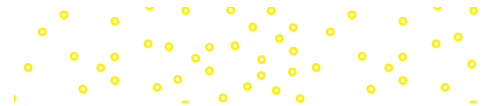


Business and Professional Communication





Business and Professional Communication

Putting People First



Kory Floyd

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Peter W. Cardon

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION: PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

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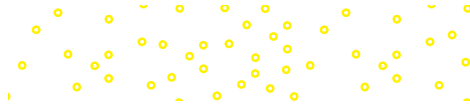
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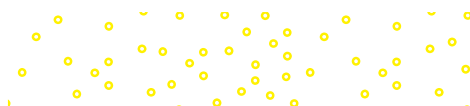


DEDICATION

To the mentors who trained and nurtured us, and to
the students who teach and inspire us.

—Kory Floyd

—Peter Cardon



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Kory Floyd (left) and Peter Cardon (right)

Kory Floyd is a professor of communication at the University of Arizona. His research focuses on interpersonal communication in a variety of contexts, with particular focus on how positive communication contributes to well-being. He has written 15 books and over 100 scientific papers and book chapters on the topics of interpersonal behavior, emotion, nonverbal behavior, and health. He is a former editor of *Communication Monographs* and *Journal of Family Communication*. His work has been recognized with both the Charles H. Woolbert Award and the Bernard J. Brommel Award from the National Communication Association, as well as the Early Career Achievement Award from the International Association for Relationship Research. As an educator, he teaches courses on interpersonal communication, communication theory, nonverbal communication, and quantitative research methods. Professor Floyd received his undergraduate degree from Western Washington University, his master's degree from the University of Washington, and his PhD from the University of Arizona.

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A PEOPLE FIRST APPROACH

A rapidly evolving global workplace requires students to develop a variety of professional skills to succeed. Professional success often rests on the ability to listen, engender trust, adapt to cultural differences, and consider the perspectives of others.

To highlight these skills in professional settings, Kory Floyd and Peter Cardon adopt a **people first approach** that prioritizes quality workplace relationships.

Authentic Examples

Using dozens of authentic examples from the business world, *Business and Professional Communication: Putting People First* emphasizes how students can communicate in person and in virtual settings to develop meaningful, rich, and productive professional relationships in a technology-saturated world.

Perspective Taking

Unique to the market, this text includes a dedicated chapter focused on perspective taking, covering the processes of person perception; common perceptual errors; the self-serving bias and the fundamental attribution error; the self-concept; and the processes of image management. This chapter equips students to understand and pay attention to the perspectives of others.

Career Communication

Also unique to the market, this text includes a dedicated chapter focused on career communication, encouraging students to engage in networking and to consider the priorities and points of view of others as they seek employment and interact professionally.

Recurring People First Feature

Occurring in every chapter, the **People First** feature presents students with realistic scenarios that are sensitive, discomfiting, or tricky to manage. It then teaches students how to navigate those situations effectively. Students are given concrete skills for preserving relationships with others as they encounter these difficult moments and conversations.



AN ONGOING FOCUS ON SKILL BUILDING, SELF-ASSESSMENT, AND CRITICAL THINKING

Throughout each chapter, students encounter opportunities to engage in skill building, self-assessment, and critical thinking:

- Each chapter includes **Sharpen Your Skills** features and end-of-chapter **Skill-Building Exercises** that identify particular communication skills and give activities for students to help build it them.
- Giving students the opportunity to analyze where they currently are with respect to a particular trait, **The Competent Communicator** feature allows students to

self-assess a specific characteristic, trait, or tendency, and provides instructions for calculating and interpreting their scores.

- **Chapter Review Questions** at the end of each chapter stimulate critical thinking and reflection and can be used to spark interaction in the classroom or as writing assignments.

AN ENGAGING, NARRATIVE-BASED APPROACH

Chapters begin by presenting students with a narrative of a communication problem or dilemma, and then conclude by resolving that dilemma by referencing the principles throughout the chapter. Each chapter is illustrated with rich examples of real business communicators, which bring the principles to life for students. This interactive approach allows students to actively engage with the content instead of passively reading it.

Bringing It All Together

Students preparing to succeed in today's workplace require solid training in communication skills and principles, as well as experience applying them in realistic professional contexts.

Kory Floyd and Peter Cardon bring substantial and concrete business-world experience to bear in the product's principles, examples, and activities and ensure that the theories, concepts, and skills most relevant to the communication discipline are fully represented and engaged. The result is a program that speaks students' language and helps them understand and apply communication skills in their personal and professional lives.

Accolades from Our Reviewers



"This is the most student focused text that I have ever read. It deals with the real-world problems that students have to overcome in order to be successful in the course. There is no better text on the market."

—DR. BRADLEY S. WESNER, SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

"A perfect blend of business and communication expertise, written in an approachable tone, that uses real-world examples to enhance student engagement and learning."

—KELLY STOCKSTAD, AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



"Full of rich, thoughtful, useful advice, up-to-date with the current job market. Easy to read, user-friendly. Not an organizational communication text . . . it is a performance enhancement text."

—JOHN CARL MEYER, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI



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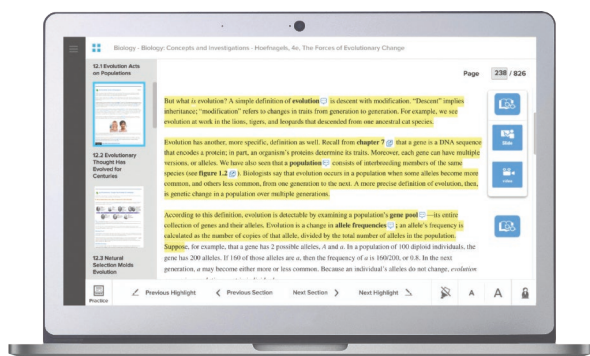
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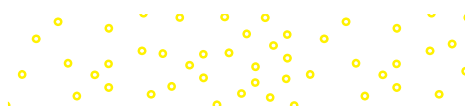


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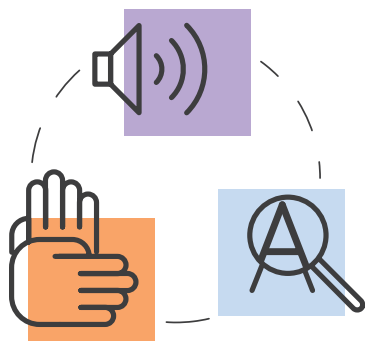
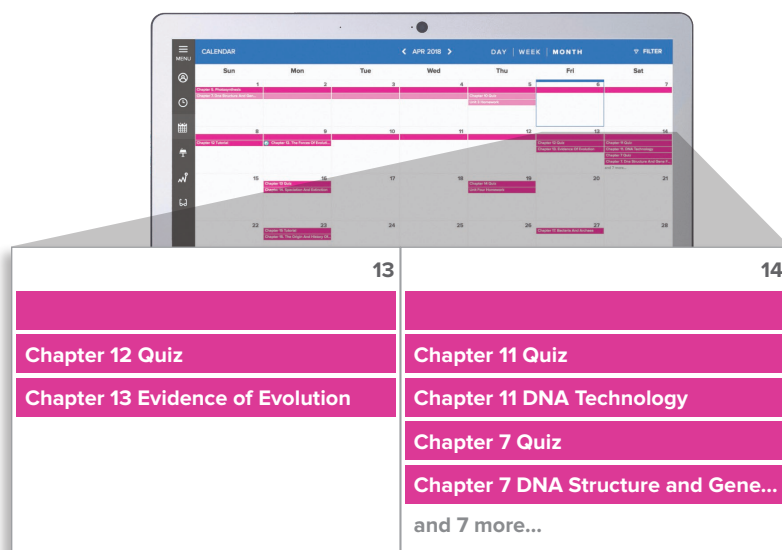
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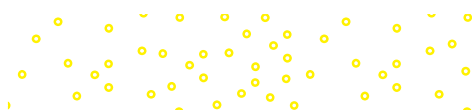
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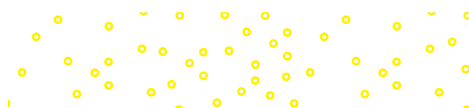




