? What could your job have done to prevent this outcome?
3. Which factor (individual, organizational, environmental) do you think plays the biggest role in workplace stress? Why?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Added Burn-out section to Sources of Stress (Organizational Behavior – Lumen Learning).
- Replaced photos that were no longer available/had broken links
- Added photos with links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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Chapter 9: Conflict Resolution

Whether a small irritation or a large problem, conflict with others can contribute to negative feelings and stress. Conflicts can occur with family members, friends, and with your coworkers and supervisors. It is important to understand how conflicts arise and how to successfully resolve them.

In this chapter you will learn about conflict resolution. You will learn what the levels, elements, and types of conflict are, conflict management strategies, and teamwork and conflict in the workplace. This will provide you with valuable information for resolving conflicts in your personal and work experiences.

9.1 Understanding Conflict

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the key elements of conflict.
- Explain different levels at which conflict can occur.
- Summarize stages in the conflict process.
- Recognize characteristics of conflict escalation.

Who do you have the most conflict with right now? Your answer to this question probably depends on the various contexts in your life. If you still live at home with a parent or parents, you may have daily conflicts with your family as you try to balance your autonomy, or desire for independence, with the practicalities of living under your family's roof. If you've recently moved away to go to college, you may be negotiating roommate conflicts as you adjust to living with someone you may not know at all. You probably also have experiences managing conflict in romantic relationships, friendships, and in the workplace. In this module, we will introduce some introductory concepts and explore why understanding conflict is important for your career success and interpersonal relationships.

There are many different definitions of conflict existing in the literature. For our purposes, **conflict** occurs in interactions in which there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. Conflict can vary in severity from mild to grievous and can be expressed verbally or nonverbally along a continuum ranging from a nearly imperceptible cold shoulder to a very obvious blowout.

Elements of Conflict

There are six elements to a conflict described by Rice (2000):

1. **Conflict is inevitable.** Because we do not all think and act the same, disagreements will occur.
2. **Conflict by itself is neither good nor bad.** Leaving conflict unresolved can result in negative outcomes. It is important to work toward resolving conflict and achieving a positive outcome.
3. **Conflict is a process.** We choose how to respond to others and can escalate or deescalate a conflict.
4. **Conflict and avoid conflict both consume energy.** The longer we avoid working on a resolution for a conflict with someone else, the more energy we spend on it.

5. **Conflict has elements of both content and feeling.** While conflict often arises from a specific behavior or action, it often involves underlying emotions. For example, if your significant other always left dirty dishes in the sink, despite your requests to rinse and put them in the dishwasher, you may feel like your partner doesn't respect you. This may lead to a conflict over doing the dishes.
6. **We can choose to be proactive or reactive in a conflict.** Taking a proactive approach to resolving conflict when it arises can lead to more positive outcomes.

Other Key Terms

Some people use the terms conflict, competition, dispute, and violence interchangeably. While these concepts are similar, they aren't exactly the same. We will define each of these terms to ensure that we have a shared understanding of how they are used.

Dispute is a term for a disagreement between parties. Typically, a dispute is adversarial in nature. While conflict can be hostile, it isn't always . Dispute also sometimes carries with it a legal connotation.

Competition is a rivalry between two groups or two individuals over an outcome that they both seek. In a competition there is a winner and a loser. Parties involved in a conflict may or may not view the situation as a competition for resources. Ideally, parties in a conflict will work together rather than compete.

The term **interpersonal violence** is also not synonymous with conflict. Although some conflict situations escalate to include acts of aggression and hostility, interpersonal violence involves acts of aggression such as an intent to harm or actual physical or psychological harm to another or their property. Ideally, conflict will be productive, respectful, and non-violent.

Levels of Conflict

In addition to different views of conflict, there exist several different levels of conflict. By level of conflict, we are referring to the number of individuals involved in the conflict. That is, is the conflict within just one person, between two people, between two or more groups, or between two or more organizations? Both the causes of a conflict and the most effective means to resolve it can be affected by level. Four levels can be identified: within an individual (intrapersonal conflict), between two parties (interpersonal conflict), between groups (intergroup conflict), and between organizations (inter-organizational conflict) (Figure 9.1).

Figure 9.1 Different Levels of Conflict. Fanshawe College. – [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Intrapersonal Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict arises within a person. In the workplace, this is often the result of competing motivations or roles. We often hear about someone who has an approach-avoidance conflict; that is, they are both attracted to and repelled by the same object. Similarly, a person can be attracted to two equally appealing alternatives, such as two good job offers (approach-approach conflict) or repelled by two equally unpleasant alternatives, such as the threat of being fired if one fails to identify a coworker guilty of breaking company rules (avoidance-avoidance conflict). Intrapersonal conflict can arise because of differences in roles.

A **role conflict** occurs when there are competing demands on our time, energy, and other resources. For example, a conflict may arise if you're the head of one team but also a member of another team. We can also have conflict between our roles at work and those roles that we hold in our personal lives.

Another type of intrapersonal conflict involves **role ambiguity**. Perhaps you've been given the task of finding a trainer for a company's business writing training program. You may feel unsure about what kind of person to hire—a well-known but expensive trainer or a local, unknown but low-priced trainer. If you haven't been given guidelines about what's expected, you may be wrestling with several options.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict is among individuals such as coworkers, a manager and an employee, or CEOs and their staff. Many companies suffer because of interpersonal conflicts as it results in loss of productivity and employee turnover. According to one estimate, 31.9% of CEOs resigned from their jobs because they had conflict with the board of directors (Whitehouse, 2008). Such conflicts often tend to get highly personal because only two parties are involved and each person embodies the opposing position in the conflict. Hence, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the opponent's position and the person. Keeping conflicts centered around ideas rather than individual differences is important in avoiding a conflict escalation.

Intergroup Conflict

Intergroup conflict is conflict that takes place among different groups and often involves disagreement over goals, values, or resources. Types of groups may include different departments, employee unions, or management in a company or competing companies that supply the same customers. Departments may conflict over budget allocations, unions and management may disagree over work rules, and suppliers may conflict with each other on the quality of parts.

Merging two groups together can lead to friction between the groups—especially if there are scarce resources to be divided among the group. For example, in what has been called "the most difficult and hard-fought labor issue in an airline merger," Canadian Air and Air Canada pilots were locked into years of personal and legal conflict when the two airlines' seniority lists were combined following the merger (Stoykewch, 2003). Seniority is a valuable and scarce resource for pilots, because it helps to determine who flies the newest and biggest planes, who receives the best flight routes, and who is paid the most. In response to the loss of seniority, former Canadian Air pilots picketed at shareholder meetings, threatened to call in sick, and had ongoing conflicts with pilots from Air Canada. The history of past conflicts among organizations and employees makes new deals challenging. As the Canadian airline WestJet is now poised to takeover Sunwing, WestJet has stated that they will respect existing union agreements (Mallees, 2022). Intergroup conflict can be the most complicated form of conflict because of the number of individuals involved. Coalitions can form and result in an "us-against-them" mentality. Here, too, is an opportunity for groups to form insulated ways of thinking and problems solving, thus allowing groupthink to develop and thrive.

Interorganizational Conflict

Finally, we can see **interorganizational conflict** in disputes between two companies in the same industry (for example, a disagreement between computer manufactures over computer standards), between two companies in different industries or economic sectors (for example, a conflict between real estate interests and environmentalists over land use planning), and even between two or more countries (for example, a trade dispute between the United States and Russia). In each case, both parties inevitably feel the pursuit of their goals is being frustrated by the other party.

Types of Conflict

If we are to try to understand conflict, we need to know what type of conflict is present. At least four types of conflict can be identified:

1. **Goal conflict** can occur when one person or group desires a different outcome than others do. This is simply a clash over whose goals are going to be pursued.
2. **Cognitive conflict** can result when one person or group holds ideas or opinions that are inconsistent with those of others. Often cognitive conflicts are rooted in differences in attitudes, beliefs, values, and worldviews, and ideas may be tied to deeply held culture, politics, and religion. This type of conflict emerges when one person's or group's feelings or emotions (attitudes) are incompatible with those of others.
3. **Affective conflict** is seen in situations where two individuals simply don't get along with each other.
4. **Behavioral conflict** exists when one person or group does something (i.e., behaves in a certain way) that is unacceptable to others. Dressing for work in a way that "offends" others and using profane language are examples of behavioral conflict.

Each of these types of conflict is usually triggered by different factors, and each can lead to very different responses by the individual or group. It is important to note that there are many types of conflict and that not all researchers use this same four-type classification. For example, Gallo (2015) has characterized conflict as being rooted in relationships, tasks (what to do), process (how to do things), or status. Regardless, when we find ourselves in a conflict situation, it can be helpful to try and take a step back and identify what type of conflict it is. It can also be helpful to acknowledge that what may look like a goal conflict may actually also have components of affective or cognitive conflict.

The Conflict Process

The most commonly accepted model of the conflict process consists of four stages: (1) frustration, (2) conceptualization, (3) behavior, and (4) outcome (Thomas, 1976)(Figure 9.2).

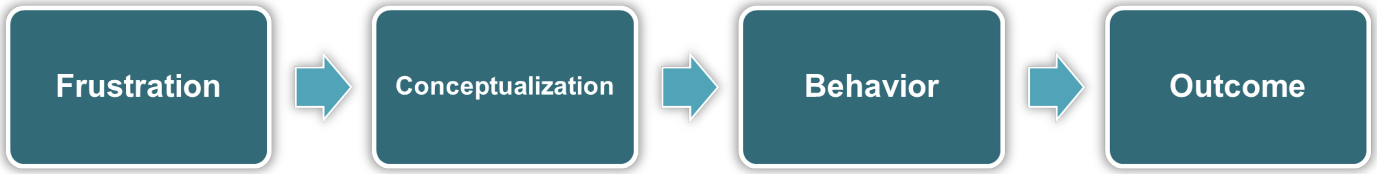

Figure 9.2 The Conflict Process: Fanshawe College. Original Image – [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Stage 1: Frustration

As we have seen, conflict situations originate when an individual or group feels frustration in the pursuit of important goals. This frustration may be caused by a wide variety of factors, including disagreement over performance goals, failure to get a promotion or pay raise, a fight over scarce economic resources, new rules or policies, and so forth. In fact, conflict can be traced to frustration over almost anything a group or individual cares about.

Stage 2: Conceptualization

In stage 2, the conceptualization stage of the model, parties to the conflict attempt to understand the nature of the problem, what they themselves want as a resolution, what they think their opponents want as a resolution, and various strategies they feel each side may employ in resolving the conflict. This stage is really the problem-solving and strategy phase. For instance, when management and union negotiate a labor contract, both sides attempt to decide what is most important and what can be bargained away in exchange for these priority needs.

Stage 3: Behavior

The third stage in Thomas's model is actual behavior. As a result of the conceptualization process, parties to a conflict attempt to implement their resolution mode by competing or accommodating in the hope of resolving problems. A major task here is determining how best to proceed strategically. That is, what tactics will the party use to attempt to resolve the conflict? Thomas has identified five modes for conflict resolution: (1) competing, (2) collaborating, (3) compromising, (4) avoiding, and (5) accommodating. We will discuss these modes in further detail in the next section.

Stage 4: Outcome

Finally, as a result of efforts to resolve the conflict, both sides determine the extent to which a satisfactory resolution or outcome has been achieved. Where one party to the conflict does not feel satisfied or feels only partially satisfied, the seeds of discontent are sown for a later conflict. One unresolved conflict episode can easily set the stage for a second episode. Managerial action aimed at achieving quick and satisfactory resolution is vital; failure to initiate such action leaves the possibility (more accurately, the probability) that new conflicts will soon emerge.

Conflict Escalation

Many academics and conflict resolution practitioners have observed predictable patterns in the way conflict escalates. Conflict is often discussed as though it is a separate entity, and in fact it is true that an escalating dispute may seem to take on a life of its own. Conflict will often escalate beyond reason unless a conscious effort is made to end it.

Figure 9.3 is called the conflict escalation tornado. It demonstrates how conflict can quickly escalate out of control. By observing and listening to individuals in dispute, it is often possible to determine where they are in the escalation process and anticipate what might occur next. In doing so, one can develop timely and appropriate approaches to halt the process.

Figure 9.3 "Conflict Escalation Tornado," by the Dispute Resolution Office, Ministry of Justice (Government of Saskatchewan), redesigned by JVDW Designs, is licensed under CC BY 4.0. Reproduced from Leadership and Influencing Change In Nursing by Joan Wagner. Color altered from original.

Culture and Conflict

Culture is an important context to consider when studying conflict. While there are some generalizations we can make about culture and conflict, it is better to look at more specific patterns of how interpersonal communication and conflict management are related. We can better understand some of the cultural differences in conflict management by further examining the concept of *face*.

What does it mean to "**save face**?" This saying generally refers to preventing embarrassment or preserving our reputation or image, which is similar to the concept of face in interpersonal and intercultural communication. Our face is the projected self we desire to put into the world, and facework refers to the communicative strategies we employ to project, maintain, or repair our face or maintain, repair, or challenge another's face. Face negotiation theory argues that people in all cultures negotiate face through communication encounters, and that cultural factors influence how we engage in facework, especially in conflict situations (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). These cultural factors influence whether we are more concerned with self-face or other-face and what types of conflict management strategies we may use. One key cultural influence on face negotiation is the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

The distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures is an important dimension across which all cultures vary. Individualistic cultures like the United States and most of Europe emphasize individual identity over group identity and encourage competition and self-reliance. Collectivistic cultures like Taiwan, Colombia, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Peru value in-group identity over individual identity and value conformity to social norms of the in-group (Dsilva & Whyte, 1998). However, within the larger cultures, individuals will vary in the degree to which they view themselves as part of a group or as a separate individual, which is called self-construal. Independent self-construal indicates a perception of the self as an individual with unique feelings, thoughts, and motivations. Interdependent self-construal indicates a perception of the self as interrelated with others (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Not surprisingly, people from individualistic cultures are more likely to have higher levels of independent self-construal, and people from collectivistic cultures are more likely to have higher levels of interdependent self-construal. Self-construal and individualistic or collectivistic cultural orientations affect how people engage in facework and the conflict management styles they employ.

Self-construal alone does not have a direct effect on conflict style, but it does affect face concerns, with independent self-construal favoring self-face concerns and interdependent self-construal favoring other-face concerns. There are specific facework strategies for different conflict management styles, and these strategies correspond to self-face concerns or other-face concerns.

- **Accommodating.** Giving in (self-face concern).
- **Avoiding.** Pretending conflict does not exist (other-face concern).
- **Competing.** Defending your position, persuading (self-face concern).
- **Collaborating.** Apologizing, having a private discussion, remaining calm (other-face concern) (Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008).

Research done on college students in Germany, Japan, China, and the United States found that those with independent self-construal were more likely to engage in competing, and those with interdependent self-construal were more likely to engage in avoiding or collaborating (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). And in general, this research found that members of collectivistic cultures were more likely to use the *avoiding* style of conflict management and less likely to use the *integrating* or *competing* styles of conflict management than were members of individualistic cultures. The following examples bring together facework strategies, cultural orientations, and conflict management style: Someone from an individualistic culture may be more likely to engage in competing as a conflict management strategy if they are directly confronted, which may be an attempt to defend their reputation (self-face concern). Someone in a collectivistic culture may be more likely to engage in avoiding or accommodating in order not to embarrass or anger the person confronting them (other-face concern) or out of concern that their reaction could reflect negatively on their family or cultural group (other-face concern). While these distinctions are useful for categorizing large-scale cultural patterns, it is important not to essentialize or arbitrarily group countries together, because there are measurable differences within cultures. For example, expressing one's emotions was seen as demonstrating a low concern for other-face in Japan, but this was not so in China, which shows there is variety between similarly collectivistic cultures. Culture always adds layers of complexity to any communication phenomenon, but experiencing and learning from other cultures also enriches our lives and makes us more competent communicators.

Summary

- Conflict occurs in interaction in which there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints.
- Conflict will inevitably occur and isn't inherently good or bad.
- Conflict can occur at different levels: within individuals, between individuals, between groups, and between organizations.
- The four types of conflict are: goal conflict, cognitive conflict, affective conflict, and behavioral conflict.
- The conflict process consists of four stages: frustration, conceptualization, behaviour, and outcomes.
- Culture influences how we engage in conflict based on our cultural norms regarding individualism or collectivism and concern for self-face or other-face.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of your most recent communication with another individual. Write down this conversation and, within the conversation, identify the components of the communication process.
2. Think about the different types of noise that affect communication. Can you list some examples of how noise can make communication worse?
3. We all do something well in relation to communication. What are your best communication skills? In what areas would you like to improve?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of combining sections of Introduction to Conflict and Conflict Resolution, Negotiations, and Labour Relations (Conflict Management – Open Library) and adding 6.2 Conflict and Interpersonal Communication (Communication in the Real World – University of Minnesota Libraries).
- Changed formatting for images to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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9.2 Conflict Management Strategies

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the five styles of conflict management.
- Describe the four steps in the STLC conflict model.

Would you describe yourself as someone who prefers to avoid conflict? Do you like to get your way? Are you good at working with someone to reach a solution that is mutually beneficial? Odds are that you have been in situations where you could answer yes to each of these questions, which underscores the important role context plays in conflict and conflict management styles in particular. The way we view and deal with conflict is learned and contextual. Research does show that there is intergenerational transmission of traits related to conflict management. As children, we test out different conflict resolution styles we observe in our families with our parents and siblings. Later, as we enter adolescence and begin developing platonic and romantic relationships outside the family, we begin testing what we've learned from our parents in other settings. If a child has observed and used negative conflict management styles with siblings or parents, he or she is likely to exhibit those behaviors with non–family members (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998).

There has been much research done on different types of **conflict management styles**, which are communication strategies that attempt to avoid, address, or resolve a conflict. Keep in mind that we don't always consciously choose a style. We may instead be caught up in emotion and become reactionary. The strategies for more effectively managing conflict that will be discussed later may allow you to slow down the reaction process, become more aware of it, and intervene in the process to improve your communication. A powerful tool to mitigate conflict is information exchange. Asking for more information before you react to a conflict-triggering event is a good way to add a buffer between the trigger and your reaction. This can be accomplished through the practice of perception checking that you learned about in chapter 6 on perception. Another key element is whether or not a communicator is oriented toward self-centered or other-centered goals. For example, if your goal is to "win" or make the other person "lose," you show a high concern for self and a low concern for other. If your goal is to facilitate a "win/win" resolution or outcome, you show a high concern for self and other. In general, strategies that facilitate information exchange and include concern for mutual goals will be more successful at managing conflict (Sillars, 1980).

Five Styles of Conflict Management

The five strategies for managing conflict we will discuss are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Each of these conflict styles accounts for the concern we place on self versus other (Figure 9.4)

Figure 9.4 Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management. Adapted from M. Afzalur Rahim, "A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict," *Academy of Management Journal* 26, no. 2 (1983): 368–76.

In order to better understand the elements of the five styles of conflict management, we will apply each to the follow scenario:

> Rosa and D'Shaun have been partners for seventeen years. Rosa is growing frustrated because D'Shaun continues to give money to their teenage daughter, Casey, even though they decided to keep the teen on a fixed allowance to try to teach her more responsibility. While conflicts regarding money and child rearing are very common, we will see the numerous ways that Rosa and D'Shaun could address this problem.

Competing

The **competing style** indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for other. When we compete, we are striving to "win" the conflict, potentially at the expense or "loss" of the other person. One way we may gauge our win is by being granted or taking concessions from the other person. For example, if D'Shaun gives Casey extra money behind Rosa's back, he is taking an indirect competitive route resulting in a "win" for him because he got his way. The competing style also involves the use of power, which can be noncoercive or coercive (Sillars, 1980). Noncoercive strategies include requesting and persuading. When **requesting**, we suggest the conflict partner change a behavior. Requesting doesn't require a high level of information exchange. When we **persuade**, however, we give our conflict partner reasons to support our request or suggestion, meaning there is more information exchange, which may make persuading more effective than requesting. Rosa could try to persuade D'Shaun to stop giving Casey extra allowance money by bringing up their fixed budget or reminding him that they are saving for a summer vacation. Coercive strategies violate standard guidelines for ethical communication and may include aggressive communication directed at rousing your partner's emotions through insults, profanity, and yelling, or through threats of punishment if you do not get your way. If Rosa is the primary income earner in the family, she could use that power to threaten to take D'Shaun's ATM card away if he continues giving Casey money. In all these scenarios, the "win" that could result is only short term and can lead to conflict escalation. Interpersonal conflict is rarely isolated, meaning there can be ripple effects that connect the current conflict to previous and future conflicts. D'Shaun's behind-the-scenes money giving or Rosa's confiscation of the ATM card could lead to built-up negative emotions that could further test their relationship.

Competing has been linked to aggression, although the two are not always paired. If assertiveness does not work, there is a chance it could escalate to hostility. There is a pattern of verbal escalation: requests, demands, complaints, angry statements, threats, harassment, and verbal abuse (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). Aggressive communication can become patterned, which can create a volatile and hostile environment. The reality television show *The Bad Girls Club* is a prime example of a chronically hostile and aggressive environment. If you do a Google video search for clips from the show, you will see yelling, screaming, verbal threats, and some examples of physical violence. The producers of the show choose houseguests who have histories of aggression, and when the "bad girls" are placed in a house together, they fall into typical patterns, which creates dramatic television moments. Obviously, living in this type of volatile environment would create stressors in any relationship, so it's important to monitor the use of competing as a conflict resolution strategy to ensure that it does not lapse into aggression.

The competing style of conflict management is not the same thing as having a competitive personality. Competition in relationships isn't always negative, and people who enjoy engaging in competition may not always do so at the expense of another person's goals. In fact, research has shown that some couples engage in competitive shared activities like sports or games to maintain and enrich their relationship (Dindia & Baxter, 1987). And although we may think that competitiveness is gendered, research has often shown that women are just as competitive as men (Messman & Mikesell, 2000).

Avoiding

The **avoiding style** of conflict management often indicates a low concern for self and a low concern for other, and no direct communication about the conflict takes place. However, as we will discuss later, in some cultures that emphasize group harmony over individual interests, and even in some situations in the United States, avoiding a conflict can indicate a high level of concern for the other. In general, avoiding doesn't mean that there is no communication about the conflict. Remember, *you cannot not communicate*.

Even when we try to avoid conflict, we may intentionally or unintentionally give our feelings away through our verbal and nonverbal communication. Rosa's sarcastic tone as she tells D'Shaun that he's "Soooo good with money!" and his subsequent eye roll both bring the conflict to the surface without specifically addressing it. The avoiding style is either passive or indirect, meaning there is little information exchange, which may make this strategy less effective than others. We may decide to avoid conflict for many different reasons, some of which are better than others. If you view the conflict as having little importance to you, it may be better to ignore it. If the person you're having conflict with will only be working in your office for a week, you may perceive a conflict to be temporary and choose to avoid it and hope that it will solve itself. If you are not emotionally invested in the conflict, you may be able to reframe your perspective and see the situation in a different way, therefore resolving the issue. In all these cases, avoiding doesn't really require an investment of time, emotion, or communication skill, so there is not much at stake to lose.

Avoidance is not always an easy conflict management choice, because sometimes the person we have conflict with isn't a temp in our office or a weekend houseguest. While it may be easy to tolerate a problem when you're not personally invested in it or view it as temporary, when faced with a situation like Rosa and D'Shaun's, avoidance would just make the problem worse. For example, avoidance could first manifest as changing the subject, then progress from avoiding the issue to avoiding the person altogether, to even ending the relationship.

Indirect strategies of hinting and joking also fall under the avoiding style. While these indirect avoidance strategies may lead to a buildup of frustration or even anger, they allow us to vent a little of our built-up steam and may make a conflict situation more bearable. When we hint, we drop clues that we hope our partner will find and piece together to see the problem and hopefully change, thereby solving the problem without any direct communication. For the most part, the person dropping the hints overestimates their partner's detective abilities. For example, when Rosa leaves the bank statement on the kitchen table in hopes that D'Shaun will realize how much extra money he is giving Casey, D'Shaun may simply ignore it or even get irritated with Rosa for not putting the statement with all the other mail. We also overestimate our partner's ability to decode the jokes we make about a conflict situation. It is more likely that the receiver of the jokes will think you're genuinely trying to be funny or feel provoked or insulted than realize the conflict situation that you are referencing. So, more frustration may develop when the hints and jokes are not decoded, which often leads to a more extreme form of hinting/joking: passive-aggressive behavior.

Passive-aggressive behavior is a way of dealing with conflict in which one person indirectly communicates their negative thoughts or feelings through nonverbal behaviors, such as not completing a task. For example, Rosa may wait a few days to deposit money into the bank so D’Shaun can’t withdraw it to give to Casey, or D’Shaun may cancel plans for a romantic dinner because he feels like Rosa is questioning his responsibility with money. Although passive-aggressive behavior can feel rewarding in the moment, it is one of the most unproductive ways to deal with conflict. These behaviors may create additional conflicts and may lead to a cycle of passive-aggressiveness in which the other partner begins to exhibit these behaviors as well, while never actually addressing the conflict that originated the behavior. In most avoidance situations, both parties lose. However, as noted above, avoidance can be the most appropriate strategy in some situations—for example, when the conflict is temporary, when the stakes are low or there is little personal investment, or when there is the potential for violence or retaliation.

Accommodating

The **accommodating style** indicates a low concern for self and a high concern for other and is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that someone complies with or obliges another without providing personal input. The context for and motivation behind accommodating play an important role in whether or not it is an appropriate strategy. Accommodating can be appropriate when there is little chance that our own goals can be achieved, when we don’t have much to lose by accommodating, when we feel we are wrong, or when advocating for our own needs could negatively affect the relationship (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000). The occasional accommodation can be useful in maintaining a relationship—remember earlier we discussed putting another’s needs before your own as a way to achieve relational goals. For example, Rosa may say, “It’s OK that you gave Casey some extra money; she did have to spend more on gas this week since the prices went up.” However, being a team player can slip into being a pushover, which people generally do not appreciate. If Rosa keeps telling D’Shaun, “It’s OK this time,” they may find themselves short on spending money at the end of the month. At that point, Rosa and D’Shaun’s conflict may escalate as they question each other’s motives, or the conflict may spread if they direct their frustration at Casey and blame it on her irresponsibility.

Research has shown that the accommodating style is more likely to occur when there are time restraints and less likely to occur when someone does not want to appear weak (Cai & Fink, 2002). If you’re standing outside the movie theatre and two movies are starting, you may say, “Let’s just have it your way,” so you don’t miss the beginning. If you’re a new manager at an electronics store and an employee wants to take Sunday off to watch a football game, you may say no to set an example for the other employees. As with avoiding, there are certain cultural influences we will discuss later that make accommodating a more effective strategy.

Compromising

The **compromising style** shows a moderate concern for self and other and may indicate that there is a low investment in the conflict and/or the relationship (Figure 9.5). Even though we often hear that the best way to handle a conflict is to compromise, the compromising style isn't a win/win solution; it is a partial win/lose. In essence, when we compromise, we give up some or most of what we want. It's true that the conflict gets resolved temporarily, but lingering thoughts of what you gave up could lead to a future conflict. Compromising may be a good strategy when there are time limitations or when prolonging a conflict may lead to relationship deterioration. Compromise may also be good when both parties have equal power or when other resolution strategies have not worked (Macintosh & Stevens, 2008).

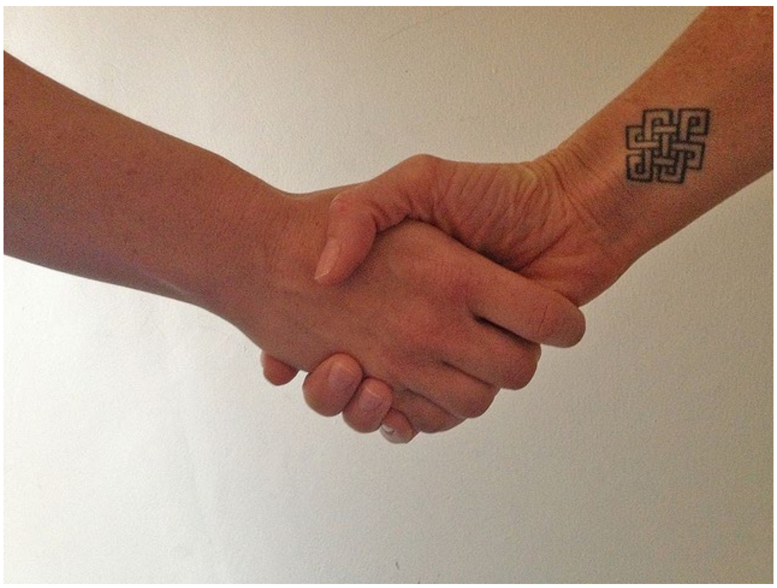

Figure 9.5 Compromising may leave both parties be completely satisfied if they each had to give something up. Broad Bean Media – handshake – BroadBeanMedia – CC BY-SA 2.0

A negative of compromising is that it may be used as an easy way out of a conflict. The compromising style is most effective when both parties find the solution agreeable. Rosa and D'Shaun could decide that Casey's allowance does need to be increased and could each give ten more dollars a week by committing to taking their lunch to work twice a week instead of eating out. They are both giving up something, and if neither of them have a problem with taking their lunch to work, then the compromise was equitable. If the couple agrees that the twenty extra dollars a week should come out of D'Shaun's golf budget, the compromise isn't as equitable, and D'Shaun, although he agreed to the compromise, may end up with feelings of resentment. Wouldn't it be better to both win?

Collaborating

The **collaborating style** involves a high degree of concern for self and other and usually indicates investment in the conflict situation and the relationship. Although the collaborating style takes the most work in terms of communication competence, it ultimately leads to a win/win situation in which neither party has to make concessions because a mutually beneficial solution is discovered or created. The obvious advantage is that both parties are satisfied, which could lead to positive problem solving in the future and strengthen the overall relationship. For example, Rosa and D'Shaun may agree that Casey's allowance needs to be increased and may decide to give her twenty more dollars a week in exchange for her babysitting her little brother one night a week. In this case, they didn't make the conflict personal but focused on the situation and came up with a solution that may end up saving them money. The disadvantage is that this style is often time consuming, and only one person may be willing to use this approach while the other person is eager to compete to meet their goals or willing to accommodate.

Here are some tips for collaborating and achieving a win/win outcome (Hargie, 2011):

- Do not view the conflict as a contest you are trying to win.
- Remain flexible and realize there are solutions yet to be discovered.
- Distinguish the people from the problem (don't make it personal).
- Determine what the underlying needs are that are driving the other person's demands (needs can still be met through different demands).
- Identify areas of common ground or shared interests that you can work from to develop solutions.
- Ask questions to allow them to clarify and to help you understand their perspective.
- Listen carefully and provide verbal and nonverbal feedback.

STLC Conflict Model

Cahn and Abigail (2014) created a very simple model when thinking about how we communicate during conflict. They called the model the STLC Conflict Model because it stands for stop, think, listen, and then communicate (Figure 9.6).

Figure 9.6 STLC Conflict Model. *Interpersonal Communication* – Jason S. Wrench; Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter; and Katherine S. Thweatt – *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*.

Stop

The first thing an individual needs to do when interacting with another person during conflict is to take the time to be present within the conflict itself. Too often, people engaged in a conflict say whatever enters their mind before they've really had a chance to process the message and think of the best strategies to use to send that message. Others end up talking past one another during a conflict because they simply are not paying attention to each other and the competing needs within the conflict. Communication problems often occur during conflict because people tend to react to conflict situations when they arise instead of being mindful and present during the conflict itself. For this reason, it's always important to take a breath during a conflict and first stop.

Sometimes these "time outs" need to be physical. Maybe you need to leave the room and go for a brief walk to calm down, or maybe you just need to get a glass of water. Whatever you need to do, it's important to take this break. This break helps you to be proactive rather than reactive (Cahn & Abigail, 2014).

Think

Once you've stopped, you now have the ability to really think about what you are communicating. You want to think through the conflict itself. What is the conflict really about? Often people engage in conflicts about superficial items when there are truly much deeper issues that are being avoided. You also want to consider what possible causes led to the conflict and what possible courses of action you think are possible to conclude the conflict. Cahn and Abigail argue that there are four possible outcomes that can occur: do nothing, change yourself, change the other person, or change the situation.

First, you can simply sit back and avoid the conflict. Maybe you're engaging in a conflict about politics with a family member, and this conflict is actually just going to make everyone mad. For this reason, you opt just to stop the conflict and change topics to avoid making people upset.

Second, we can change ourselves. Often, we are at fault and start conflicts. We may not even realize how our behavior caused the conflict until we take a step back and really analyze what is happening. When it comes to being at fault, it's very important to admit that you've done wrong. Nothing is worse (and can stoke a conflict more) than when someone refuses to see their part in the conflict.

Third, we can attempt to change the other person. Let's face it, changing someone else is easier said than done. Just ask your parents/guardians! All of our parents/guardians have attempted to change our behaviors at one point or another, and changing people is very hard. Even with the powers of punishment and reinforcement, a lot of the time change only lasts as long as the punishment or the reinforcer is active.

Lastly, we can just change the situation. Having a conflict with your roommates? Move out. Having a conflict with your boss? Find a new job. Having a conflict with a professor? Drop the course. Admittedly, changing the situation is not necessarily the first choice people should take when thinking about possibilities, but often it's the best decision for long-term happiness. In essence, some conflicts will not be settled between people. When these conflicts arise, you can try and change yourself, hope the other person will change (they probably won't, though), or just get out of it altogether.