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Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- LO5.1** Illustrate how selection, organization, and interpretation occur during perception.
- LO5.2** Explain the reasons why people commit perceptual errors.
- LO5.3** Differentiate self-serving bias and fundamental attribution error.
- LO5.4** Explain how the nature of self-concept is partially subjective.
- LO5.5** Describe three pathways through which self-concept can shape communicative behavior.
- LO5.6** Identify the ways in which image management is collaborative, involves the management of multiple identities, and is complex.



CHAPTER 5

Perspective Taking

Liz sat in the breakroom with Caleb, a close colleague. “I’m so frustrated with Aisha. We just missed our deadline with a client because she took too much time creating the graphics. By the time she gave them to me, I had only one day to finish the updates to our website. With all the meetings that were scheduled that day, there was no way for me to finish in time. Aisha simply doesn’t care when we miss these deadlines.”

Caleb replied, “Don’t worry about it. It’s not your fault—you always get the job done unless one of the graphics designers drops the ball. Graphics designers worry more about getting awards than about giving the clients what they want.”

We have an ongoing need to make sense of other people. Especially when they act in ways that are surprising or disappointing—as Aisha did by taking so long to create graphics for Liz—our natural tendency is to come up with explanations for their behaviors. Liz explained Aisha’s behavior by perceiving that Aisha doesn’t care when deadlines are missed, whereas Caleb perceived that all graphics designers—including Aisha—are more interested in winning accolades than in pleasing their clients.

We come up with perceptions about other people, and even about ourselves, all the time. What’s more, many of us assume our perceptions are accurate reflections of reality, and we communicate on the basis of those perceptions without recognizing that they may be inaccurate or incomplete. Liz and Caleb may be correct in perceiving that Aisha doesn’t care about their deadlines or their satisfaction with her work—but they may also be wrong. As we’ll discover in this chapter, our perceptions of people, including ourselves, are susceptible to a wide range of influences that can distort their accuracy. Before we act on the basis of our perceptions, therefore, it is critical to recognize that we don’t always see things the way they are.

How We Perceive Others

Before going on a job interview, applicants may practice introducing themselves, prepare answers to anticipated questions, and consider clothing options to refine their look. As we’ll discuss later in this book, all these preparations are worthwhile because they help you put your best self forward. Job candidates may be disappointed, however, to learn that interviewers often make up their minds about someone within the first few minutes.¹ Although that may seem too short a period to make a serious hiring decision, research indicates that people are surprisingly accurate at evaluating others after very brief periods of time. In fact, some studies have shown that our impressions and evaluations of others can be more accurate if we have less—rather than more—information to go on.²

We form these impressions and evaluations by engaging in **perception**, the process of making meaning from what we experience in the world around us. We notice physical experiences—such as fatigue, body aches, and congestion—and perceive that we are ill. We notice environmental experiences—such as cold air, wind, and rain—and perceive that a storm is under way. When we apply the same process to people,

In both personal and professional settings, we have an ongoing need to make sense of others.

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we engage in *interpersonal perception*, which helps us make meaning from our own and others' behaviors.³

As social beings, we are constantly engaged in interpersonal perception. Although our perceptions may seem to take shape instantaneously, we will find in this section that they actually form in stages, although quickly. We will also see that several factors can influence the accuracy of our perceptions, including culture, stereotypes, primacy and recency effects, and perceptual sets.

PERCEPTION IS A PROCESS

We usually select, organize, and interpret information so quickly and subconsciously that we think our perceptions are objective, factual reflections of the world. Suppose you had a conflict this morning with an intern you are training, and throughout the day he failed to respond to your text messages reminding him to post an update about your charity donation drive on your organization's Facebook page. You might believe he is ignoring you because he is not replying. However, you have created your perception based on the information you *selected* for attention (he doesn't respond), the way you *organized* that information (he is angry about your conflict), and the way you *interpreted* it (he's ignoring you).⁴ In fact, you might also perceive that he is having an extremely busy day or that he left his cell phone in his car. The perception you form depends on which pieces of information you attend to, how you organize them in your mind, and how you interpret their meaning.

As Figure 5.1 shows, selection, organization, and interpretation are the three basic stages of perception. Let's examine each in turn.

Selection is the first stage. Perception is initiated when one or more of your senses are stimulated. You hear a customer placing her order in a store. You see a puppy chewing on an old tennis ball. You smell a co-worker's cologne. Those sensory experiences of hearing, seeing, and smelling can prompt you to form perceptions.

Your senses are constantly stimulated by events in your environment, but it's impossible to pay attention to all these stimuli at any given moment.⁵ Instead, you engage in **selection**, the process by which your mind and body help you isolate certain stimuli to pay attention to. For example, you notice that your officemate left the lights on all night, but you overlook that he brought you lunch when you were overwhelmed with work. Clearly, the information we attend to influences the perceptions we form, although we don't necessarily make conscious choices about what to ignore.

LO5.1

Illustrate how selection, organization, and interpretation occur during perception.

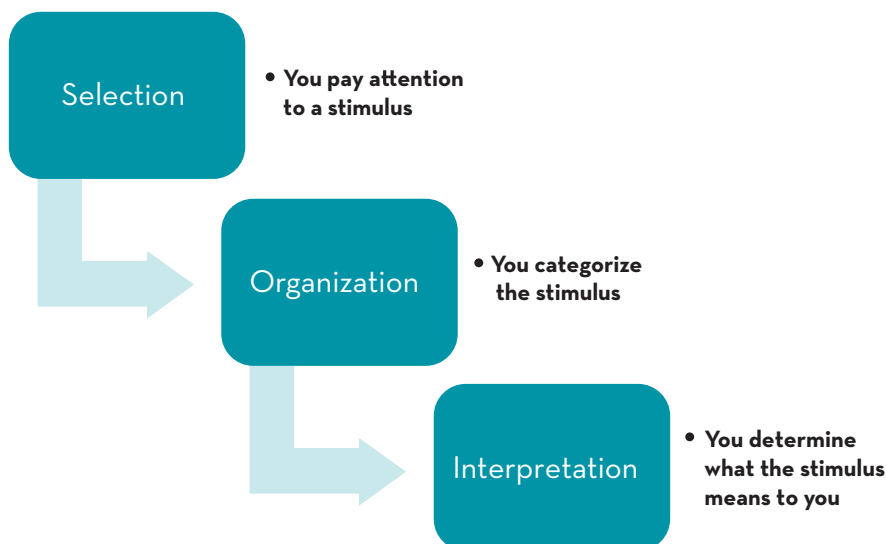


Figure 5.1

Three Stages of Perception

Perception occurs in three stages: selection, organization, and interpretation.