Listen

The third step in the STLC model is listen. Humans are not always the best listeners. Listening is a skill. Unfortunately, during a conflict situation, this is a skill that is desperately needed and often forgotten. When we feel defensive during a conflict, our listening becomes spotty at best because we start to focus on ourselves and protecting ourselves instead of trying to be empathic and seeing the conflict through the other person's eyes.

One mistake some people make is to think they're listening, but in reality, they're listening for flaws in the other person's argument. We often use this type of selective listening as a way to devalue the other person's stance. In essence, we will hear one small flaw with what the other person is saying and then use that flaw to demonstrate that obviously everything else must be wrong as well.

The goal of listening must be to suspend your judgment and really attempt to be present enough to accurately interpret the message being sent by the other person. When we listen in this highly empathic way, we are often able to see things from the other person's point-of-view, which could help us come to a better-negotiated outcome in the long run.

Communicate

Lastly, but certainly not least, we communicate with the other person. Notice that Cahn and Abigail (2014) put communication as the last part of the STLC model because it's the hardest one to do effectively during a conflict if the first three are not done correctly. When we communicate during a conflict, we must be hyper-aware of our nonverbal behavior (eye movement, gestures, posture, etc.). Nothing will kill a message faster than when it's accompanied by bad nonverbal behavior. For example, rolling one's eyes while another person is speaking is not an effective way to engage in conflict.

During a conflict, it's important to be assertive and stand up for your ideas without becoming verbally aggressive. Conversely, you have to be open to someone else's use of assertiveness as well without having to tolerate verbal aggression. We often end up using mediators to help call people on the carpet when they communicate in a fashion that is verbally aggressive or does not further the conflict itself.

Summary

- Interpersonal conflict is an inevitable part of relationships that, although not always negative, can take an emotional toll on relational partners unless they develop skills and strategies for managing conflict.
- Although there is no absolute right or wrong way to handle a conflict, there are five predominant styles of conflict management, which are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating.
- In the STLC model of conflict the steps in conflict are: Stop, Think, Listen, and Communicate.

Discussion Questions

1. Of the five conflict management strategies, is there one that you use more often than others? Why or why not? Do you think people are predisposed to one style over the others? Why or why not?
2. Review the example of D'Shaun and Rosa. If you were in their situation, what do you think the best style to use would be and why?
3. Discuss an example of a conflict you've experienced. How could you have used the STLC Conflict Model to help you resolve this conflict positively.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of Employment Legislation (Introduction to Business – Lumen Learning) and EEO Best Practices, EEO Complaints (Human Resources Management – Lumen Learning) added to Introduction to Social Diversity in the Workplace (Organizational Behavior and Human Relations – Lumen Learning).
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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9.3 Teamwork and Conflict in the Workplace

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss the five stages of team development.
- Describe different positive and negative team roles.
- Describe strategies for cultivating a positive group climate.
- Describe common types and causes of conflict that arise within teams.

Group dynamics involve the interactions and processes of a team and influence the degree to which members feel a part of the goal and mission. A team with a strong identity can prove to be a powerful force. One that exerts too much control over individual members, however, runs the risk or reducing creative interactions, resulting in tunnel vision. A team that exerts too little control, neglecting all concern for process and areas of specific responsibility, may go nowhere. Striking a balance between motivation and encouragement is key to maximizing group productivity.

A skilled communicator creates a positive team by first selecting members based on their areas of skill and expertise. Attention to each member's style of communication also ensures the team's smooth operation. If their talents are essential, introverts who prefer working alone may need additional encouragement to participate. Extroverts may need encouragement to listen to others and not dominate the conversation. Both are necessary, however, so the selecting for a diverse group of team members deserves serious consideration.

Stages of Team Development

For teams to be effective, the people in the team must be able to work together to contribute collectively to team outcomes. But this does not happen automatically: it develops as the team works together. You have probably had an experience when you have been put on a team to work on a school assignment or project. When your team first gets together, you likely sit around and look at each other, not knowing how to begin. Initially you are not a team; you are just individuals assigned to work together. Over time you get to know each other, to know what to expect from each other, to know how to divide the labor and assign tasks, and to know how you will coordinate your work. Through this process, you begin to operate as a team instead of a collection of individuals.

This process of learning to work together effectively is known as team development. Research has shown that teams go through definitive stages during development. Tuckman (1965) identified a five-stage development process that most teams follow to become high performing. He called the stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Figure 9.7)

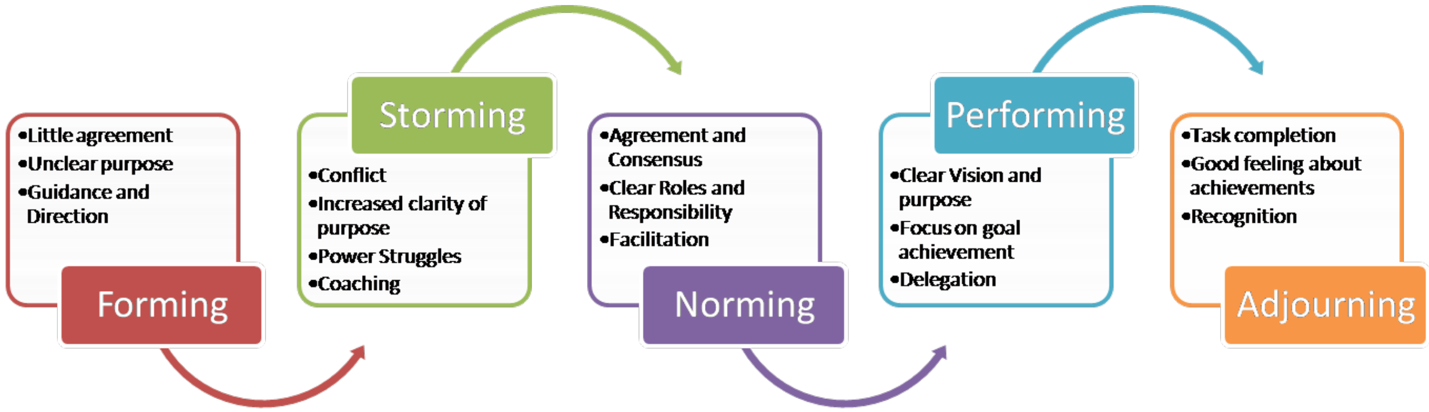

Figure 9.7 Most high-performing teams go through five stages of team development. Tuckman's Stages of Group Development – pngegg.com – CC BY NC 4.0

Forming stage

The forming stage involves a period of orientation and getting acquainted (Figure 9.8). Uncertainty is high during this stage, and people are looking for leadership and authority. A member who asserts authority or is knowledgeable may be expected to take control. Team members are asking such questions as "What does the team offer me?" "What is expected of me?" "Will I fit in?" Most interactions are social as members get to know each other.

Figure 9.8 Forming a team at work often involves a period of getting to know each other. Coworkers in Meeting – 089photoshootings – CC BY 4.0

Storming stage

The storming stage is the most difficult and critical stage to pass through. It is a period marked by conflict and competition as individual personalities emerge. Team performance may actually decrease in this stage because energy is put into unproductive activities. Members may disagree on team goals, and subgroups and cliques may form around strong personalities or areas of agreement. To get through this stage, members must work to overcome obstacles, to accept individual differences, and to work through conflicting ideas on team tasks and goals. Teams can get bogged down in this stage. Failure to address conflicts may result in long-term problems.

Norming stage

If teams get through the storming stage, conflict is resolved and some degree of unity emerges. In the norming stage, consensus develops around who the leader or leaders are, and individual member's roles. Interpersonal differences begin to be resolved, and a sense of cohesion and unity emerges (Figure 9.9). Team performance increases during this stage as members learn to cooperate and begin to focus on team goals. However, the harmony is precarious, and if disagreements re-emerge the team can revert to storming.

Figure 9.9 A Norming group develops a degree of cooperation and smooth work flow. Group Working Together on a Project – StockSnap – Pixabay License

Performing stage

In the performing stage, consensus and cooperation have been well-established and the team is mature, organized, and well-functioning. There is a clear and stable structure, and members are committed to the team's mission. Problems and conflicts still emerge, but they are dealt with constructively. The team is focused on problem solving and meeting team goals.

Adjourning stage

In the adjourning stage, most of the team's goals have been accomplished. The emphasis is on wrapping up final tasks and documenting the effort and results. As the work load is diminished, individual members may be reassigned to other teams, and the team disbands. There may be regret as the team ends, so a ceremonial acknowledgement of the work and success of the team can be helpful. If the team is a standing committee with ongoing responsibility, members may be replaced by new people and the team can go back to a forming or storming stage and repeat the development process.

Positive and Negative Team Roles

When a manager selects a team for a particular project, its success depends on its members filling various positive roles. There are a few standard roles that must be represented to achieve the team's goals, but diversity is also key. Without an initiator-coordinator stepping up into a leadership position, for instance, the team will be a non-starter because team members such as the elaborator will just wait for more direction from the manager, who is busy with other things. If all the team members commit to filling a leadership role, however, the group will stall from the get-go with power struggles until the most dominant personality vanquishes the others, who will be bitterly unproductive relegated to a subordinate worker-bee role. A good manager must therefore be a good psychologist in building a team with diverse personality types and talents. Table 9.1 below captures some of these roles.

Table 9.1 Positive Roles in Teams

Role	Actions
Initiator-Coordinator	Suggests new ideas or new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples
Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-Critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques
Comic Relief	Uses humor to keep the team happy

Of course, each team member here contributes work irrespective of their typical roles. The groupmate who always wanted to be recorder in high school because they thought that all they had to do what jot down some notes about what other people said and did, and otherwise contributed nothing, would be a liability as a slacker in a workplace team. We must therefore contrast the above roles with negative roles, some of which are captured in Table 9.2 below.

Table 9.2 Negative Roles in Teams

Dominator	Dominates discussion so others can't take their turn
Recognition Seeker	Seeks attention by relating discussion to their actions
Special-Interest Pleader	Relates discussion to special interests or personal agenda
Blocker	Blocks attempts at consensus consistently
Slacker	Does little-to-no work, forcing others to pick up the slack
Joker or Clown	Seeks attention through humor and distracting members

Whether a team member has a positive or negative effect often depends on context. Just as the class clown can provide some much-needed comic relief when the timing's right, they can also impede productivity when they merely distract members during work periods. An initiator-coordinator gets things started and provides direction, but a dominator will put down others' ideas, belittle their contributions, and ultimately force people to contribute little and withdraw partially or altogether.

Perhaps the worst of all roles is the slacker. If you consider a game of tug-o-war between two teams of even strength, success depends on everyone on the team pulling as hard as they would if they were in a one-on-one match. The tendency of many, however, is to slack off a little, thinking that their contribution won't be noticed and that everyone else on the team will make up for their lack of effort. The team's work output will be much less than the sum of its parts, however, if everyone else thinks this, too. Preventing slacker tendencies requires clearly articulating in writing the expectations for everyone's individual contributions. With such a contract to measure individual performance, each member can be held accountable for their work and take pride in their contribution to solving all the problems that the team overcame on its road to success.

Cultivating a Supportive Group Climate

Any time a group of people comes together, new dynamics are put into place that differ from the dynamics present in our typical dyadic interactions. The impressions we form about other people's likeability and the way we think about a group's purpose are affected by the climate within a group that is created by all members.

When something is cohesive it sticks together, and the cohesion within a group helps establish an overall group climate. **Group climate** refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. To better understand cohesion and climate, we can examine two types of cohesion: task and social.

Task cohesion refers to the commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group. **Social cohesion** refers to the attraction and liking among group members. Ideally, groups would have an appropriate balance between these two types of cohesion relative to the group's purpose, with task-oriented groups having higher task cohesion and relational-oriented groups having higher social cohesion. Even the most task-focused groups need some degree of social cohesion, and vice versa, but the balance will be determined by the purpose of the group and the individual members. For example, a team of workers from the local car dealership may join a local summer softball league because they're good friends and love the game. They may end up beating the team of faculty members from the community college who joined the league just to get to know each other better and have an excuse to get together and drink beer in the afternoon. In this example, the players from the car dealership exhibit high social and task cohesion, while the faculty exhibit high social but low task cohesion. Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness (Hargie, 2011):

- set goals easily;
- exhibit a high commitment to achieving the purpose of the group;
- are more productive;
- experience fewer attendance issues;
- have group members who are willing to stick with the group during times of difficulty;
- have satisfied group members who identify with, promote, and defend the group;
- have members who are willing to listen to each other and offer support and constructive criticism; and
- experience less anger and tension.

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale. The following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale (Marston & Hecht, 1988):

- **Participation.** Group members feel better when they feel included in the discussion and a part of the functioning of the group.
- **Messages.** Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, and clear, organized, and relevant messages help build task dimensions within a group.
- **Feedback.** Positive, constructive, and relevant feedback contribute to the group climate.
- **Equity.** Aside from individual participation, group members also like to feel as if participation is managed equally within the group and that appropriate turn-taking is used.
- **Clear and accepted roles.** Group members like to know how status and hierarchy operate within a group. Knowing the roles isn't enough to lead to satisfaction, though—members must also be comfortable with and accept those roles.
- **Motivation.** Member motivation is activated by perceived connection to and relevance of the group's goals or purpose.

Group cohesion and climate are also demonstrated through symbolic convergence (Bormann, 1985). Have you ever been in a group that had 'inside jokes' that someone outside the group just would not understand? **Symbolic convergence** refers to the sense of community or group consciousness that develops in a group through non-task-related communication such as stories and jokes. The originator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest Bormann, claims that the sharing of group fantasies creates symbolic convergence. *Fantasy*, in this sense, doesn't refer to fairy tales, sexual desire, or untrue things. In group communication, **group fantasies** are verbalized references to events outside the "here and now" of the group, including references to the group's past, predictions for the future, or other communication about people or events outside the group (Griffin, 2009).

In any group, you can tell when symbolic convergence is occurring by observing how people share such fantasies and how group members react to them. If group members react positively and agree with or appreciate the teller's effort or other group members are triggered to tell their own related stories, then convergence is happening and cohesion and climate are being established. Over time, these fantasies build a shared vision of the group and what it means to be a member that creates a shared group consciousness. By reviewing and applying the concepts in this section, you can hopefully identify potential difficulties with group cohesion and work to enhance cohesion when needed to create more positive group climates and enhance your future group interactions.

The Benefits of Team Diversity

Rock and Grant (2016) assert that increasing workplace diversity is a good business decision. Hunt, Layton, and Prince (2015) conducted a study of 366 public companies and found that those in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35% more likely to have financial returns above their industry mean, and those in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15% more likely to have returns above the industry mean. Similarly, Curtis, Schmid, and Struber (2012) found that organizations with at least one female board member yielded a higher return on equity and higher net income growth than those that did not have any women on the board (Figure 9.10).

Figure 9.10 Teams made up of diverse members tend to perform better than teams of similar backgrounds. wocintech (Microsoft) – 134 – Women of Color in Tech Chat – CC BY 2.0.

Additional research on diversity has shown that diverse teams are better at decision-making and problem-solving because they tend to focus more on facts (Rock & Grant, 2016). Phillips, Liljenquist, and Neale (2008) found that when working together, people from diverse backgrounds can potentially alter the group's behaviors, leading to more accurate and improved thinking. In their study, the diverse panels raised more facts related to the case than homogeneous panels and made fewer factual errors while discussing available evidence. Additionally, Levine, Apfelbaum, and Bernard (2014) showed that diverse teams are more likely to constantly reexamine facts and remain objective. They may also encourage greater scrutiny of each member's actions, keeping their joint cognitive resources sharp and vigilant.

By breaking up workforce homogeneity, you can allow your employees to become more aware of their own potential biases—entrenched ways of thinking that can otherwise blind them to key information and even lead them to make errors in decision-making processes. In other words, when people are among homogeneous and like-minded (non-diverse) teammates, the team is susceptible to groupthink and may be reticent to think about opposing viewpoints since all team members are in alignment. In a more diverse team with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, the opposing viewpoints are more likely to come out and the team members feel obligated to research and address the questions that have been raised. Again, this enables a richer discussion and a more in-depth fact-finding and exploration of opposing ideas and viewpoints to solve problems.