How, then, does selection occur? Research indicates that three characteristics make a given stimulus more likely to be selected for attention.

First, being unusual or unexpected makes a stimulus stand out.⁶ You might not pay attention to people talking loudly in a restaurant, but in the library the same loud conversation would grab your attention because it is unusual there. Second, repetition or frequency makes a stimulus stand out.⁷ For example, you're more likely to remember television commercials you've seen repeatedly than those you've seen only once. Third, the intensity of a stimulus affects how much you take notice of it. You are more aware of strong odors than weak scents, and of bright and flashy colors than dull and muted hues.⁸

How do we avoid becoming overwhelmed by so much sensory information? A part of your brain called the *reticular formation* serves the important function of helping you focus on certain stimuli while ignoring others.⁹ It is the primary reason why, when having a conversation with a colleague in a noisy coffee shop, you can focus on what your colleague is saying and tune out the other sights and sounds bombarding your senses at the time.

Organization is the second stage. Once you have noticed a particular stimulus, the next step in the perception process is **organization**, the classification of information according to its similarities to and differences from other things you know about. To classify a stimulus, your mind applies a *perceptual schema* to it, a mental framework for organizing information into categories we call *constructs*.

According to communication researcher Peter Andersen, we use four types of schema to classify information we notice about other people:¹⁰

1. *Physical constructs* emphasize people's appearance, causing us to notice objective characteristics such as height, age, ethnicity, and body shape, as well as subjective characteristics such as physical attractiveness.
2. *Role constructs* emphasize people's social or professional position, so we notice that a person is a sales rep, an accountant, a stepmother, and so on.¹¹
3. *Interaction constructs* emphasize people's behavior, so we notice that a person is outgoing, aggressive, shy, or considerate.
4. *Psychological constructs* emphasize people's thoughts and feelings, such as anger, self-assurances, insecurity, or lightheartedness.

Whichever constructs we notice about people—and we may notice more than one at a time—the process of organization helps us identify how the items we select for attention are related to one another.¹² If you notice that your human resources director is a Little League softball coach and the father of three children, for example, those two pieces of information go together because they both relate to the roles he plays. If you notice that he seems irritated or angry, those pieces of information go together as examples of his psychological state.

Interpretation is the final stage. After noticing and classifying a stimulus, you have to assign it an **interpretation** to figure out its meaning for you. Let's say one of your co-workers has been especially friendly toward you since last week. She asks you how your current project is going, and she offers to run errands for you over her lunch break. Her behavior is definitely noticeable, and you've probably classified it as a psychological construct because it relates to her thoughts and feelings about you.

What is her behavior communicating? How should you interpret it? Is she being nice because she's getting ready to ask you for a big favor? Or, is she simply trying to look good in front of her manager because she is hoping for a promotion?

To address those questions, you likely will pay attention to three factors: your *personal experience*, your *knowledge* of this co-worker, and the *closeness of your relationship* with her. First, your personal experience helps you assign meaning to behavior. If some co-workers have been nice to you in the past just to get favors from you later, you might be suspicious of this person's behavior.¹³ Second, your knowledge of the person helps you interpret her actions. If you know she's friendly and

nice to everyone, you might interpret her behavior differently than if you notice she's being nice only to you.¹⁴ Finally, the closeness of your relationship influences the way you interpret a person's behavior. When your best friend does you an unexpected favor, you probably interpret it as a sincere sign of friendship. With a co-worker, you may be more likely to wonder about an ulterior motive.¹⁵

THE CIRCULAR NATURE OF PERCEPTION

Although perception occurs in stages—selecting, organizing, and interpreting information—the stages all overlap.¹⁶ Thus, for example, the way we interpret a communication behavior depends on what we notice about it, but what we notice can also depend on the way we interpret it.

Suppose you are listening to a speech by the regional vice president of your company. If you like her ideas and proposals, you might interpret her demeanor and speaking style as examples of her intelligence and confidence. If you oppose her ideas, however, you might believe her demeanor and speaking style reflect arrogance or incompetence. Either interpretation, in turn, might lead you to select for attention only those behaviors or characteristics that support your interpretation and to ignore those that do not. So, even though perception happens in stages, the stages don't always take place in the same order. We're constantly noticing, organizing, and interpreting things around us, including other people's behaviors.

WE COMMONLY MISPERCEIVE OTHERS' COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS

Although we get a lot of opportunities to practice perception, mistakes are easy to make. Imagine that during an overseas sales trip, you perceive that two adults you see in a restaurant are having a heated argument. As it turns out, you later discover they are not arguing but engaging in behaviors that, in their culture, communicate interest and involvement.

Why do we commit such a perceptual error despite our accumulated experience? The reason is that each of us has multiple lenses through which we perceive the world. As we'll see below, those lenses include our cultural and co-cultural backgrounds, stereotypes, primacy and recency effects, and our perceptual sets. In each case, those lenses have the potential to influence not only our own communication behaviors but also our perceptions of the communication of others.

Cultures and co-cultures influence perceptions. One powerful influence on the accuracy of our perceptions is the culture and co-cultures with which we identify. Recall from Chapter 2 that culture is the learned, shared symbols, language, values, and norms that distinguish one group of people—such as Russians, South Africans, or Thais—from another. Co-cultures are smaller groups of people—such as single parents, bloggers, and history enthusiasts—who share values, customs, and norms related to mutual interests or characteristics besides their national citizenship.

Many characteristics of cultures can influence our perceptions and interpretations of other people's behaviors.¹⁷ For instance, people from individualistic cultures frequently engage in more direct, overt forms of conflict communication than do people from collectivistic cultures. In a conflict, then, an

LO5.2

Explain the reasons why people commit perceptual errors.

Culture is one of many influences on our perceptions of others.

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individualist might perceive a collectivist's communication behaviors as conveying weakness, passivity, or a lack of interest. Likewise, the collectivist may perceive the individualist's communication patterns as overly aggressive or self-centered, even though each person is communicating in a way that is normal in his or her culture.

Co-cultural differences can also influence perceptions of communication. Younger workers might perceive their older supervisors' advice as outdated or irrelevant, whereas the supervisors may perceive their younger workers' indifference to their advice as naive.¹⁸ Likewise, liberals and conservatives may each see the other's communication messages as rooted in ignorance.

Stereotypes influence perceptions. A **stereotype** is a generalization about a group or category of people that can have a powerful influence on the way we perceive others and their communication behavior.¹⁹ Stereotyping is a three-part process:

- First, we identify a group to which we believe another person belongs ("you are an accountant").
- Second, we recall a generalization others often make about the people in that group ("accountants have no sense of humor").
- Finally, we apply that generalization to the person ("therefore, you must have no sense of humor").

You can probably think of stereotypes for many groups. What stereotypes come to mind for people with physical or mental disabilities? Wealthy people? Science fiction fans? Immigrants? What stereotypes come to mind when you think about yourself?

Many people find stereotyping distasteful or unethical, particularly when stereotypes have to do with characteristics such as sex, race, and sexual orientation.²⁰ Unquestionably, because it underestimates the differences among individuals in a group, stereotyping can lead to inaccurate, even offensive, perceptions of other people. It may be true, for instance, that women are more emotionally sensitive than men, but that doesn't mean *every* woman is emotionally sensitive. Similarly, people of Asian descent may often be more studious than those from other ethnic groups, but not every Asian is a good student, and not all Asians do equally well in school.²¹

Although perceptions based on stereotypes are often inaccurate, they aren't necessarily so.²² For example, consider the stereotype that women love taking care of children. Not every woman enjoys taking care of children, but some do. Before assuming your perceptions of others are correct, get to know those people, and let your perceptions be guided by what you learn about them as individuals rather than as members of a group. That advice is especially useful when you find yourself in conflict with someone you disagree with, as the "People First" box explains.

Primacy and recency effects influence perceptions. As the saying goes, you get only one chance to make a good first impression. According to a principle called the **primacy effect**, first impressions are critical because they set the tone for all future interactions.²³ Our first impressions of someone's communication behaviors seem to stick in our mind more than our second, third, or fourth impressions do. In an early study of the primacy effect, psychologist Solomon Asch found that a person described as "intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious" was evaluated more favorably than one described as "envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent."²⁴ Notice that most of those adjectives are negative, but when the description begins with a positive adjective (*intelligent*), the effects of the more negative ones that follow it are diminished.

Asch's study illustrates that the first information we learn about someone tends to have a stronger effect on how we perceive that person than information we receive later.²⁵ That finding explains why we work so hard to communicate competently during a job interview, on a date, or in other important situations. When people

PEOPLE FIRST

Being Aware of Stereotypes

IMAGINE THIS: While on your break at work, you and your colleague Karina are discussing your company president's recent public statement about immigration. Karina's comments lead you to realize that you have strongly opposing opinions. One of you feels undocumented workers waste taxpayers' money by using social services without defraying their cost. The other believes everyone deserves to share in the "American dream," and that some U.S. industries, such as agriculture and construction, employ large numbers of undocumented workers.

You find Karina's opinions infuriating and wonder aloud how she can possibly think the way she does. She wonders the same about you, and soon your conversation has turned into an argument, with each of you calling the other's beliefs ignorant and dangerous. You both go back to work angry and frustrated.

Now, consider this: Your conflict with Karina was based partly on your differing opinions about immigration. However, it likely was also influenced by your perceptions of each other. In particular, once you realized the difference in your positions, you may have stereotyped each other as "conservative" or "liberal." Doing so may have led you to make inaccurate assumptions about the other and to consider yourself open-minded while dismissing the other person's arguments as uninformed.

- The first step in keeping stereotypes from influencing your perceptions is awareness. Because Karina's



position differs from yours, do you assume she is narrow-minded or naive? Do you presuppose anything about her background or experiences?

- If you do recognize assumptions you are making about Karina, remind yourself that stereotypes are often inaccurate when applied to individuals. It may be true that people with liberal and conservative viewpoints have different backgrounds and life experiences, but that doesn't necessarily mean every conservative person is the same, nor every liberal person.
 - Instead of dismissing Karina's arguments as wrong, ask her why she feels as she does, and listen to her answer with an open mind. You may find her positions well informed and logical, even if you disagree with them.

Stereotypes can easily influence our perceptions of others, even without our being aware. It leads us to think superficially about others and their ideas, which can make it difficult for us to prioritize people above the disagreements we may have with them.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

Why do you think stereotyping is so easy to do, and so challenging to combat? When have your stereotypes about other individuals turned out to be inaccurate in the past?

evaluate us favorably at first, they are more likely to perceive us in a positive light from then on.²⁶

Stand-up comedians will tell you, however, that the two most important jokes in a show are the first *and* the last. That advice follows a principle known as the **recency effect**, which says that the most recent impression we have of a person's communication is more powerful than our earlier impressions.²⁷

Which is more important, the first or the most recent impression? The answer is that *both* appear to be more important than any impressions we form in between.²⁸ To grasp this key point, consider the last significant conversation you had with someone. You probably have a better recollection of how the conversation started and ended than you do of what was communicated in between. Figure 5.2 illustrates the relationship between the primacy effect and the recency effect by showing how our first and most recent impressions of people overshadow our other perceptions of them.

Perceptual sets influence perceptions. "I'll believe it when I see it," people often say. However, our perception of reality is influenced by more than what we see.

Stereotyping can be easy to do, but perceptions formed on the basis of stereotypes are often inaccurate. What stereotypes come to mind when you see the people in these photos?

Top: ©Andrea De Martin/123RF;
bottom left: ©tixti/123RF;
bottom right: ©jenjen42/Getty Images



Our biases, expectations, and desires can create what psychologists call a **perceptual set**, or a predisposition to perceive only what we want or expect to perceive.²⁹ An equally valid motto might therefore be “I’ll see it when I believe it.”

For example, our perceptual set regarding gender guides the way we perceive and interact with newborns. Without the help of a contextual cue such as blue or pink baby clothes, we sometimes have a hard time telling whether a dressed infant is male or female. However, research shows that if we’re told an infant’s name is David, we perceive that child to be stronger and bigger than if the same infant is called, say, Diana.³⁰ Our perceptual set tells us that male infants are usually bigger and stronger than female ones, so we “see” a bigger, stronger baby when we’re told it’s a boy. Our perceptions can then affect our communication behavior: we may also hold and talk to the “female” baby in softer, quieter ways than we do with the “male” baby.

Our perceptual set also influences how we make sense of people, circumstances, and events. Deeply religious individuals may talk about healings as miracles or answers to prayer, whereas others may describe them as natural responses to medication.³¹ Highly homophobic people are more likely than others to perceive affectionate communication between men as sexual in nature.³²



CAREER TIP

Many people recognize Andre Iguodala as a star professional basketball player who has contributed to multiple NBA championships. Fewer people may know of his other professional accomplishments as a successful tech venture capitalist and sought-after speaker about leadership and technology.

Iguodala has overcome many stereotypes and misperceptions about athletes and their aptitude for business ventures. As he explained, “I try to let the people I do business with off the court know that I’m serious about my business off the court. So, I try not to mix the two. . . . I want them to know that I’m serious about what I’m doing and it’s a priority to me.”³³

Iguodala has overcome the primacy effect (most people’s first impressions of him are as a basketball player) to demonstrate his talent for business. He networks among insiders in the tech industry. He spends hours each day learning about the latest trends in business and technology. He grills potential business partners and demonstrates his thorough background in the tech industry. He actively seeks out speaking opportunities at technology events and has gained a reputation as an innovative thinker and leader.³⁴

Iguodala’s awareness of the way he may be perceived has helped him intentionally develop his skills and communicate in ways that make a lasting impression based on



Andre Iguodala

©Drew Altizer/Sipa Press/San Francisco/CA/United States

his most recent encounters in business (recency effect). Identify the misperceptions others may have of you and then look for opportunities to challenge those misperceptions. If you believe others see you as lacking initiative, for instance, volunteer to lead a work team or organize an after-work social event. If others perceive that you’re not a team player, make a point to ask co-workers for their input on a project or invite them to brainstorm with you on a problem. Like Iguodala, you can then find ways to reinvent yourself as your career interests change or expand.

Perception is a complex process. As we will discover in the next section, we are vulnerable to mistakes not only when we form perceptions but also when we try to explain what we perceive.