Diversity in teams also leads to greater innovation. Lorenzo, Yoigt, Schetelig, Zawadzki, Welpe, & Brosi (2017) sought to understand the relationship between diversity in managers (all management levels) and innovation. The key findings of this study show that:

- The positive relationship between management diversity and innovation is statistically significant—and thus companies with higher levels of diversity derive more revenue from new products and services.
- The innovation boost isn't limited to a single type of diversity. The presence of managers who are either female or are from other countries, industries, or companies can cause an increase in innovation.
- Management diversity seems to have a particularly positive effect on innovation at complex companies—those that have multiple product lines or that operate in multiple industry segments.
- To reach its potential, gender diversity needs to go beyond tokenism. In the study, innovation performance only increased significantly when the workforce included more than 20% women in management positions. Having a high percentage of female employees doesn't increase innovation if only a small number of women are managers.
- At companies with diverse management teams, openness to contributions from lower-level workers and an environment in which employees feel free to speak their minds are crucial for fostering innovation.

When you consider the impact that diverse teams have on decision-making and problem-solving—through the discussion and incorporation of new perspectives, ideas, and data—it is no wonder that the BCG study shows greater innovation. Team leaders need to reflect upon these findings during the early stages of team selection so that they can reap the benefits of having diverse voices and backgrounds.

Challenges and Best Practices of Working in Multicultural Teams

As globalization has increased over the last decades, workplaces have felt the impact of working within multicultural teams. The earlier section on team diversity outlined some of the benefits of working on diverse teams, and a multicultural group certainly qualifies as diverse. However, some key practices are recommended to those who are leading multicultural teams to navigate the challenges that these teams may experience.

People may assume that communication is the key factor that can derail multicultural teams, as participants may have different languages and communication styles. However, Brett, Behfar, and Kern (2006) outline four key cultural differences that can cause destructive conflicts in teams. The first difference is direct versus indirect communication, also known as high-context vs low-context orientation. Some cultures are very direct and explicit in their communication, while others are more indirect and ask questions rather than pointing out problems. This difference can cause conflict because, at the extreme, the direct style may be considered offensive by some, while the indirect style may be perceived as unproductive and passive-aggressive in team interactions.

The second difference that multicultural teams may face is trouble with accents and fluency. When team members don't speak the same language, there may be one language that dominates the group interaction—and those who don't speak it may feel left out. The speakers of the primary language may feel that those members don't contribute as much or are less competent. The next challenge is when there are differing attitudes toward hierarchy. Some cultures are very respectful of the hierarchy and will treat team members based on that hierarchy. Other cultures are more egalitarian and don't observe hierarchical differences to the same degree. This may lead to clashes if some people feel that they are being disrespected and not treated according to their status. The final difference that may challenge multicultural teams is conflicting decision-making norms. Different cultures make decisions differently, and some will apply a great deal of analysis and preparation beforehand. Those cultures that make decisions more quickly (and need just enough information to make a decision) may be frustrated with the slow response and relatively longer thought process.

These cultural differences are good examples of how everyday team activities (decision-making, communication, interaction among team members) may become points of contention for a multicultural team if there isn't an adequate understanding of everyone's culture. The authors propose that there are several potential interventions to try if these conflicts arise. One simple intervention is **adaptation**, which is working with or around differences. This is best used when team members are willing to acknowledge the cultural differences and learn how to work with them. The next intervention technique is **structural intervention**, or reorganizing to reduce friction on the team. This technique is best used if there are unproductive subgroups or cliques within the team that need to be moved around. **Managerial intervention** is the technique of making decisions by management and without team involvement. This technique should be used sparingly, as it essentially shows that the team needs guidance and can't move forward without management getting involved. Finally, exit is an intervention of last resort and is the voluntary or involuntary removal of a team member. If the differences and challenges have proven to be so great that an individual on the team can no longer work with the team productively, then it may be necessary to remove the team member in question.

Conflict Within Teams

Conflict occurs wherever people interact, both at home and at work. If employees don't get along with one another or their employers, there's very little motivation to do good work. Learning how to identify and navigate conflict is an important life skill that will prove to be extremely helpful, especially in the workplace. Professionally managing conflict will help to foster healthy working environments and create strong working relationships amongst coworkers and managers alike.

Any time individuals interact, there is potential for conflict. Conflict occurs when differing interests and ideas collide, creating tension. Conflict is a natural part of everyday life, especially in the workplace. With compensation, deadlines, clients, etc. on the line, it is normal for the workplace to add additional stress and pressure to the challenges of everyday life. Therefore, it is more likely people will encounter conflict at work.

Common Types of Team Conflict

Conflict is a common occurrence on teams. Conflict itself can be defined as antagonistic interactions in which one party tries to block the actions or decisions of another party. Bringing conflicts out into the open where they can be resolved is an important part of the team leader's or manager's job.

There are two basic types of team conflict: substantive (sometimes called task) and emotional (or relationship).

- **Substantive conflicts** arise over things such as goals, tasks, and the allocation of resources. When deciding how to track a project, for example, a software engineer may want to use a certain software program for its user interface and customization capabilities. The project manager may want to use a different program because it produces more detailed reports. Conflict will arise if neither party is willing to give way or compromise on his position.
- **Emotional conflicts** arise from things such as jealousy, insecurity, annoyance, envy, or personality conflicts. It is emotional conflict when two people always seem to find themselves holding opposing viewpoints and have a hard time hiding their personal animosity. Different working styles are also a common cause of emotional conflicts. Julia needs peace and quiet to concentrate, but her office mate swears

that playing music stimulates his creativity. Both end up being frustrated if they can't reach a workable resolution.

Common Causes of Conflict

Some common causes of negative conflict in teams are identified as follows:

- Conflict often arises when team members focus on **personal (emotional) issues** rather than work (substantive) issues. Enrico is attending night school to get his degree, but he comes to work late and spends time doing research instead of focusing on the job. The other team members have to pick up his slack. They can confront Enrico and demand his full participation, they can ignore him while tensions continue to grow, or they can complain to the manager. All the options will lower team performance.
- **Competition over resources**, such as information, money, supplies or access to technology, can also cause conflict. Maria is supposed to have use of the laboratory in the afternoons, but Jason regularly overstays his allotted time, and Maria's work suffers. Maria might try to "get even" by denying Jason something he needs, such as information, or by complaining to other team members.
- **Communication breakdowns** cause conflict—and misunderstandings are exacerbated in virtual teams and teams with cross-cultural members. The project manager should be precise in his expectations from all team members and be easily accessible. When members work independently, it is critical that they understand how their contributions affect the big picture in order to stay motivated. Carl couldn't understand why Latisha was angry with him when he was late with his reports—he didn't report to her. He didn't realize that she needed his data to complete her assignments. She eventually quit, and the team lost a good worker.
- Team morale can be low because of **external work conditions** such as rumors of downsizing or fears that the competition is beating them to market. A manager needs to understand what external conditions are influencing team performance.

Summary

- Teams go through five definitive stages during development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.
- The success of work teams relies on individuals filling different positive roles, however work teams can fail if too many individuals take on negative roles.
- Group climate refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members
- The benefits of team diversity include better decision-making and problem-solving and opposing viewpoints are more likely to come out.
- There are two basic types of team conflict: substantive (sometimes called task) and emotional (or relationship).

Discussion Questions

1. Recall a previous or current small group to which you belonged/belong. Trace the group's development using the five stages discussed in this section. Did you experience all the stages? In what order? Did you stay in some stages more than others?
2. Discuss a team you were a part of that included a member who took on one of the positive team roles or one of the negative team roles in the team. What actions did they engage in? How did their actions impact the team's ability to work?
3. Describe a substantive conflict and an emotional conflict you've experienced or witness at your place of work. How were these conflicts resolved?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of combining The Five Stages of Team Development and Conflict Within Teams (Principles of Management – Lumen Learning) with 5.2 Small Group Dynamics and 5.4 Working in Diverse Teams(Conflict Management – Open Library)
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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Chapter 10: Workplace Success

Have you ever received a write-up at work for something you said to your boss? Or have you ever posted an image or statement on the internet that you wish you could take back? Do you know what steps to take to earn a promotion at work?

In this chapter you will learn about workplace success. You will learn about career development and growth, professionalism, and workplace communication. This will provide you with valuable information for engaging in positive interactions in your professional experiences.

10.1 Career Development and Growth

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the five stages of career development.
- Describe the Plan-Do-Check-Act strategy.
- Compare and contrast hard skills and soft skills.
- Describe strategies for networking.
- Describe strategies for earning promotions at work.

What exactly is **career development**? It's a lifelong process in which we become aware of, interested in, knowledgeable about, and skilled in a career. It's a key part of human development as our identity forms and our life unfolds. Below you will learn about the various stages you will go through as your career develops.

Stages of Career Development

There are five main stages of career development (Super & Jordaan, 1973; Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Each stage correlates with attitudes, behaviors, and relationships we all tend to have at that point and age. As we progress through each stage and reach the milestones identified, we prepare to move on to the next one (Figure 10.1).

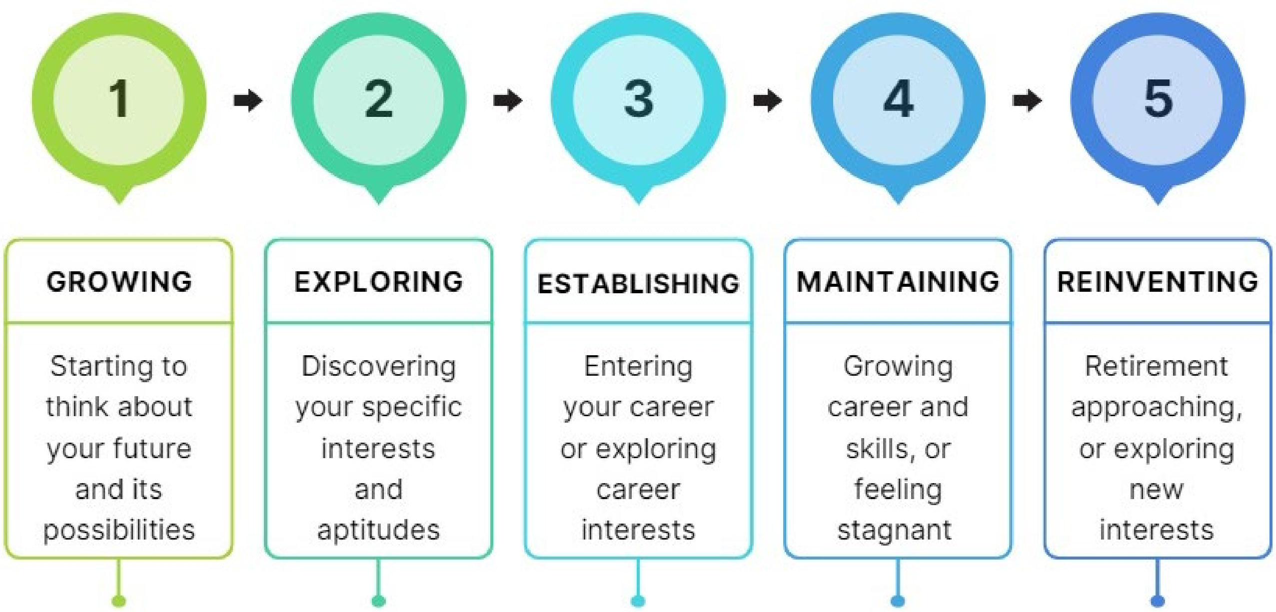

Figure 10.1 Throughout our lives we go through different stages that influence our careers. [5 Stages of Career Development](#) – [Stevy.Scarbrough](#) – [CC BY 4.0](#)

Growing

This is a time in early years (4–13 years old) when you begin to have a sense about the future. You begin to realize that your participation in the world is related to being able to do certain tasks and accomplish certain goals

Exploring

This period begins when you are a teenager, extends into your mid-twenties, and may extend later. In this stage you find that you have specific interests and aptitudes. You are aware of your inclinations to perform and learn about some subjects more than others. You may try out jobs in your community or at your school. You may begin to explore a specific career. At this stage, you have some detailed "data points" about careers, which will guide you in certain directions.

Establishing

This period covers your mid-twenties through mid-forties. By now you are selecting or entering a field you consider suitable, and you are exploring job opportunities that will be stable. You are also looking for upward growth, so you may be thinking about an advanced degree.

Maintaining

This stage is typical for people in their mid-forties to mid-sixties. You may be in an upward pattern of learning new skills and staying engaged. But you might also be merely "coasting and cruising" or even feeling stagnant. You may be taking stock of what you've accomplished and where you still want to go.

Reinventing

In your mid-sixties, you are likely transitioning into retirement. But retirement in our technologically advanced world can be just the beginning of a new career or pursuit—a time when you can reinvent yourself. There are many new interests to pursue, including teaching others what you've learned, volunteering, starting online businesses, consulting, etc.

Keep in mind that your career development path is personal to you, and you may not fit neatly into the categories described above. It's more common than it has been in the past for people to change careers in their thirties, forties, fifties, and even sixties. Perhaps your socioeconomic background changes how you fit into the schema. Perhaps your physical and mental abilities affect how you define the idea of a "career." Chance is a factor that plays into everyone's career path in a way that can't be predicted or anticipated. You are unique, and your career path can only be developed by you.

Career Development Resources

Career experts say that people will change careers (not to mention jobs) five to seven times in a lifetime. So, your career will likely not be a straight and narrow path. Be sure to set goals and assess your interests, skills and values often. Seek opportunities for career growth and enrichment. And take advantage of the rich set of resources available to you. Below are just a few.

Whether you are a prospective student, a current student, a graduate, or even an employer, you can obtain invaluable career development assistance at your college or university. Campus career centers can support, guide, and empower you in every step of the career development process, from initial planning to achieving lifelong career satisfaction.

Going to college is one of the best steps you can take to prepare for a career. But soon-to-be or recently graduated students are not necessarily guaranteed jobs. Staying educated about strategies for developing your career and finding new jobs will help you manage ongoing transitions. The book *The Secret to Getting a Job After College: Marketing Tactics to Turn Degrees into Dollars* by Larry Chiagouris was written specifically to help recent grads increase their chances of finding a job right after college. This book speaks to students in all majors and provides tips and tactics to attract the attention of an employer and successfully compete with other candidates to get the job you want.

Career Roadmap

You can use the Career Roadmap, from DePaul University, to evaluate where you are and where you want to be in your career/careers. This roadmap can help you decide if you want to change career paths and can guide you in searching for a new job. The road map identifies the following four cyclical steps:

1. Know yourself.
2. Explore and choose options.
3. Gain knowledge and experience.
4. Put it all together: the job search process.

Plan, Do, Check, Act

PDCA (plan–do–check–act) is a four-step strategy for carrying out change. You can use it to evaluate where you are in the career development process and to identify your next steps (Figure 10.2). The strategy is typically used in the business arena as a framework for improving processes and services. But you can think of your career as a personal product you are offering or selling.

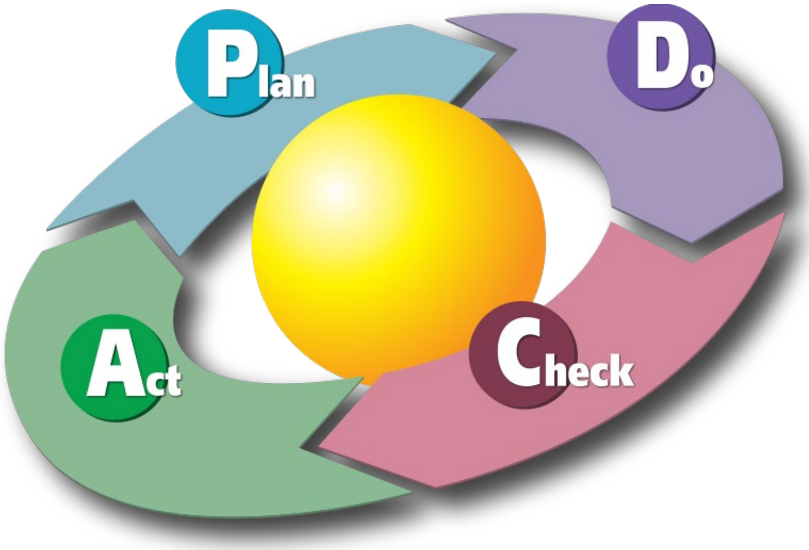

Figure 10.2 A diagram showing the PDCA Cycle – Diagram by Karn G. Bulsuk (http://www.bulsuk.com) – CC BY 3.0 Unported

1. **PLAN**: What are your goals and objectives? What process will you use to get to your targets? You might want to plan smaller to begin with and test out possible effects. For instance, if you are thinking of getting into a certain career, you might plan to try it out first as an intern or volunteer or on a part-time basis. When you start on a small scale, you can test possible outcomes.
2. **DO**: Implement your plan. Sell your product—which is YOU and your skills, talents, energy, and enthusiasm. Collect data as you go along; you will need it for charting and analyzing in the Check and Act steps ahead.
3. **CHECK**: Look at your results so far. Are you happy with your job or wherever you are in the career development process? How is your actual accomplishment measuring up next to your intentions and wishes? Look for where you may have deviated in your intended steps. For example, did you take a job in another city when your initial plans were for working closer to friends and family? What are the pros and cons? If you like, create a chart that shows you all the factors. With a chart, it will be easier to see trends over several PDCA cycles.
4. **ACT**: How should you act going forward? What changes in planning, doing, and checking do you want to take? The PDCA framework is an ongoing process. Keep planning, doing, checking, and acting. The goal is continuous improvement.

Career Skills

Employers want individuals who have the necessary hard and soft skills to do the job well and adapt to changes in the workplace. Soft skills may be especially in demand today because employers are generally equipped to train new employees in a hard skill, such as new computer software, but it's much more difficult to teach an employee a soft skill such as developing rapport with coworkers or knowing how to manage conflict.

Hard Skills

Hard skills are concrete or objective abilities that you learn and perhaps have mastered. They are skills you can easily quantify, like using a computer, speaking a foreign language, or operating a machine. You might earn a certificate, a college degree, or other credentials that attest to your hard-skill competencies. Obviously, because of changes in technology, the hard skills required by industries today are vastly different from those required centuries ago (Figure 10.3).

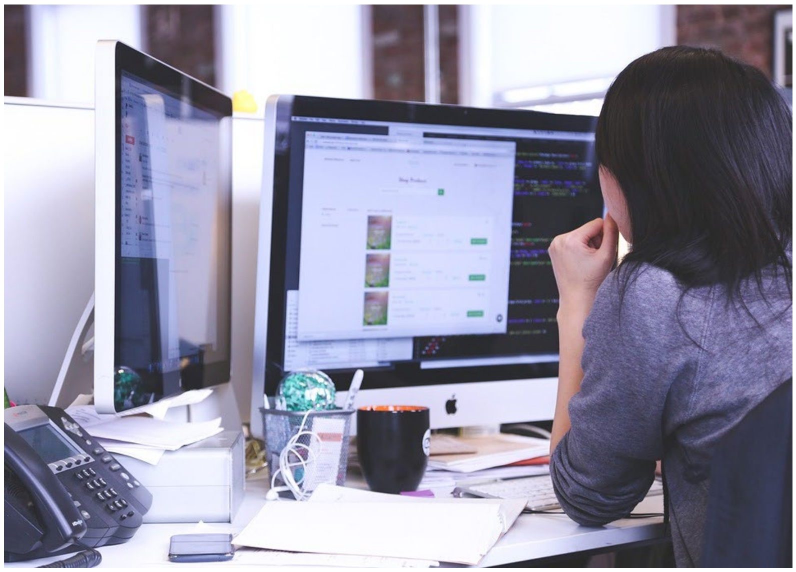

Figure 10.3 Knowing how to use the computer is a valuable hard skill in today's technology-driven world. Woman Using Computer – StartupStockPhotos – Pixabay License

Soft Skills

Soft skills, on the other hand, are subjective skills that have changed very little over time. Such skills might pertain to the way you relate to people; the way you think; or the ways in which you behave—for example, listening attentively, working well in groups, and speaking clearly. Soft skills are sometimes also called *transferable skills* because you can easily transfer them from job to job or profession to profession without much training.

These skills are transferable because they are positive attributes that are invaluable in practically any kind of work. They also do not require much training from an employer—you have them already and take them with you wherever you go. Soft skills are a big part of your "total me" package.

So, identify the soft skills that show you off the best, and identify the ones that prospective employers are looking for (Figure 10.4). By comparing both sets, you can more directly gear your job search to your strongest professional qualities.

Figure 10.4 The Top 10 Soft Skills employers are looking for. Soft Skills Summary – Digits.co.uk Images – CC BY 2.0

Networking

In the context of career development, **networking** is the process by which people build relationships with one another for the purpose of helping one another achieve professional goals. Networking involves the exchange information with others. For example:

- You may share business cards, résumés, cover letters, job-seeking strategies, leads about open jobs, information about companies and organizations, and information about a specific field.
- You might also share information about meet-up groups, conferences, special events, technology tools, and social media.
- You might also solicit job "headhunters," career counselors, career centers, career coaches, an alumni association, family members, friends, acquaintances, and vendors.

Networking can occur anywhere and at any time. In fact, your network expands with each new relationship you establish (Figure 10.5). And the networking strategies you can employ are nearly limitless. With imagination and ingenuity, your networking can be highly successful.

Figure 10.5 Networking with other people can lead to establishing connections to more contacts. 3D Social Networking – Chris Potter – CC BY 2.0

Strategies for Networking

We live in a social world. Almost everywhere you go and anything you do professionally involves connecting with people. It stands to reason that finding a new job and advancing your career entails building relationships with these people. The challenge is figuring out how to do it. What is your first step? Whom do you contact? What do you say? How long will it take? Where do you concentrate efforts? How do you know if your investments will pay off?

The following strategies can be useful tools for networking:

1. Create an action plan and use it to think through your career goals and the steps you need to take to meet them. Use the information you learned in Chapter 3 to help you create your action plan.
2. Think of your network holistically. You probably know people who can help. Identify those you know personally, academically, and professionally. Let the people in your network know what you are trying to achieve.
3. Attend as many events as you can. Put yourself into new situations and become comfortable talking about your career goals and interests.
4. Create a professional social media profile. Employers are using LinkedIn and other sites like Indeed to find and screen candidates.

Strategies at College

- **Get to know your professors**: Communicating with instructors is a valuable way to learn about a career and also get letters of reference if and when needed for a job. When you learn in a virtual environment, it is important to be communicative to build relationships and be memorable. Your instructor can't provide you with an academic reference if they don't remember you. Connecting with your instructors might provide you with leads on job openings, internships, or research possibilities. Get to know your instructors. They are a valuable part of your network.
- **Network with alumni:** Attend alumni events to find people working in your desired field. Search for alums on LinkedIn – they might be willing to do an informational interview or help you in some other way. It is easier to network with people that you share something in common with.
- **Network with your learning colleagues:** Classmates are an excellent source of information and connections. Many of them may already be working in your desired field.
- **Volunteer**: Volunteering is an excellent way to meet new people who can help you develop your career, even if the organization you are volunteering with is not in your field. Just by working alongside others and working toward common goals, you build relationships that may later serve you in unforeseen and helpful ways.
- **Get an internship**: Many organizations offer internship positions to college students. Some of these positions are paid, but often they are not. Paid or not, you gain experience relevant to your career, and you potentially make many new contacts.
- **Conduct informational interviews**: You may initiate contact with people in your chosen field who can tell you about their experiences of entering the field and thriving in it. Many websites have guidance on how to plan and conduct these interviews.

Strategies at Work

- **Join professional organizations**: You can meet many influential people at local and national meetings and events of professional and volunteer organizations. Learn about these organizations. See if they have membership discounts for students, or student chapters. Once you are a member, you may have access to membership lists, which can give you prospective access to many new people to network with. Following professional organizations on LinkedIn or other social media allows you to see their content and keep abreast of emerging trends and best practices.
- **Get a part-time job**: Working full-time may be your ultimate goal, but you may want to fill in some cracks or crevices by working in a part-time job. Invariably you will meet people who can feasibly help with your networking goals. And you can

gain good experience along the way, which can also be noted on your résumé. Talk to Career Services to learn more about the possibilities.
- **Attend networking events**: There are innumerable professional networking events taking place around the world and also online. Find them listed in magazines, community calendars, newspapers, journals, and at the websites of companies, organizations, and associations.

Strategies at Home and Beyond

- **Get comfortable and participate in online social media**: An explosion of career opportunity awaits you with social media, including LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and many more. You will find an extensive list of suggested sites at CareerOneStop. Keep your communication professional at these sites. Follow the guidelines for communication found in the previous section of this chapter. Peruse magazine articles, and if you find one that's relevant to your field and it contains names of professionals, you can reach out to them to learn more and get job leads. Realize that social media is public and posting pictures of yourself at parties or commenting in an unbecoming way could cost you an opportunity.
- **Ask family members and friends, coworkers, and acquaintances for referrals**: Do they know others who might help you? You can start with the question "Who else should I be talking to?"
- **Use business cards or networking cards**: A printed business card can be an essential tool to help your contacts remember you. Creativity can help in this regard, too. Students often design cards themselves and either hand print them or print them on a home printer.

The bottom line with developing professional networks is to cull information from as many sources as possible and use that information in creative ways to advance your career opportunities.

Career Growth

Once you have found a career that interests you and have started on that path, your focus should familiarize yourself with planning strategies used by people who want to further their careers. Each of these involves and requires emotional intelligence skills that you learned about in chapter 5 and throughout the book. Having emotional intelligence skills, as you may recall, is even more important than having a high IQ in the workplace (Goleman, 2005). Knowing yourself and your ability to manage your actions and behaviors is necessary to achieve career success.

Getting Promoted

How to get promoted must be one of the questions managers are asked the most. Often earning a promotion or movement into a higher level is dependent on not only one's skills and abilities but also certain behaviors. According Siang (2006) there are several characteristics people have that can help them earn a promotion, and these areas fall into one of three categories; plan, attitude, and action:

Plan

1. **Perform self-analysis.** Examining your strengths and weaknesses can help you to improve your work to prepare for a promotion.
2. **Keep your eye on the goals.** What are your work goals? What do you need to do to accomplish them? Developing S.M.A.R.T. goals and an action plan for each goal will help you to achieve them.

Attitude

3. **Be proud of your work.** Put in the necessary effort to complete your work at the highest levels and be proud of what you accomplish.
4. **Develop your knowledge, skills, and abilities.** Do what needs to be done to acquire skills. Take seminars and workshops and attend conferences. Make sure you continually update your skills.
5. **View challenges as opportunities for growth.** Avoid complaining and look at things to overcome as ways to improve your skills but also to show others you are capable of solving problems.

Action

6. **Understand your role in helping the organization achieve goals.** Be a team player to understand what you must do to help the rest of the department and organization achieve.
7. **Do your best.** Take initiative. Look at how you can solve problems or contribute new ideas. But don’t over-extend yourself!
8. **Go the extra mile.** Take the initiative to aid with work or problems that you know how to or think you can solve.
9. **Do work from the next level up.** Continue to do your own work, but try to take on assignments that may be “above your pay grade” or above your normal expected workload. This shows you are capable of the position you want.

Besides understanding the skills, attitudes, and abilities needed for promotion, learning how to handle change is a great way to earn a promotion and obtain career success.

Summary

- There are five stages of career development: growing, exploring, establishing, maintaining, and reinventing.
- The Plan-Do-Check-Act strategy can help you make evaluate your career and know when to make changes in your career.
- Hard skills can be learned in your career, while soft skills are transferable between careers.
- Networking allows you to build relationships with other people who may have skills or other connections to help you be successful in your career.
- Continuously evaluating your own performance and having self-awareness about your knowledge, skills, and abilities in your job can help you work towards getting promoted.

Discussion Questions

1. Use the Plan-Do-Check-Act strategy to determine where you are in the career-development process. What can you do to work toward your desired career?
2. Which of the top 10 soft skills do you possess? What can you do to help develop the skills you are lacking?
3. List three of the networking suggestions that you think you can use to help you advance your career. Which networking suggestions do you think will not be helpful to you? Why?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of combining Career Development, Skills for a Career and Strategies for Networking (College Succes – Lumen Learning) with Career Growth: Behaviors and Change (Human Relations – Saylor)
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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10.2 Professionalism

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define professionalism and discuss the various components of professionalism.
- Describe the various types of etiquette for success.

What is professionalism? A **profession** is an occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience. Becoming a member of a specific profession doesn't happen overnight. Whether you seek to be a public relations expert, lawyer, doctor, teacher, welder, electrician, and so on, each profession involves that interested parties invest themselves in learning to become a professional or a member of a profession who earns their living through specified expert activity. It's much easier to define the terms "profession" and "professional" than it is to define the term "professionalism" because each profession will have its take on what it means to be a professional within a given field.

According to the United States Department of Labor (2012) professionalism isn't one thing; it's a combination of qualities. A professional employee arrives on time for work and manages time effectively. Professional workers take responsibility for their own behavior and work effectively with others. High quality work standards, honesty, and integrity are also part of the package. Professional employees look clean and neat and dress appropriately for the job. Communicating effectively and appropriately for the workplace is also an essential part of professionalism.

As you can see here, professionalism isn't a single "thing" that can be labeled. Instead, **professionalism** involves the aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession. By the word "aims," we mean that someone who exhibits professionalism is guided by a set of goals in a professional setting. Whether the aim is to complete a project on time or help ensure higher quarterly incomes for their organization, professionalism involves striving to help one's organization achieve specific goals. By "behaviors," we mean specific ways of acting and communicating within an organizational environment. Some common behaviors can include acting ethically, respecting others, collaborating effectively, and taking personal/professional responsibility. Let's look at each of these separately.

Ethics

The word "ethics" actually is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means the nature or disposition of a culture (Oxford English Dictionary, 1963). From this perspective, ethics then involves the moral center of a culture that governs behavior. Without getting too deep, let's just say that philosophers debate the very nature of ethics, and they have described a wide range of different philosophical perspectives on what constitutes ethics. For our purposes, **ethics** is the judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.

Every year there are lapses in ethical judgment by organizations and organizational members. For example, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Scott Pruitt, committed many ethical lapses during his tenure with the agency prompting his resignation. Some of the ethical lapses included ordering raises for two aides even when the White House rejected them, spending $3.5 million (twice times as much as his predecessor) on taxpayer-funded security, using that security to pick up his favorite moisturizing lotion and dry-cleaning, renting a room from a lobbyist who had dealings with the EPA for $50 per night, installing a $43,000 private phone booth in his office that allegedly was used once, spending $124,000 on first-class flights, purchasing two season-ticket seats to a University of Kentucky basketball game from a billionaire coal executive, tried to use his position to get his wife a Chick-fil-A franchise, and others. Sadly, these ethical lapses are still frequent in corporate America, and they often come with huge lawsuit settlements and/or jail time.

In the business world, we often talk about business ethics, which involves things like not stealing from a company; not lying to one's boss, coworkers, or customers/clients; not taking bribes, payoffs, or kickbacks; taking credit for someone else's work; abusing and belittling someone in the workplace; or simply letting other people get away with unethical behavior. For example, if you know your organization has a zero-tolerance policy for workplace discrimination and you know that one supervisor is purposefully not hiring pregnant women because "they'll just be leaving on maternity leave soon anyway," then you are just as responsible as that supervisor. We might also add, that discriminating against someone who is pregnant or can get pregnant is also a violation of Equal Employment Opportunity law, so you can see that often the line between ethics and rules (or laws) can be blurred.

From a communication perspective, there are also ethical issues that you should be aware of. Redding (1996), broke down unethical organizational communication into six specific categories; coercive, destructive, deceptive, intrusive, secretive, manipulative/exploitative.

Respect for Others

Our second category related to professionalism is respecting others. From workplace bullying to sexual harassment, many people simply do not always treat people with dignity and respect in the workplace. So, what do we mean by treating someone with respect? There are a lot of behaviors one can engage in that are respectful if you're interacting with a coworker or interacting with leaders or followers. Here's a list we created of respectful behaviors for workplace interactions:

- Be courteous, polite, and kind to everyone.
- Do not criticize or nitpick at little inconsequential things.
- Do not engage in patronizing or demeaning behaviors.
- Don't engage in physically hostile body language.
- Don't roll your eyes when your coworkers are talking.
- Don't use an aggressive tone of voice when talking with coworkers.
- Encourage coworkers to express opinions and ideas.
- Encourage your coworkers to demonstrate respect to each other as well.
- Listen to your coworkers openly without expressing judgment before they've finished speaking.
- Listen to your coworkers without cutting them off or speaking over them.
- Make sure you treat all of your coworkers fairly and equally.
- Make sure your facial expressions are appropriate and not aggressive.
- Never engage in verbally aggressive behavior: insults, name-calling, rumor mongering, disparaging, and putting people or their ideas down.
- Praise your coworkers more often than you criticize them. Point out when they're doing great things, not just when they're doing "wrong" things.
- Provide an equal opportunity for all coworkers to provide insight and input during meetings.
- Treat people the same regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, etc.…
- When expressing judgment, focus on criticizing ideas, and not the person.

Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave. Whether we're talking about our attitudes, our thought processes, or physical/communicative behaviors, personal responsibility is simply realizing that we are in the driver's seat and not blaming others for our current circumstances. Now, this is not to say that there are never external factors that impede our success. Of course, there are. This is not to say that certain people have a leg-up on life because of a privileged background, of course, some people have. However, personal responsibility involves differentiating between those things we can control and those things that are outside of our control. For example, you may not be able to control a coworker who decides to yell at you, but you can control how you feel about that coworker, how you think about that coworker, and how you choose to respond to that coworker. Here are some ways that you can take personal responsibility in your own life (or in the workplace):

- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your choices in the workplace.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for how you feel at work.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your behaviors at work.
- Accept that your choices are yours alone, so you can't blame someone else for them.
- Accept that your sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem are yours.
- Accept that you can control your stress and feelings of burnout.
- Decide to invest in your self-improvement.
- Decide to take control of your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Decide on specific professional goals and make an effort and commitment to accomplish those goals.