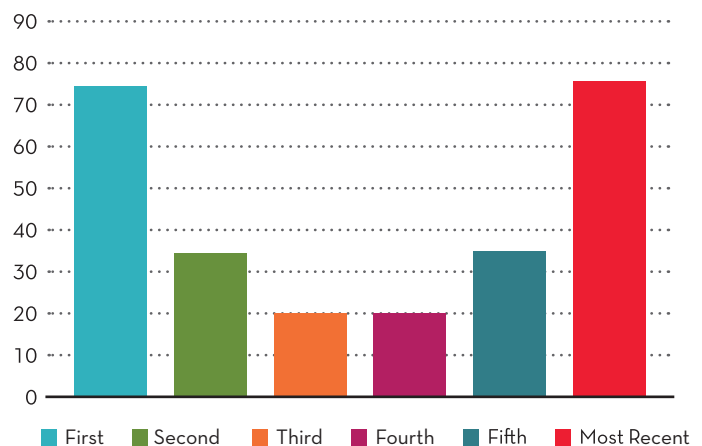
Communicating and Explaining Our Perceptions

Suppose you’re meeting with a committee at work that is focused on restructuring the employee evaluation process. In the middle of your discussion, your supervisor enters the room, walks over to your co-worker Erika, and whispers something to her. Erika’s eyes start to water immediately, and then she gets up from the table and follows your supervisor out of the room. The rest of you stare at each other, wondering what just happened. Did Erika just receive some upsetting news? Was she tearing up because she was happy about what your supervisor told her?

Figure 5.2

Primacy and Recency Effects

Our first impressions and our most recent impressions are more important than those that come in between.



When we perceive social behavior, especially behavior we find surprising, our nearly automatic reaction is to try to make sense of it.³⁵ We need to understand what is happening to know how to react. After all, if you perceive that someone is communicating out of anger or jealousy, you will react differently than if you perceive the motivation is humor or sarcasm. Our ability to explain social behavior—including our own—helps us perceive our social world. In this section, we will see that we explain behaviors by forming attributions for them, and we will discover how to avoid two of the most common errors people make when doing so.

WE EXPLAIN BEHAVIOR THROUGH ATTRIBUTIONS

An **attribution** is an explanation of an observed behavior, the answer to the question “Why did this occur?”³⁶ Attributions tend to vary along three important dimensions: locus, stability, and controllability.³⁷

Attributions vary in locus. Locus describes the place where the cause of a behavior is “located,” whether within or outside ourselves.³⁸ Some of our behaviors have *internal* loci (the plural of *locus*), meaning they’re caused by a particular characteristic of ourselves. Other behaviors have *external* loci, meaning they are caused by something outside ourselves. If your boss is late for your 9 a.m. performance review, an internal attribution you might make about her is that she has lost track of time or she’s making you wait on purpose. In other words, it is something about *her* that is making her late. An external attribution is that the traffic is heavy or an earlier meeting she is attending has run long.

Attributions vary in stability. A second dimension of attributions is whether the cause of a behavior is stable or unstable.³⁹ A *stable* cause is one that is permanent, semipermanent, or at least not easily changed. Why was your boss late? Rush hour traffic is a stable cause for lateness because it’s a permanent feature of many people’s morning commute. The attribution that she is rarely punctual would likewise be stable because it identifies an enduring aspect of her behavior. In contrast, a traffic accident or an overly long morning meeting would be an *unstable* cause of your boss’s lateness because those events occur only from time to time and are largely unpredictable.

SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS

Attribution Making

Working with a partner or in a small group, consider Erika’s reaction to what your manager told her, and generate an attribution for her reaction that is internal and stable. Then, generate an attribution that is external and unstable. Finally, generate an attribution that is internal and unstable. Take note of which attributions are easier to generate than others.

Attributions vary in controllability.

Finally, causes for behavior vary in how controllable they are.⁴⁰ You make a *controllable* attribution for someone’s behavior when you believe the cause was under that person’s control. In contrast, an *uncontrollable* attribution identifies a cause beyond the person’s control. If you perceive that your boss is late for your appointment because she has spent too much time socializing with other co-workers beforehand, that is a controllable attribution because socializing is under her control.

Alternatively, if you perceive she’s late because she was in a car accident on the way to work, that is an uncontrollable attribution because she couldn’t help but be late if she wrecked her car.

LO5.3

Differentiate self-serving bias and fundamental attribution error.

AVOIDING TWO COMMON ATTRIBUTION ERRORS

Although most of us probably try to generate accurate attributions for other people’s behaviors, we are still vulnerable to making attribution mistakes.⁴¹ Suppose you have

worked at a restaurant for many years. You started out bussing tables, then became a server, and you're now the weekend manager. You have been a loyal employee to the restaurant's owner, Olivia, even accepting reduced hours when business has been slow. Thus, you are shocked to learn that Olivia is selling the restaurant and moving out of state. After many years of loyalty, you feel betrayed at her decision and uncertain about the future of your own job. You conclude that Olivia is being greedy and thinking only of herself. You learn later, however, that she decided to sell her business and move in order to provide care for her elderly father after his diagnosis of dementia.

We're all prone to taking mental shortcuts when generating attributions. As a result, our attributions are often less accurate than they should be. Two of the most common attribution errors—which we can better avoid if we understand them—are the self-serving bias and the fundamental attribution error.

Be aware of the self-serving bias. The **self-serving bias** is our tendency to attribute our successes to stable, internal causes and our failures to unstable, external causes.⁴² For instance, if you gave a successful sales presentation to a potential client, you may say it was great because you were well prepared, but if it went poorly, you might say the noise in the room was distracting you. Such attributions are self-serving because they suggest that our successes are deserved but our failures are not our fault.

Although the self-serving bias deals primarily with attributions we make for our own behaviors, research shows that we often extend this tendency to important people in our lives.⁴³ In a satisfying relationship, for instance, people tend to attribute their partner's positive behaviors to internal causes ("She remembered my birthday because she's thoughtful") and negative behaviors to external causes ("He forgot my birthday because he's been very preoccupied at work"). In a distressed relationship, the reverse is often true: people attribute negative behaviors to internal causes ("She forgot my birthday because she's completely self-absorbed") and positive behaviors to external causes ("He remembered my birthday only because I reminded him five times").

Avoid the fundamental attribution error. How did you react the last time someone cut you off in traffic? Did you think, "He must be late for something important" or "What a jerk"?

It is a human tendency to commit the **fundamental attribution error**, in which we attribute other people's behaviors to internal rather than external causes.⁴⁴ But bear in mind that people's behaviors—including your own—are often responses to external forces. For instance, when a new doctor spends only three minutes with you before moving on to the next patient, you might perceive that she's not very caring. That would be an internal attribution for her communication behavior, which the fundamental attribution error makes more likely. To judge the merits of that attribution, however, ask yourself what external forces might have motivated the doctor's behavior. Maybe another doctor's absence that day left her with twice as many patients as usual. Good communicators recognize the tendency to form internal attributions for people's behaviors, and they force themselves to consider external causes that might also be influential.

We do make accurate attributions for people's behaviors (including our own). But the self-serving bias and the fundamental attribution error are easy mistakes to commit. The more we know about them, the more often we can base our communication behaviors on accurate perceptions of ourselves and others.

The self-serving bias leads many of us to believe our successes are deserved but our failures are not our fault.

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LO5.4

Explain how the nature of self-concept is partially subjective.

How We Perceive Ourselves

As much as your communication's effectiveness depends on your ability to perceive others, it also depends on your ability to perceive yourself. In this section, we will discover that each of us perceives our self through our self-concept, and we will examine the characteristics of a self-concept. We will also learn how self-concept influences communication behavior and relates to self-esteem.

SELF-CONCEPT DEFINED

Let's say you are asked to come up with ten ways to answer the question "Who am I?" What words will you pick? Which answers are most important? Each of us has a set of ideas about who we are that isn't influenced by moment-to-moment events (such as "I'm happy right now") but is fairly stable over the course of our lives (such as "I'm a happy person"). Your **self-concept**, also called your **identity**, is composed of your own stable perceptions about who you are. As we'll see in this section, self-concepts are multifaceted and partly subjective.

Self-concept is multifaceted. We define ourselves in many different ways. Some of these ways rely on our name: "I'm Sunita" or "I'm Darren." Some rely on physical or social categories: "I am a vegan" or "I am Australian." Others make use of our skills or interests: "I'm artistic" or "I'm good with numbers." Still others are based on our relationships to other people: "I am an uncle" or "I do volunteer work with homeless children." Finally, some rely on our evaluations of ourselves: "I am honest" or "I am impatient." You can probably think of several other ways to describe who you are.

Which of those descriptions is the *real* you?

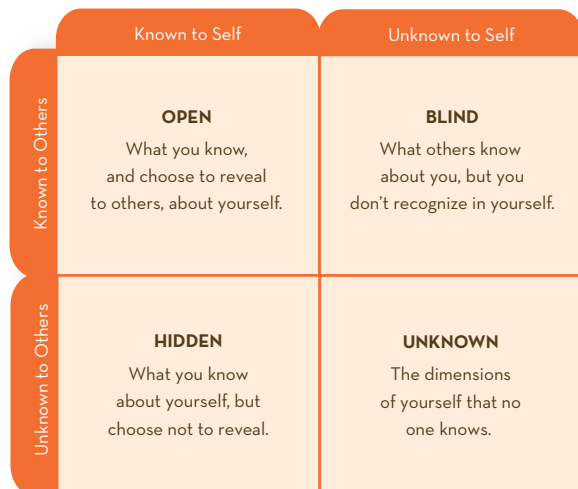
The answer is that your self-concept has several different parts, and each of your descriptions taps into one or more of those parts. What we call *the self* is a collection of smaller *selves*. If you're female, that's a part of who you are, but it isn't everything you are. Asian, athletic, agnostic, or asthmatic may all be parts of your self-concept, but none of those terms defines you completely. All the different ways you would describe yourself are pieces of your overall self-concept.

One way to think about your self-concept is to distinguish between aspects of yourself that are known to others and aspects that are known only to you. In 1955, U.S. psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham created the **Johari window**, a visual representation of the self as composed of four separate parts.⁴⁵ According to this model, which is illustrated in Figure 5.3:

Figure 5.3

Johari Window

The Johari window consists of open, blind, hidden, and unknown quadrants, each representing a different combination of what is known to us and what is known to others about us.



- The *open area* consists of characteristics known both to the self and to others. Those probably include your name, sex, hobbies, academic major, and other aspects of your self-concept that you are aware of and freely share with others.
- The *hidden area* consists of characteristics that you know about yourself but choose not to reveal to others, such as emotional insecurities or traumas from your past that you elect to keep hidden.
- The *blind area* refers to aspects of ourselves that others see in us, but of which we are unaware. For instance, others might see us as impatient or moody even if we don't recognize these traits in ourselves.

- Finally, the *unknown area* comprises aspects of our self-concept that are not known either to us or to others. For example, no one—including you—knows what kind of parent you will be until you actually become one.

If you think about people who are important to you professionally or personally, you can construct a different Johari window that reflects your self-concept with each of those people. Perhaps you share more about yourself with some people than with others, making your *open* pane larger and your *hidden* pane smaller in those relationships. Some people may know certain details about you that you don't recognize in yourself (your *blind* pane), whereas others do not. The point is that our self-concept can differ with different people in our lives.

Self-concept is partly subjective. Some of what we know about ourselves is based on objective facts. Suppose, for instance, that you are 5'8" tall, have brown hair, and were born in San Francisco but now live in Dallas. Those aspects of your self-concept are objective—they are based on fact and not on someone's opinion. That doesn't mean you have no choice about them. You might have chosen to move to Dallas to attend school or take a great job, and although you were born with brown hair, you could change your hair color if you wanted to. Referring to those personal characteristics as "objective" simply means that they are factually true. Many aspects of our self-concept are subjective rather than objective, however. "Subjective" means that they are based on the impressions we have of ourselves rather than on objective facts.

It is often difficult for people to judge themselves accurately or objectively. Sometimes our self-assessments are unreasonably positive. For instance, you might know individuals who have unrealistic ideas about their intelligence, their talents, or their understanding of the world. In one study, the College Board (the company that administers the SAT college entrance examination) asked almost a million U.S. high school seniors to rate their ability to get along with others. *Every single student* in the study responded that he or she was "above average"—a result that is mathematically impossible! Moreover, 60 percent claimed their ability to get along with others was in the top 10 percent, and a whopping 25 percent rated themselves in the top 1 percent.⁴⁶

In contrast, sometimes our judgments of ourselves are unreasonably negative. That is especially true for people with low self-esteem. Several studies have shown that such individuals tend to magnify the importance of their failures.⁴⁷ They often underestimate their abilities, and when they get negative feedback, such as a poor evaluation at work or a disrespectful remark from someone they know, they are likely to believe it accurately reflects their worth as individuals.

Several studies have also suggested that people with low self-esteem have a higher-than-average risk of clinical depression, a condition that impairs not only mental and emotional well-being but also physical health and the ways people communicate in their social relationships.⁴⁸ We return to self-esteem a little later in this chapter.

AWARENESS OF THE SELF-CONCEPT

Part of being a competent, skilled communicator is being aware of your self-concept and its influences on your communication with others. Three pathways by which self-concept can shape communicative behavior are self-monitoring, the self-fulfilling prophecy, and self-esteem.

Self-monitoring is being self-aware. Recall from Chapter 1 that *self-monitoring* is an awareness of how you look and sound and how your behavior is affecting those around you. The tendency toward self-monitoring ranges along a continuum from high to low. People on the high end of the scale pay attention to how others are reacting to their own behaviors, and they have the ability to adjust their communication as needed. People on the low end express whatever they are thinking or feeling without paying attention to the impression they're creating.

LO5.5

Describe three pathways through which self-concept can shape communicative behavior.

THE COMPETENT COMMUNICATOR

Googling Yourself: Managing Your Online Image

Employers, creditors, and even prospective romantic partners use the Internet to learn about you. According to one study, 70 percent of employers use social media to screen prospective job candidates, and 54 percent have decided not to hire someone based on the person's social media profile. When people search online for information about you, will you like what they find? To assess your online image, type your name into google.com or a similar search engine and explore the first dozen websites your search identifies that are relevant to you (rather than to someone else with your name). Read each of the following statements, and indicate whether you think it is true or false with respect to yourself by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column.

	True	False
1. I would be fine knowing that a prospective employer was looking at these websites.	_____	_____
2. I found pictures of myself that I wouldn't be comfortable letting my employer see.	_____	_____
3. Most people would have a positive impression of me after seeing the websites I found.	_____	_____
4. Some of the information I found might make me look irresponsible.	_____	_____
5. I'd feel comfortable letting my parents read the websites I came across.	_____	_____
6. At least some of what I found online about myself was inaccurate.	_____	_____

It's best if you answered "true" to the odd-numbered statements and "false" to the even-numbered statements. If any of your answers are otherwise, consider taking steps to alter the online content. If the information or photos that concern you appear on websites over which you have some control—such as your Facebook page or a friend's personal web page—remove the material or make it viewable only by close acquaintances. This may be a particularly important consideration before you go on a job interview or set up a date.