Although you may have the ability to take responsibility for your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, not everyone in the workplace will do the same. Most of us will come in contact with coworkers who do not take personal responsibility. Dealing with coworkers who have a million and one excuses can be frustrating and demoralizing.

Excuse-making occurs any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behavior from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look better and more in control (Snyder & Higgins, 1988). For example, an individual may explain their tardiness to work by talking about how horrible the traffic was on the way to work instead of admitting that they slept in late and left the house late. People make excuses because they fear that revealing the truth would make them look bad or out of control. In this example, waking up late and leaving the house late is the fault of the individual, but they blame the traffic to make themself look better and in control even though they were late.

Excuse-making happens in every facet of life, but excuse-making in the corporate world can be highly problematic. For example, research has shown that when front-line service providers engage in excuse-making, they are more likely to lose return customers as a result Hill, Baer, & Kosenko, 1992). In one study, when salespeople attempted to excuse their lack of ethical judgment on their customer's lack of ethics, supervisors tended to punish more severely those who engaged in excuse-making than those who had not Bellizzi, & Norvell, (1991). Of course, even an individual's peers can become a little annoyed by a colleague who always has a handy excuse for their behavior. For this reason, Nordam (2014) recommends using the **ERROR method** when handling a situation where your behavior was problematic: Empathy, Responsibility, Reason, Offer Reassurance. Here is an example Nordam uses to illustrate the ERROR method:

> I hate that you [burden placed on person] because of me (Empathy). I should have thought things out better (Responsibility), but I got caught up in [reason for behavior] (Reason). Next time I'll [preventative action] (Offer Reassurance).

As you can see, the critical parts of this response involve validating the other person, taking responsibility, and providing an explanation for how you'll behave in the future to avoid similar problems.

General Etiquette for Career Success

Introductions

An introduction to a person is possibly one of the most important aspects to etiquette. This nonverbal behavior can send positive or not-so-positive messages to a person with whom you want to make a good impression. Here are the components to a good handshake and introduction (Lorenz, 2004):

1. **Firm handshake.** A firm handshake shows self-confidence. Try not to make it too firm or too soft. Do not place your hand on top of the other person's hand while shaking (Figure 10.6).
2. **Web to web.** When you shake someone's hand, put your right hand out and the web of skin between your thumb and pointer finger should touch the web of the other person. Try to avoid grabbing someone's fingers when shaking hands, as this could send a negative message.
3. **Eye contact.** As you shake the person's hand, make direct eye contact. This can be challenging for some people who grew up in a culture where direct eye contact would be considered rude. Make sure to smile.
4. **Say your name and repeat the other person's name.** As you are making eye contact and shaking hands, you might say something like, "Hi, my name is Laura Portolese Dias. It is a pleasure to meet you." When they say their name, make sure to repeat it, which will make it easier to remember.
5. **Introducing two people.** If you know two people and are introducing them, say both people's names and try to tell them something they have in common they can discuss. For example, "Casey, meet Ms. Robins. Both of you went to the University of Washington-Bothell campus." This gives them a starting point to begin their conversation.

Good handshakes and introductions are important, but they also take practice. Often, people are too worried about the impression they are making to focus on their handshake, eye contact, and other aspects. The more comfortable you can get with this, the more second nature it will become and the better your human relations will be.

Figure 10.6 A firm handshake can make a good first impression at a job interview. Handshake Interview – Tumisu – Pixabay License

While a firm hand shake can make a good first impression in most Western Contexts, it is important to remember that culture also plays a role in how to go about making a good first impression. When working with teams, clients, or businesses from international contexts, learning about their customs for introductions can often result in positive working relationships, or at least start them off on the right track (Figure 10.7).

a) b)

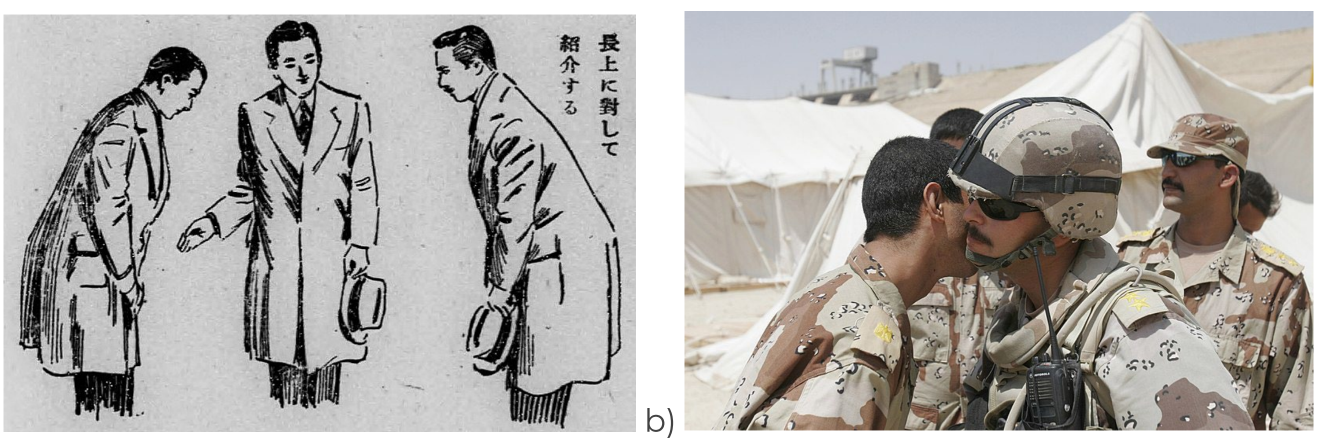

Figure 10.7 a) Greeting in Japan. Handshake Illustration - 国民礼法研究会 – Public Domain b) Col. Muhammed greets an Iraqi lieutenant. It is common for Iraqis to exchange kisses on the cheek as a greeting between close friends. An odd number of kisses, usually more than three but fewer than seven are exchanged. HADITHAH DAM, AL ANBAR, IRAQ (August 13, 2005) - Lance Corporal Marc Fencil – Public Domain

Clothing

Dress is another consideration with etiquette. Dress will vary greatly from region to region. For example, in the Seattle area, it is normal for many people to wear jeans to work, while in other parts of the country, this would be considered inappropriate. When deciding what to wear, it is always best to be a bit overdressed than underdressed. For job interviews, jeans or shorts would rarely, if ever, be acceptable. Normally in job interviews, dressing one "step up" from what people wear at the company is a good rule of thumb.

Showing too much skin or revealing tattoos or facial piercings in some work environments may prevent upward movement in a company, as it sends the wrong message to your boss, or future boss. Fair or not, there are many unspoken rules about what is appropriate and what is not. The best thing to do is to look at what the successful people around you are wearing. For example, if all of the men in the workplace wear suit jackets and rarely take them off, this is an indicator of expected workplace dress. If all of the women in the office wear closed toed shoes and leave the flip flops at home, it might be a good idea for you to do the same as well. Personal style and individuality are important, but in some professions, it makes sense to err on the side of caution when choosing a work wardrobe (Sinberg, 2009).

Technology

Another important thing to mention is the use of technology. Although many people use it, the increased use of technology has actually made people ruder; 9 out of 10 Americans report they've seen others misuse technology and 75 percent agree that mobile etiquette is worse than it was a year ago (Bruzzese, 2011).

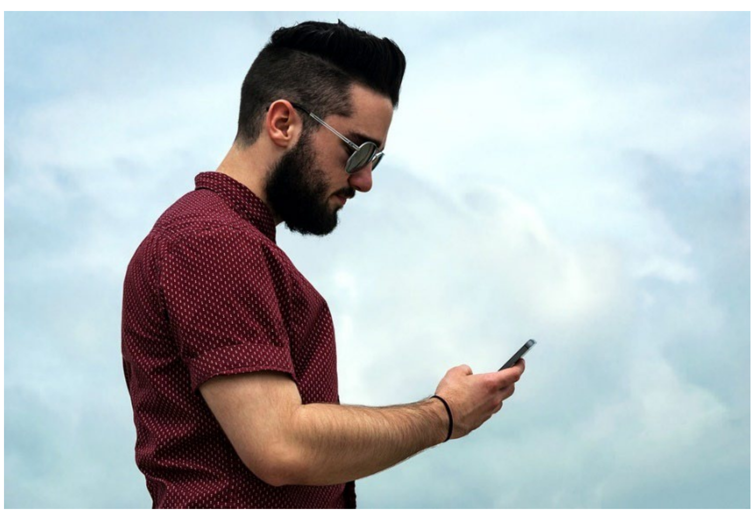

Figure 10. 8 Looking at your phone while talking with someone is viewed similarly as turning your back to them in the middle of a conversation. [Man Texting](#) – [TheHilaryClark](#) – [Pixabay License](#)

Here are some examples of basic etiquette when it comes to technology:

- Don't look at your phone while talking with someone else.
- Don't use a phone for calls or texts while at the dinner table.
- Don't talk loudly on the phone in a public space.
- Avoid letting "text speak" cross over into e-mails (i.e., "IDK" is okay in a text message, but spell it out, "I don't know," in e-mails).
- Try to avoid multitasking with your phone in inappropriate places, such as when in the restroom.
- When sending e-mails, avoid clogging up peoples' e-mail boxes with "reply all" messages.
- Use spell-check for e-mails.
- Try to answer e-mails within twenty-four hours, even if it is to say, "I am not sure about this but I will get back to you."

Reputation Management

Many companies pay hundreds, even thousands of dollars every month to monitor and clean up their online reputations. The process of monitoring your online reputation is called **reputation management**. Reputation.com, one of hundreds of firms that specializes in "fixing" online reputations, has become popular for companies looking to enhance their online image. Reputation management isn't just for companies, individuals are using these services to make unflattering things on the Internet about them disappear (Tozzi, 2008).

Anything posted on the Internet, from a picture on Facebook to a comment on a blog, will be in cyberspace indefinitely. Consider the case of a New York professor. Eight years earlier, he had been charged with receiving grant money wrongfully. If you googled his name, you would find a press release listing this charge as one of his name's top search results, even though he had paid the $2,000 fine (Bilton, 2011). Not exactly something he would want a potential or current employer to see!

This is exactly why it is important in career development to be aware of the kinds of things you post, whether you are looking for a job or already have a job. For example, thirteen Virgin Airlines employees were fired for a chat they had on Facebook about the plane's safety, along with negative comments about customers (Bloomberg News, 2008). In yet another example, a job seeker posted the following to Twitter: "Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work." And Cisco, who regularly monitors the Internet for mentions of their name (reputation management), replied, "Who is the hiring manager. I'm sure they would love to know that you will hate the work. We here at Cisco are versed in the web." The job offer to this future employee was rescinded (Popkin, 2009).

Websites that allow for professional networking can be a great tool but can also be detrimental. For example, a human resource executive posted his resume on LinkedIn and searching for new career opportunities. He was forced out of his job and then sued his employer for constructive dismissal (Williams, 2012).

So how exactly can you monitor your online reputation? Here are some tips:

- Google yourself often and see what the search results return.
- Consider changing your privacy settings in Facebook, so people you are not friends with cannot view your profile.
- Change your Facebook setting so you must approve posts that “tag” you.
- Be aware of your company’s policy on posting resumes on websites like LinkedIn.
- Do not talk about work on Twitter, Facebook, or any other social media site.
- Never mention your company name on social media sites.

Managing your online reputation can make sure that when an employer or potential employer sees your online persona, they are seeing the side you want them to see. It will show them that you represent the company in a positive light, which can enhance career success.

Summary

- Professionalism involves the aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession.
- The term ethics is defined as the judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.
- Personal responsibility refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave.
- The use of technology has increased and so has the rudeness, some studies show. Basic etiquette for phones includes not texting while you are having a face-to-face conversation with someone and avoiding speaking loudly.
- Make sure to engage in careful consideration before posting comments on social media. This is called reputation management.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a time in an organization where you witnessed unethical organizational communication. Which of Redding's typology did you witness? Did you do anything about the unethical organizational communication? Why?
2. Why do you think it's essential to take personal responsibility and avoid excusing making in the workplace? Have you ever found yourself making excuses? Why?
3. Visit a public place such as a mall or restaurant. Observe how people use technology when they are alone and when others are around them. What did you observe? What would be considered rude and what would be considered acceptable and normal behavior? Write four paragraphs on your observations and bring to class to discuss.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of combining 13.1 The Requirements of Professionalism (Interpersonal Communication – Milne Library) and 13.3 Career Growth: Impression Management (Human Relations – Saylor).
- Changed formatting for images to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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10.3 Workplace Communication

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between formal and informal language.
- Discuss the role of text messaging and e-mails in business communication.
- Describe the appropriate use of netiquette.

Oral and written communication proficiencies are consistently ranked in the top ten desirable skills by employer surveys year after year. In fact, high-powered business executives sometimes hire consultants to coach them in sharpening their communication skills. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2009), the following are the top five personal qualities or skills potential employers seek:

1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Strong work ethic
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others, group communication)
4. Initiative
5. Analytical skills

Knowing this, you can see that one way for you to be successful and increase your promotion potential is to increase your abilities to speak and write effectively (Figure 10.9).

Figure 10.9 Effective communication skills can increase your chance of promotion. Baltimore Jewish Council Meeting – Maryland GovPics – CC BY 2.0

The College Board (2004) found that writing is related to attaining high-skill, high-wage work. Not being able to clearly articulate yourself can limit your opportunities for professional, salaried employment. unable to express themselves clearly in writing limit their opportunities for professional, salaried employment. An individual with excellent communication skills is an asset to every organization. No matter what career you plan to pursue, learning to express yourself professionally in speech and in writing will help you get there. Let's examine the various ways communication is used in the workplace today.

Language Use

In the workplace, the type of language and how we use language is essential. PayScale (2016) surveyed 63,924 managers. The top 3 Hard-Skills managers reported that new college graduates lack are writing proficiency (44%), public speaking (39%), and data analysis (36%). The top 3 Soft Skills the managers reported that new college graduates lack are critical thinking/problem-solving (60%), attention to detail (56%), and communication (46%). One of the most important factors of professionalism in today's workplace is effective written and oral communication. From the moment someone sends in a resume with a cover letter, their language skills are being evaluated, so knowing how to use both formal language effectively and jargon/specialized language is paramount for success in the workplace.

Formal Language

Formal language is a specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar. This is in contrast to informal language, which is more common when we speak. In the workplace, there are reasons why someone would use both formal and informal language. Formal language is less personal and more professional in tone than informal language. Some key factors of formal language include complex sentences, use of full words, and the third person.

Informal language, on the other hand, is more colloquial or common in tone; it contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations, and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays. For people entering the workplace, learning how to navigate both formal and informal language is very beneficial because different circumstances will call for both in the workplace. If you're writing a major report for shareholders, then knowing how to use formal language is very important. On the other hand, if you're a PR professional speaking on behalf of an organization, speaking to the media using formal language could make you (and your organization) look distant and disconnected, so using informal language can help in this case.

Use of Jargon/Specialized Language

Every industry is going to be filled with specialized **jargon** or the specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless or difficult for outsiders to understand. For example, if you were informed that a "factor analysis with a varimax rotation" was conducted, you would likely be confused. However, those who study human communication from a social scientific perspective, would know what that phrase means because they learned it during their training in graduate school. If you walked into a hospital and heard an Emergency Department (ED) physician referring to the GOMER in bay 9, most of you would be equally perplexed. Every job has some jargon, so part of being a professional is learning the jargon within your industry and peripherally related sectors as well. For example, if you want to be a pharmaceutical sales representative, learning some of the jargon of an ED (notice they're not called ERs anymore). Trust us, watching the old television show ER isn't going to help you learn this jargon very well either (Primack, et al., 2012).

Instead, you have to spend time within an organization or field to pick up the necessary jargon. However, you can start this process while a student by joining student groups associated with specific fields. If you want to learn the jargon of public relations, join the Public Relations Student Society of America. If you want to go into training and development, becoming a student member of the Association for Talent Development. Want to go into nonprofit work, become a member of the Association for Volunteer Administration or the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network. If you do not have a student chapter of one of these groups on your campus, then find a group on LinkedIn or another social networking site aimed at professionals. One of the great things about modern social networking is the ability to watch professionals engaging in professional dialogue virtually. By watching the discussions in LinkedIn groups, you can start to pick up on the major issues of a field and some of the everyday jargon.

Texting

Text messages and e-mails are part of our communication landscape, and skilled business communicators consider them a valuable tool to connect. Netiquette refers to etiquette, or protocols and norms for communication, on the Internet.

Whatever digital device you use, written communication in the form of brief messages, or texting, has become a common way to connect. It is useful for short exchanges, and is a convenient way to stay connected with others when talking on the phone would be cumbersome. Texting is not useful for long or complicated messages, and careful consideration should be given to the audience.