SOURCE: CareerBuilder. (2017, June 15). Number of employers using social media to screen candidates at all-time high, finds latest CareerBuilder study. Retrieved from <http://press.careerbuilder.com/2017-06-15-Number-of-Employers-Using-Social-Media-to-Screen-Candidates-at-All-Time-High-Finds-Latest-Career-Builder-Study>.

High self-monitors pay close attention to how they look, how they sound, and how others react to their behavior.

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Suppose you've arranged for your supervisor Caleb to interview your friend Keith for an internship position. As a high self-monitor, Caleb pays attention to his clothes and grooming to make sure he looks good and presents himself positively. In contrast, as a low self-monitor, Keith doesn't spend much time thinking about those things. During their interview, Caleb is aware of what he's saying, so he comes across as thoughtful and capable. Keith, however, says whatever is on his mind, without considering what Caleb might think. Caleb notices if his behavior seems to make Keith uncomfortable, and he adjusts his actions accordingly. In contrast, Keith doesn't tune in to what he's saying or how his behavior affects Caleb—and unsurprisingly, he is not offered the internship.

From that example, you might get the impression that it's best to be a high self-monitor. Self-monitoring certainly has advantages. High self-monitors tend to be better at making whatever kind of impression they

want to make. They often find it easier than low self-monitors to put other people at ease in social situations and tend to be good at figuring out what others are thinking and feeling, a skill that gives them a clear advantage in many social settings.

High self-monitors also pay attention to the way they are portrayed online. What would people learn about you if they Googled your name? Check out “The Competent Communicator” box to find out.

Being a low self-monitor also has advantages, however. Low self-monitors spend less time and energy thinking about their appearance and behavior, so they are probably more relaxed than high self-monitors in many situations. In addition, because they are less aware of, or less concerned about, the impressions they make, they are often more straightforward communicators. They may even be seen as more genuine and trustworthy than high self-monitors.

Self-fulfilling prophecies make predictions come true. Imagine meeting a new co-worker whom you’ve heard other people describe as painfully shy. Because you don’t want to make her uncomfortable, you spend little time talking to her when you meet her, and you don’t invite her to join you and your friends for lunch. Consequently, she says little to you all day and eats lunch alone at her desk. You think to yourself, “I guess everyone was right about her; she really *is* shy.” Why did your expectation about a shy co-worker come true? Most likely, the cause is a phenomenon called a **self-fulfilling prophecy**—a situation in which a prediction causes people to act and communicate in ways that make it come about.

How do self-fulfilling prophecies affect the way we communicate? Sometimes our expectations influence our communication behavior—as when we treat someone we think is shy as if she were. Similarly, when we expect our relationships to succeed, we behave in ways that strengthen them, and when we expect to be socially rejected, we perceive and react to rejection even when it isn’t really there.⁴⁹

There is one very important clarification here. For a prophecy to be self-fulfilling, it’s not enough that you expect something to happen and then it does. Rather, it has to be the case that your expectation *causes* it to happen. Let’s say that yesterday morning you expected it to rain, and later it did rain. That isn’t a self-fulfilling prophecy, because your expectation didn’t cause the rain: it would have rained regardless of what you thought. In other words, your expectation was fulfilled, but it was not *self-fulfilled*. A self-fulfilling prophecy is one in which the expectation itself causes the behaviors that make it come true. That is the case when your expectation about someone leads you to communicate in a manner that produces the expected outcome.

Self-esteem is our assessment of self-worth. *Knowing* your self-concept and *being happy with* it are two different things. How do you feel about yourself? Your accomplishments? Your relationships? Do you feel confident about and proud of who you are? Such questions concern your **self-esteem**, your subjective evaluation of your value and worth as a person.

Like self-monitoring, your level of self-esteem ranges along a continuum from high to low. If you evaluate yourself positively and feel happy about who you are, you probably have high self-esteem. In contrast, if you are pessimistic about your abilities and dissatisfied with your self-concept, you probably have low self-esteem.

Maintaining a positive image of ourselves does appear to have its advantages when it comes to communication behavior. Individuals with higher self-esteem are generally more outgoing and more willing to communicate and build relationships with others.⁵⁰ They are more comfortable initiating relationships, and they are more likely to believe that other people’s expressions of support are genuine.⁵¹

However, although several researchers have speculated that having low self-esteem promotes aggressive and antisocial behavior, the reverse is actually true: aggressive people have higher self-esteem, not lower.⁵² Moreover, when they encounter problems

in their relationships with others, people with high self-esteem are more likely to end those relationships and seek out new ones instead of working to fix what's wrong.⁵³

In this section, we have considered that we perceive ourselves through our self-concepts. Next we discover how people use a variety of communication behaviors to express their desired self-perceptions to others.

LO5.6

Identify the ways in which image management is collaborative, involves the management of multiple identities, and is complex.

Managing Our Image

Our self-concept is related to the way we see ourselves. When we communicate with other people, we are also interested in the way we want them to see us. Our concern is with the *image* we want to project—that is, the personal “face” we want others to see. Is it friendly, outgoing, fun? Or perhaps it is reliable, competent, and serious, depending on the occasion. In this section, we examine what scholars call *image management*, and research that has shed light on that process.

COMMUNICATION AND IMAGE MANAGEMENT

Few methods of communicating our image to others are more popular, even among professionals, than the selfie. Millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) are expected to take over 25,000 selfies each over the course of their lives.⁵⁴ The selfie allows you to exert a high degree of control over the way you present your image. You can give others the impression that you lead a more glamorous, enviable life than you might in reality. You can digitally alter your image to make yourself appear more attractive or socially desirable to others. Between a third and a fifth of social media users admit to altering their selfies before posting them, according to research.⁵⁵

The process of behavioral adjustment to project a desired image is known as **image management**. In the following discussion, we consider that image management is collaborative, that we manage multiple identities, and that managing an image is complex.

Image management is collaborative. To some extent, managing your image is an individual process. After all, your image is yours. Yet you also get a lot of help managing your image from the people around you. As psychologist Dan McAdams has suggested, each of us develops a **life story**, a way of presenting ourselves to others that is based on our self-concept but is also influenced by other people.⁵⁶ In this sense, image management is collaborative.

In many situations, we carefully consider how we want others to perceive us. That is the process of image management.

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If others accept the image you portray, they will tend to behave in ways that encourage that image. Let's say you see and project yourself as a confident person. If other people see you as confident, they will treat you as though you are—and their behavior will strengthen that part of your identity in your own mind. If others don't accept that image of you, however, they may treat you as less credible or as untrustworthy.

Perhaps you have encountered people who seem as though they are trying to be someone they aren't, or who are portraying an image that you don't accept as genuine. In June 2015, for instance, civil rights activist Rachel Dolezal resigned as a chapter president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) amid controversy about her racial identity. After Dolezal reported to police and local news media that she had been a victim of several hate crimes, her parents—who are both Caucasian—said publicly that she is a white woman pretending to be African American. Investigations of that claim revealed that Dolezal had made public statements claiming to be black and had listed herself as black on at least one job application, even though she had sued Howard University (a predominantly African American school) in 2002 for discriminating against her for being white. These and other discrepancies ignited a controversy about whether Dolezal had misrepresented who she was. Although the NAACP stated that racial identity is not a criterion for holding leadership positions in the organization, the credibility of Dolezal's self-identification, when it was challenged by others, may have harmed her ability to lead effectively.