It is often said that you can tell how old someone is by how he or she inputs a phone number on a cell phone. If the person uses his or her thumb while holding the digital device, that person may have been raised on video games and be adept at one-handed interfaces. If he holds the digital device with one hand and inputs the number with the other, he may be over thirty, or may be less comfortable with some technological devices. Of course, there is no actual correlation between input and age, but it is a useful example to use when considering who your audience is when writing a text message. If the person is a one-hander, and knows all the abbreviations common to texting, you may be able to use similar codes to communicate effectively. If the person is a two-hander, you are better off using fewer words and spelling them out. Texting can be a great tool for connecting while on the go, but consider your audience and your company, and choose words, terms, or abbreviations that will deliver your message (Figure 10.10).

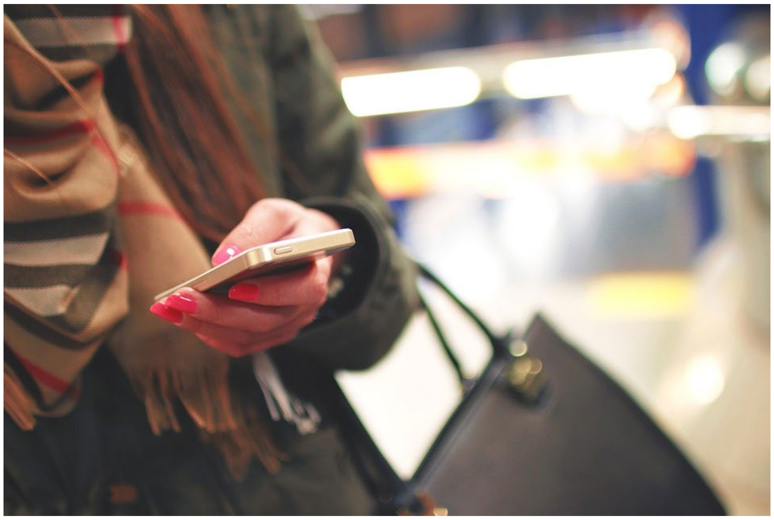

Figure 10.10 Texting is a quick and convenient way to communicate for work purposes. Woman Texting – StockSnap – Pixabay License

Tips for Effective Business Texting

- **Know your recipient**. "? % dsct" may be an understandable way to ask a close associate what the proper discount is to offer a certain customer, but if you are writing a text to your boss, it might be wiser to write, "what % discount does Murray get on $1K order?"
- **Anticipate unintentional misinterpretation**. Texting often uses symbols and codes to represent thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Given the complexity of communication, and the useful but limited tool of texting, be aware of its limitation and prevent misinterpretation with brief messages.
- **Contacting someone too frequently can border on harassment**. Texting is a tool. Use it when appropriate but don't abuse it.
- **Unplug yourself once in a while**. Do you feel constantly connected? Do you feel lost or "out of it" if you don't have your cell phone and cannot connect to people, even for fifteen minutes? Sometimes being unavailable for a time can be healthy, everything in moderation, including texting.
- **Don't text and drive**. Research shows that the likelihood of an accident increases dramatically if the driver is texting behind the wheel (Houston Chronicle, 2009). Being in an accident while conducting company business would reflect poorly on your judgment as well as on your employer.

E-mail

Electronic mail, usually called e-mail, is quite familiar to most students and workers. It may be used like text, or synchronous chat, and it can be delivered to a cell phone. In business, it has largely replaced print hard copy letters for external (outside the company) correspondence, as well as taking the place of memos for internal (within the company) communication (Guffey, 2008). E-mail can be very useful for messages that have slightly more content than a text message, but it is still best used for fairly brief messages.

Many businesses use automated e-mails to acknowledge communications from the public, or to remind associates that periodic reports or payments are due (Figure 10.11). You may also be assigned to “populate” a form e-mail in which standard paragraphs are used but you choose from a menu of sentences to make the wording suitable for a particular transaction.

Welcome to The [our name] Store

Dear [customer’s name]

Thank you for registering with The [our name] Store.

You can manage your personal information from the “My Account” section of the site when you sign in to The [our name] Store.

You can change your contact details and password, track recent orders, add alternate shipping addresses, and manage your preferences and customer profile all in this one convenient location.

Thank you for your interest in The [our name] Store.

We look forward to your next visit.

Figure 10.11 Automated business email form.

E-mails may be informal in personal contexts, but business communication requires attention to detail, awareness that your e-mail reflects you and your company, and a professional tone so that it may be forwarded to any third party if needed (Figure 10.12). E-mail often serves to exchange information within organizations. Although e-mail may have an informal feel, remember that when used for business, it needs to convey professionalism and respect. Never write or send anything that you wouldn’t want read in public or in front of your company president.

To: Harriet Adamo, Physical Plant Manager, XYZ Corporation
From: Mel Vargas, Construction Site Manager, Maxim Construction Co.
Sent: Mon 10/25/09 8:14 AM
Subject: construction interruptions

Harriet,

I know employees of XYZ Corp. are looking forward to moving into the new ABC Street building in January, but recently groups of employees who do not have business here have been walking through the building. These visits create a safety hazard, interrupt the construction workers, and could put your occupancy date in jeopardy.

Would you please instruct your staff members who haven't already been moved to ABC Street to stay out of the building? If they need to meet here with someone who has already moved, they should conduct their business and leave promptly via the nearest staircase.

We need to avoid further interruptions so our construction workers can get the building ready for occupancy on schedule. If you have any questions, please call me.

Thanks,
Mel

Melvin R. Vargas
Construction Site Manager, Maxim Construction Co.
1234 Main Street, Big City, USA 98765-1111
(111) 123-4567, ext. 98

Figure 10.12 Business letter written specifically for the situation and audience.

Tips for Effective Business E-mails

- Proper salutations should demonstrate respect and avoid mix-ups in case a message is accidentally sent to the wrong recipient. For example, use a salutation like "Dear Ms. X" (external) or "Hi Barry" (internal).
- Subject lines should be clear, brief, and specific. This helps the recipient understand the essence of the message. For example, "Proposal attached" or "Your question of 10/25."
- Close with a signature. Identify yourself by creating a signature block that automatically contains your name and business contact information.
- Avoid abbreviations. An e-mail is not a text message, and the audience may not find your wit cause to ROTFLOL (roll on the floor laughing out loud).
- Be brief. Omit unnecessary words.
- Use a good format. Include line breaks between sentences or divide your message into brief paragraphs for ease of reading. A good e-mail should get to the point and conclude in three small paragraphs or less.

- Reread, revise, and review. Catch and correct spelling and grammar mistakes before you press "send." It will take more time and effort to undo the problems caused by a hasty, poorly written e-mail than to get it right the first time.
- Reply promptly. Watch out for an emotional response—never reply in anger—but make a habit of replying to all e-mails within twenty-four hours, even if only to say that you will provide the requested information in forty-eight or seventy-two hours.
- Use "Reply All" sparingly. Do not send your reply to everyone who received the initial e-mail unless your message absolutely needs to be read by the entire group.
- Avoid using all caps. Capital letters are used on the Internet to communicate emphatic emotion or yelling and are considered rude.
- Test links. If you include a link, test it to make sure it is complete.
- E-mail ahead of time if you are going to attach large files (audio and visual files are often quite large) to prevent exceeding the recipient's mailbox limit or triggering the spam filter.
- Give feedback or follow up. If you don't get a response in twenty-four hours, e-mail or call. Spam filters may have intercepted your message, so your recipient may never have received it.

Netiquette

We create personal pages, post messages, and interact via mediated technologies as a normal part of our careers, but how we conduct ourselves can leave a lasting image, literally. The photograph you posted on your Facebook or Instagram may have been seen by your potential employer, or that nasty remark in a post may come back to haunt you later. When the Internet was a new phenomenon, Shea (1994) laid out a series of ground rules for communication online that continue to serve us today.

Virginia Shea's Rules of Netiquette

- Remember the human on the other side of the electronic communication.
- Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life.
- Know where you are in cyberspace.
- Respect other people's time and bandwidth.
- Make yourself look good online.
- Share expert knowledge.
- Keep flame wars under control.
- Respect other people's privacy.
- Don't abuse your power.
- Be forgiving of other people's mistakes.

Her rules speak for themselves and remind us that the golden rule (treat others as you would like to be treated) is relevant wherever there is human interaction.

Summary

- Differentiate between formal and informal language.
- A text message is a brief written message sent and received using a digital device. It is useful for informal, brief, time-sensitive communication.
- E-mail is useful for both internal and external business communications. The content and formatting of an e-mail message should reflect professionalism and follow the rules of netiquette.
- Social customs that exist in traditional, live, human interaction also influence the rules and customs by which we interact with each other in the online environment.

Discussion Questions

1. Choose at least three e-mails you have sent or received that are good examples of business communication. What makes them good examples? Could they be improved in any way? Share your suggestions with classmates.
2. In your experience, how do people behave when they interact online? Share your observations with your classmates.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of Chapter 13: Interpersonal Relationships at Work (Interpersonal Communication – Milne Library) added to 1.1 Why Is It Important to Communicate Well? and 9.1 Text, E-mail, and Netiquette (Business Communication for Success – University of Minnesota).
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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Appendix A: Assignments

This appendix includes a written assignment for each chapter. An assignment rubric is included at the beginning of the appendix.

Assignment Grading Rubric

	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Beginning	Absent
Q1	Learning objectives met. Mastery achieved. Thoroughly addressed all parts of question 1 with clear and well thought out answers, demonstrating an understanding of the concepts.	Learning objectives met. Mastery achieved. Addressed all parts of question 1 demonstrating an understanding of the concepts.	Approaching the learning objective. Partial mastery. Address some parts of question 1 demonstrating a partial understanding of the concepts.	Learning objective has not been met. Mastery not achieved. Answer does not address the question asked.	Learning objective not met. Mastery not achieved. Assessment not submitted.
Q2	Learning objectives met. Mastery achieved. Thoroughly addressed all parts of question 2 with clear and well thought out answers, demonstrating an understanding of the concepts.	Learning objectives met. Mastery achieved. Addressed all parts of question 2 demonstrating an understanding of the concepts.	Approaching the learning objective. Partial mastery. Address some parts of question 2 demonstrating a partial understanding of the concepts.	Learning objective has not been met. Mastery not achieved. Answer does not address the question asked.	Learning objective not met. Mastery not achieved. Assessment not submitted.

You can add extra rows to the rubric for additional questions.

Assignment 1: Understanding Your Self-Concept

Purpose
The purpose of this activity is to help you understand your own self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. For this activity, you will work on in dependently.

Learning Objectives
LO1. Compare and contrast self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.
LO2. Apply self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy to personal experiences.
LO3. Discuss how social and family influences, culture, and media influence self-perception.
LO4. Compare and contrast personal, social, and cultural identities.

Time
The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions
You will be completing three short surveys to learn more about your self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Please use the links below to complete each survey. Make sure you save a copy of your results for each survey.

VIA Character Strengths Inventory
This online survey is meant to determine what characteristics make up your self-concept. It has 96 items and will take about 15-20 minutes to complete. You will need to register for the site. After you have completed your inventory click on the "PDF Results" button to download and save a pdf copy of your results.

Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale
This online survey is meant to rate self-esteem feelings by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. It has 10 questions and will take about 3-5 minutes to complete. After you have completed your inventory, please save a copy of your Summary Snapshot Report. You will need to take a screenshot and save it to a Word or Google Doc file for a later activity.

General Self-Efficacy Scale
This online survey is meant to assess the sense of perceived self-efficacy to check how you cope with daily situations and stressful life events. It has 10 questions and will take about 3-5 minutes to complete. After you have completed your survey, please save a copy of your results using the Print button at the bottom of the survey to download and save a pdf copy of your results.

After you have completed these surveys, please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Separate your answers into different paragraphs for each question to make grading easier.

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Based on your survey results and your thoughts about them, how are they related to each other? Do you think that having a very high or very low score for one of these concepts will impact the others, why or why not
2. Based on what you included in your "Who am I?" creative work, which identities are the most important to you (personal, social, cultural)? What aspects of your life do you think were most influential in how you see your identity?

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Assignment 2: Developing Your Cultural Competency

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you examine ways in which you can develop your awareness of and commitment to diversity. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Define the terms culture and diversity.

LO2. Apply cultural competency to personal experiences.

LO3. Apply elements of culture to personal experiences.

LO5. Apply workplace diversity to your own experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this assignment is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

Please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Separate your answers into different paragraphs for each question to make grading easier.

1. How do you define the terms "culture" and "diversity" in your own words? What are your cultural comfort zones, and how might you expand them to connect with more diverse groups? Do you want to be challenged by new viewpoints, or will you feel more comfortable connecting with people who are like you? Explain.
2. Discuss two of the major elements of culture (norms, beliefs, values, symbols, language) and what impact they have had on your life using personal experiences.
3. Select one of the Anti-discrimination laws that you learned about and discuss how it has impacted your place of work, a past workplace, or if you have not had any work experience yet, please discuss an example in a movie, tv show, other media.

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Assignment 3: Identifying Your Goals

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you identify specific goals that you want to pursue and develop a personal action plan to carry them out.

Learning Objectives

LO5. Develop a Personal Action Plan that includes long-term, mid-term, and short-term goals.

LO6. Apply the SMART goal model to your goals.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

In order to achieve your goals, you first need to define your goals. Think about what long-term goals you want to accomplish in different goal areas. You will use the worksheet below to identify Academic Goals and Personal Goals. Then you will break your identified long-term goals down into mid-term goals and short-term goals.

Your goals should be phrased as positive statements. Identify goals that are linked to your own performance, rather than dependent on the actions of other people or situations beyond your control. Be realistic but optimistic and ambitious. The goals you set should be achievable, but reach a little higher than what you think may think is possible. Use the SMART goal criteria. Your goals should be specific, measurable, and with clear deadlines.

Example Long-Term Goals

- I plan to graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in four years. My major will be Radio-Television-Film, and my minor will be Spanish.
- I will implement a regular exercise schedule where I run four times a week for three miles each run.

Example Mid-Term Goals

- I will transfer to the State University after two years at Community College.
- I will run three times a week for 2 miles each run.

Example Short-Term Goals

- I will get an A on my upcoming exam.
- I will get an app that tracks my mileage and distance.

Identifying Your Goals Worksheet

Identify two long-term academic goals and two long-term personal goals below.

Academic Goal	
Academic Goal	
Personal Goal	
Personal Goal	

Select one of your long-term goals above and write out mid-term and short-term goals to help you accomplish this goal below.

Long-term Goal from above	
Mid-Term Goal	
Mid-Term Goal	
Short-Term Goal	
Short-Term Goal	

After you have identified some long-term goals and broken them down into mid-term and short-term goals, look through your chart and decide on one that you will commit to working toward. Select a mid-term or short-term goal that can be accomplished by the end of this course. Once you have selected the goal you will work on, use the following worksheet to create your Personal Action Plan.

Personal Action Plan Worksheet

Please review this SMART Goal Example to help you in writing your personal action plan.

- **Specific:** I will save $500 for books for next semester by saving $50/week for 10 weeks.
- **Measurable:** I will check my bank account every week to be sure that I am on schedule and will adjust if needed.
- **Attainable:** I work part-time and can bring my lunch to school instead of eating out to save money.
- **Realistic & Relevant:** I want to graduate in two years and paying for textbooks is important so that I can stay on plan.
- **Timeline:** I have 12 weeks to save $500. This gives me a two-week cushion in case of the unexpected.

Write your Personal Action Plan Here:

My SPECIFIC goal is:	
I will MEASURE it by:	
It is ATTAINABLE because:	
It is REALISTIC AND RELEVANT to me because:	
My TIMELINE for completion is:	
Potential obstacles I anticipate are:	
I will overcome these obstacles by:	
I will share my goal with the following people for support, encouragement, and accountability:	
After my goal is complete, I will reward myself with (be sure that it is proportionate to the goal):	
This goal supports my core values in the following ways:	

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Assignment 4: Your Traits, Values, and Attitudes

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand your personality traits, values, and overall attitude. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Compare and contrast Psychodynamic, Learning and Cognitive, Biological, Inherent drives, and Sociocultural factors that influence personality.
LO2. Discuss how culture and society influence personality.
LO4. Apply personality traits, values, and attitudes to personal and workplace experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

You will be completing three short surveys to learn more about personality, values, and attitudes. Please use the links below to complete each survey. Make sure you save a copy of your results for each survey.

> The Big Five Personality Test (OCEAN)
> This online survey is meant to determine your levels of each of the five major personality traits. It has 120 items and will take about 10-15 minutes to complete.
>
> Personal Values Assessment
> This online assessment is meant to determine what you value the most. You will select at least 10 values from the list (you can select more). Then the test will have you rank the values. It takes about 5 minutes to complete.
>
> Work Values Matcher
> This online assessment is meant to determine what you value most about work. You will sort 20 statements into a ranking of most to least important. It takes about 5 minutes to complete.
>
> Attitude Test
> This online assessment is meant to determine whether your overall attitude is positive or negative. It has 12 items and will take about 2 minutes to complete.

After you have completed these surveys, please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

1. Which factors (Psychodynamic, Learning and Cognitive, Biological, Inherent drives, or Sociocultural) do you think have been most influential on your personality traits? Why?
2. What aspects of your own cultural upbringing do you think have impacted your personality? Why?
3. How can you use the information learned in the surveys to improve your interactions with others in the workplace?

Optional Surveys

These surveys were not included in the assignment, but if you are interested in learning more about your personality, you can also complete these.

Cattell's 16 personality factors
This online survey is meant to determine your levels on Cattell's 16 personality factors. It has 164 items and will take about 20 minutes to complete.

The SAPA Project
This online survey is meant to determine your levels on 27 different personality traits. It covers the Big Five traits as well as factors from the 16PF. You should complete at least 100 items to get a good sense of each factor, however if you want to complete the entire survey, it has 200 items total. It will take about 25-30 minutes to complete.

Attribution

Assignment 5: EI in Personal and Workplace Experiences

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand your emotional intelligence experiences. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Compare and contrast the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and sociocultural functions of emotion.
LO2. Apply functions of emotions to personal experiences.
LO3. Describe the influence of emotions on attitudes and behaviors at work.
LO4. Apply emotional intelligence concepts to personal and workplace experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

Please complete the following Emotional Intelligence measures then discuss what you learned about your own EI and how that might help you in your interactions with others in your personal and workplace experiences:

- Test Your Emotional Intelligence: How well do you read other people? - This measure tests your ability to read others' emotions
- Emotional Intelligence Quiz - This measure examines your own emotionality.

After you have completed these surveys, please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

1. Which functions of emotions (interpersonal, intrapersonal, sociocultural) do you think are most influential in your day-to-day life? Give an example.
2. In what ways do emotions influence how we behave and interact with others in our personal and workplace experiences?
3. What have you learned about your emotional intelligence (EQ) that help you with interactions in the workplace?

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Assignment 6: Perceiving Social Media Influencers

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand the attributions you make and impressions you form of others. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Identify attributions and impressions of others.
LO2. Describe the role that culture plays in the perception of others.
LO3. Apply strategies for improving perception of self-others to personal and work experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

Look up a social media influencer (YouTube, Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter, etc.) of your choice and view some of their content. Please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

1. Provide a link to an example of content that you viewed from this influencer. Make sure it is appropriate for an academic setting. What is or was your first impression of this influencer? Is it positive or negative, why? (Primacy Effect) Describe a behavior you noticed about this influencer. Why do you think they engage in this behavior? And is your explanation an internal or external attribution?
2. How has your own culture influenced how you perceive this influencer?
3. Discuss one of the strategies to improve perception of others that you can use in your workplace interactions. How do you think this strategy will help you?

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Assignment 7: Interpersonal Communication Skills

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you examine the interpersonal communication skills you possess and how to further develop them. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Describe the skills associated with effective interpersonal communication.
LO3.Compare and contrast the different types of listening.
LO4. Apply interpersonal communication concepts to personal experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

Please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

1. Of the concepts that you learned about in this chapter, which 3 do you think are most important for positive interpersonal communication experiences and why?
2. What is your primary listening style (people, action, content, time)? Choose one of the other listening styles. What should you think about when communicating with someone who has the other listening style you chose?
3. Recall a situation in which you experienced conflict. Now that you know some approaches to effective interpersonal communication evaluate the experience your recalled and write down what you could have done differently?

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Assignment 8: Perceived Stress

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand the types of stress you experience and how you cope with that stress. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Describe the various types of stress and stressors people experience.
LO2. Discuss the various sources of stress in workplace settings and how organizations attempt to prevent stress.
LO4. Apply stress concepts to personal experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

You will be completing several short surveys to learn more about how you perceive stress, the amount of stress you are currently experiencing and how you cope with stress. Please use the links below to complete each survey.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)
This survey measures the degree to which situations in your life are perceived as stressful. It has 10 items and will take about 2-3 minutes to complete.

Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)
This survey is for measuring the total stress you're experiencing. It has 43 items and will take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory (Brief-COPE)
This survey measures your response to stress and coping mechanisms. It has 28 items and will take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Separate your answers into different paragraphs for each question to make grading easier.

1. Discuss your results on the perceived stress scale, the social readjustment rating scale and the coping orientation to problems experienced inventory. Do you feel they accurately represent the stress you are experiencing and how you typically cope with stress? Why or why not?

2. Which of the stress reduction techniques discussed in the chapter have you used or would you try? How effective were they in helping you cope with stress?
3. Which of the sources of stress in the workplace do you think are the most stressful? Why? What are your thoughts about the ways that organizations attempt to address stress?

Attribution

Assignment 9: Conflict Resolution

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you identify and describe various types of conflict that you have experienced and apply conflict management strategies to resolve them. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Describe the various levels and types of conflict.
LO3. Compare and contrast the different types of conflict management styles.
LO4. Apply conflict resolution concepts to personal experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

Please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

1. Describe examples of two levels of conflict that you've experienced (interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, intraorganizational) and discuss which type of conflict (goal, cognitive, affective, behavioral) was involved in each.
2. Which of the 5 conflict management styles (Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising, Collaborating) do you use most often? Give an example.
3. Describe how you would apply the STLC Conflict Model to a recent conflict you experienced where the outcome did not go well. How do you think the STLC model would have impacted the outcome?

Attribution

Assignment 10: Workplace Success Skills

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you identify skills to keep track of your career progress. For this assignment, you will work independently.

Learning Objectives

LO1. Describe the various soft skills valued in the workplace.
LO3. Compare and contrast the different types of communication used in the workplace.
LO4. Apply the Plan-Do-Check-Act strategy to personal and workplace experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

After you have completed these surveys, please address the following questions in a 200-400 word written response. Follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

1. What soft skills do you possess from the top 10 soft skills list in the reading? How can you use these skills across different jobs/careers? Give an example. What can you do to develop the soft skills you are lacking?
2. Imagine that you have to send an important message to your boss that needs to be read as soon as possible. Write a texting version and an e-mail version of the message. Make sure to follow the guidelines and recommendations given in the textbook.
3. Use the Plan-Do-Check-Act strategy to evaluate where you are in your career. Describe each of the steps as you use them and describe how you will use this information to help you with your career development.

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Appendix B: Discussions

This appendix includes a discussion for each chapter. A discussion rubric and online netiquette guidelines are included at the beginning of this appendix.

Discussion Board Rubric

	Proficient	Developing	Absent
Submitted Initial Post	Complete Initial post addressed all questions in the prompt and was submitted by the Wednesday due date.	Complete – Late Initial post addressed all questions in the prompt, but was submitted after the Wednesday due date.	Incomplete An initial post was not submitted.
Responded to two peers' posts	Complete Responded to two peers' initial posts following Netiquette Guidelines by Sunday due date.	Partially Complete / Complete – Late Responded to one peer's initial post following Netiquette Guidelines by Sunday, OR responded to two peers after Sunday due date.	Incomplete Reply posts were not submitted.

Netiquette Guidelines for Online Discussions

Ground Rules for Online Discussions

Most of human communication is through nonverbal cues, such as our facial expressions, posture, mannerisms, etc. When a person's speech is incongruent with their body language it is often off-putting. For example, when someone agrees to help you and then rolls their eyes at you, you are able to tell that they are actually irritated, upset, annoyed, or don't really mean what they are saying.

Within the online environment there is an absence of visual and auditory cues provided by our body language, making it harder to determine the full meaning and intent of communication. in face-to-face discussions these clues contribute a lot of nonverbal nuances and the overall meaning of the message. However, in an online classroom it is impossible to fully replicate these nonverbal cues.

To avoid and reduce misinterpretation of communication, Peter Roper provides ten ground rules for guiding successful online interactions.

1. **Participate -** This is a shared learning environment. Please do not lurk in the cyberspace background. For the maximum benefit of all, please contribute to discussions and group activities.
2. **Be Thorough -** Read everything in the discussion or group activity. This will help you avoid repeating something someone else has already contributed. Acknowledge the points others have made with which you agree and suggest alternatives for those with which you don't.
3. **Practice Brevity -** You want your message to be clear. Being concise and on point will prevent others from not understanding the argument you are making or opinion you are sharing.
4. **Use Formal Writing -** Grammatical writing and sentence structure will help make your thoughts clearer to readers. This is also a form of academic writing and should use the same conventions as you would in crafting an essay or research paper.
5. **Cite Your Sources -** If you are mentioning the intellectual property of another person written, artistic, etc. it is unethical to not give proper credit or attribution to that person or persons of whose work you are using. Please give proper attribution to others' work.
6. **Emoticons, Emojis, and Texting -** Social media and text messaging has spawned a body of linguistic shortcuts that are not part of the academic dialogue. Please refrain from using emoji, emoticons, and texting abbreviations

7. **Respect Diversity -** Don't use language that is or could be interpreted as offensive towards others, such as racially-, sexually-, gender-, age-, ability-, religion-based slurs or language, comments, or jokes that may be derogatory or defamatory.
8. **DON' T YELL!** Please refrain from using all caps to emphasize your point as it is use to denote yelling and is not considered appropriate in our cultural and social conventions of communication.
9. **No Flaming -** If you do not agree with another classmate's perspective or opinion, you are welcome to offer a critique, but not a criticism. A critique offers a critical examination, acknowledging the positives and negatives, strengths and weaknesses of an argument, giving supporting evidence or logical reasoning for the critique. Whereas a criticism is an expression of disapproval, negative judgment, or faultfinding with no careful consideration of the argument. Ranting and profanity are not tolerated or appropriate in an academic context.
10. **You Can't Unring the Bell-** Language is your only tool in an online environment. No one can read your body language or nonverbal cues or tone in your writing and may interpret what you write differently than you intended to convey. Please make sure you review your contributions and ensure that they convey the information you intend. You should also proofread and revise your submissions.

Discussion 1: “Who Am I?” Identity Exploration

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion is to help you understand various aspects of your identity. For this activity you will work independently, and then share your work with the class.

Learning Objectives

Apply personal, social, and cultural identities to personal experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-90 minutes.

Instructions

You will be engaging in an artistic/creative exercise to explore your identity. Think about the question “Who am I?” How would you answer this question? What makes you, you? Use a sheet of paper, a digital art program, or other online tools to draw, collage, or put together a creative work that represents who you are.

After you have finished your creative work, please create a 2-5 minute video to introduce yourself and share your creative work with the class to tell us who you are. Upload your video to the class introduction discussion board. Please see the class resources page in the course Learning Management System (LMS) to review instructions on how to create a video and upload it to our course site.

Please upload your introduction video by the third day of the class. Then watch introduction videos of two of your peers and reply to their posts with a comment and/or question you have for them by Sunday.

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Discussion 2: Diversity Experiences in the Workplace

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion is to help you understand your experiences with diversity in the workplace. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO4. Discuss the benefits and challenges of a diverse workforce.

Time

The time estimated to complete this assignment is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

- Select one of the benefits and one of the challenges of diversity in the workplace listed in the reading. Do you agree or disagree with these? Provide and example that helps support your position.

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive and between 50-150 words. Please prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 3: Growing Your Mindset

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you understand how to develop a growth mindset. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO4. Compare and Contrast fixed and growth Mindsets.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

Please take these two short quizzes on mindset. The second quiz will ask for your email and email your results to you.

- Interactive Quiz: Fixed vs Growth Mindsets
- What's my Mindset?

After you have completed the quizzes above address the following questions:

- Reflect on your results from the quizzes. Do you agree or disagree with your results?
- Based on what you have learned about mindset, what advice would you give someone to help them develop a growth mindset?
- Give an example of a growth mindset statement.

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive, between 50-150 words, and follow formal writing conventions. Prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 4: Culture and Personality in the Workplace

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you understand your personality traits, values, and overall attitude. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO3. Compare and contrast how various cultural factors of personality impact the workplace.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

- To what extent are religion, race/ethnicity, gender, and age important factors in workplace interactions? Give an example.
- What personality traits do you think are more advantageous than others for workplace success in the United States? Why?
- Do you think this personality traits are equally advantageous in workplaces found in other countries, such as Japan, Mexico, or Greece? Why or why not?

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive, between 50-150 words, and follow formal writing conventions. Prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 5: Cultural Differences in Emotions

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you understand different emotional expressions based on culture. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO5. Compare and contrast cultural similarities and differences in emotion.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

- Discuss a time when someone had an emotional response that was unexpected, surprising, or different from how you emotionally responded to the same experience.
- What role do you think culture played in their emotional response and your emotional response?

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive, between 50-150 words. Please prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 6: Perception Checking

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion is to help you practice perception checking. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO5. Apply perception checking to personal and work experiences.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

Read through the following example:

> You have been working at Awesome Graphic Designs. For the past several months you have been eating lunch with one of your coworkers. However, you have noticed in the past couple of weeks, your coworker has chosen to eat at their desk rather than go to lunch with you.

Then address the following perception checking steps in your initial post:

- Describe the behavior you observed.
- Provide at least two possible interpretations of the behavior.
- Ask for clarification.

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive and between 50-150 words. Please prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 7: Cultural Intelligence

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you practice cultural intelligence. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO2. Discuss several different ways to create better intercultural interactions in personal and workplace settings.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

For this group discussion please read the below scenario:

> Roy and Jalissa originally met in graduate school. On the first day that Jalissa walked into grad school, she was glad to see someone else near her age, which was older than the average student in the class. Even though Roy was White and Jalissa was African American, the two immediately felt drawn to each other. Before they knew it, Jalissa and Roy were inseparable. Jalissa's husband started to get jealous of Roy until he met Roy and realized that Roy was gay.
>
> Over the years, the two graduated and went to different jobs that were close to each other. Roy and Jalissa still would get together regularly and go shopping, go to the movies, have dinner, etc. The two of them considered themselves as highly culturally intelligent people. Jalissa was a Dean of Diversity at a liberal arts college, and Roy taught cultural studies at a large research university. The two often had pet names for each other that people outside of their relationship could view as racist or homophobic, but they knew the spirit behind their pet names was meant in jest and not ignorance, ethnocentrism, or fear.
>
> One day Roy and Jalissa were hanging how in a store when Roy found an African Mask. Roy grabbed the mask, walked up behind Jalissa, and shouted, "Abugga bugga!" Jalissa turned around and laughingly slapped Roy on the arm responding, "You White racist cracker!" Jalissa looked at an older White

woman standing in the row completely startled, and she just busted out laughing and Roy joined right in.

Then answer the questions below in your initial post:

- In this case, was Roy culturally intelligent? Why or why not?
- In this case, was Jalissa culturally intelligent? Why or why not?
- Was this interpersonal interaction appropriate? Why or why not?

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive, and between 50-150 words. Please prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 8: Coping Styles

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you understand various coping styles. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO3. Compare and contrast the different types of coping styles.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

- Give an example of a stressful life event. You can use a personal example or one you have seen in a movie or tv show.
- What coping styles were used to cope with this stressful event?
- What coping styles do you think would lead to successfully managing the stress from this experience?
- What role do you think culture plays in how people cope with stress?

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive, and between 50-150 words. Please prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 9: Team Formation and Diversity

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you understand how teams come together. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO2. Discuss team development and diversity in the workplace.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

- Describe an example of a workplace team or group. You can use a personal example or one you have seen in a movie or tv show.
- What stage of team formation was this group in? Give an example.
- In what ways would diverse team members help this group?
- In what ways would diverse team members hinder this group?

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive, and between 50-150 words. Please prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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Discussion 10: Ethics in the Workplace

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help you apply ethical standards to workplace experiences. For this activity, you will engage in a small group discussion.

Learning Objectives

LO2. Discuss ethical considerations in the workplace.

Time

The time estimated to complete this activity is 45-60 minutes.

Instructions

For this group activity, you will engage your peers in a small group discussion. Your initial post on the discussion board should be between 100-200 words in length. Please follow formal writing conventions using complete sentences and checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Please submit your initial post by Wednesday.

- Describe an example of an unethical situation that occurred in your workplace or that you have seen in a movie or tv show.
- How would you suggest this unethical situation be handled?
- Were there any aspects of diversity and/or culture that would impact this situation? Why or why not?

After you have addressed these questions in your initial post, please read some of your other classmates' posts and reply to two different peers using the RISE model of peer feedback found in the Netiquette Guidelines page. Your replies should be thoughtful and substantive, between 50-150 words. Please prioritize responding to classmates that have not received any responses yet. Please submit your response posts by Sunday.

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