Rachel Dolezal

©Splash News/Alamy Stock Photo

We manage multiple identities. Most people know you only in certain contexts. Your professional contacts know you as an employee, a supervisor, or a co-worker. Your family members know you as a mother, a son, an aunt, a brother, a cousin, or a grandchild. People in your social circle know you as a neighbor or friend.



FOCUS ON ETHICS

Communicating under Multiple Identities

As the new manager of a local hotel, Jerome is aware that many potential customers check out reviews on Yelp before deciding where to stay. To make his competitors look bad, therefore, he creates several fake Yelp accounts and posts highly negative reviews of other hotels, hoping to make his hotel look better by comparison. When a friend questions the ethics of his behavior, Jerome notes that he is simply expressing his honest opinions about his competitors' hotels. His friend then questions why he's hiding behind made-up accounts to express his opinions, and wonders aloud how Jerome would react if other hotel owners did the same to him.

CONSIDER THIS: Even if the opinions Jerome is expressing on Yelp are honest, how ethical is it for him to use multiple fake identities to communicate them? Besides embarrassment if exposed, what risks is he incurring by doing so?



TECH TIP

Image Management on LinkedIn

Nearly all professionals create profiles and post content on professional networking websites such as LinkedIn to use for job seeking and networking. Consider these tips as you develop your LinkedIn profile:

- *Upload a professional, high-resolution photo.* The first impression most people form is based on your photo, which they nearly always see first. Do you want to display yourself in a suit or in business casual attire? Do you want to smile (perhaps to project friendliness or optimism) or not (perhaps to project seriousness or purpose)? What do you want in the background, and what message does that send?
- *Develop a narrative you want to tell with your profile.* Do you want to project yourself as a problem solver, a team player, a creative thinker, or an expert at helping customers? The basic professional story you want to tell about yourself should dictate the content you add to your profile.
- *Create a concise, compelling summary statement.* Many professionals do not complete the summary statement in their profile. This is a major missed opportunity. In three to ten sentences, share who you are as a professional.
- *Focus on quality rather than quantity.* LinkedIn allows you to add dozens of sections and gives you nearly unlimited space to post content. Add only content that supports your professional narrative and avoid adding clutter that detracts from your overall story.
- *Ask some trusted colleagues and friends about the image you project with your profile.* Make sure to get feedback and advice from five to ten people about the image they think you project from your profile. This will help you refine it to best project your intended image.

Each of those contexts carries its own distinctive role expectations, so you probably enact a somewhat different identity in each one. In fact, we all manage multiple identities. That is, we show different parts of ourselves to different people in our lives.

In the virtual world of the Internet, a person can create and maintain as many different identities as he or she chooses, simply by generating multiple email addresses or web pages or participating in various virtual communities.⁵⁷ For instance, you might have one email address associated with your college or university that identifies your name and school. You might have another from a free email server, such as iCloud or Gmail, containing no identifying information about yourself (for example, mybro4816@gmail.com). Perhaps you use such an anonymous address when you want to communicate online without revealing your identity. In virtual communities, such as chat rooms and Second Life, you can manipulate your identity to appear as though you are of a different sex, a different ethnicity, or even a different species.⁵⁸ Some people may create multiple online identities to protect themselves when interacting with strangers; others may do so for amusement or to explore various aspects of their personalities.

Image management is complex. Image management is often complicated and may generate competing goals for our interactions with others. Let's say you encounter some unexpected expenses and decide to ask your supervisor for an advance on your salary. You want your supervisor to think of you as a responsible employee, so you have to present your request in a way that projects your image as a mature person who makes good decisions. At the same time, though, you want to persuade your supervisor that you really need the advance. Thus, you may find your image needs in conflict: you want to appear responsible but also in need of assistance. Managing those competing image needs—while still persuading your employer to advance you the money you need—can be complex.

Communication researcher Myra Goldschmidt found that when people ask others for favors, they often create narratives—ways of telling their stories—that help

them to maintain their image while still being persuasive.⁵⁹ To your employer, you might make such statements as “I wouldn’t ask for this advance if I weren’t in a bind” and “I’ll even work extra hours if you need me to.” Such strategies can help preserve your image as a responsible individual even in a situation where that image might be threatened.

COMMUNICATION AND FACE NEEDS

The reason most of us hate being embarrassed is that it threatens the image of ourselves we are trying to project. Helping someone “save face” means helping that person avoid embarrassment and preserve dignity in a situation where that dignity is threatened. Sometimes we associate this concept with collectivistic cultures such as Korea and Japan. In reality, saving face is important in many cultures.⁶⁰ Let’s consider what happens when our desired public image is threatened.

Face and face needs constitute our desired public image. Each of us works to maintain our desired public image through the ways we communicate. If you want others to see you as intelligent and competent, you will likely communicate in ways that nurture that impression and try to avoid situations that would make you look uninformed or incompetent. Sociologist Erving Goffman coined the term **face** to describe our desired public image and the term **facework** to describe the behaviors we use to project that image to others.⁶¹

Researchers believe our face is made up of three different **face needs**, or important components of our desired public image.⁶² Helpfully, the first letter of each of their names—fellowship, autonomy, and competence—are also the first three letters in the word *face*.

Fellowship face refers to the need to have others like and accept us. This is the part of our identity that motivates us to make friends, join clubs and social groups, and communicate pleasantly with others. **Autonomy face** refers to our need to avoid being imposed on by others. It’s our autonomy face that motivates us to be in control of our time and resources and to dislike having other people make decisions for us. Finally, **competence face** is our need to be respected—to have others acknowledge our abilities and intelligence. That need drives us to seek careers and hobbies in which we can excel and to avoid situations that will embarrass us.

Some people have a very strong fellowship face need, meaning it is extremely important that others like them. Other people may have a very high need for autonomy, whereas others don’t mind having decisions made for them. Those differences are part of what makes everyone’s identity unique.

We are confronted with face threats.

We often become consciously aware of our face needs only when they are threatened. Let’s say you apply for an internship in a prestigious public relations firm but are not chosen. That news could threaten your fellowship face. It could also threaten your competence face by making you feel you aren’t smart enough to work for that company. The rejection of your application, therefore, is a **face-threatening act** because it hinders the fulfillment of one or more of your face needs.

Face-threatening acts often lead people to behave in ways that help them restore their face. In the case of the internship, you might say to others, “I didn’t really want to



Competence face is our need to be respected for our abilities and our intelligence.

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SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS**Minimizing Face Threats**

With others in your class, role-play a conversation in which you are a supervisor having to criticize an employee's work. Practice delivering your critiques to each other in ways that minimize face threats for the recipients.

work for that firm anyway.⁶³ In truth, you probably *did* want to work for that firm, or you wouldn't have applied. So, you would likely make such a statement as a way of managing your image with others—that is, you want it to *appear* that your face needs have not been threatened. Your statement is thus a type of *defense mechanism*—a response that minimizes the effects of a face-threatening act.

CHAPTER WRAP-UP

By understanding perspective taking, we equip ourselves to communicate with one another more effectively inside and outside the workplace. Here's a quick review of the chapter.

LO5.1 Illustrate how selection, organization, and interpretation occur during perception.

- Selection is the process by which your mind and body help you isolate certain stimuli to pay attention to. Your perceptions are influenced partly by the stimuli you select for attention.
- Organization is the process of classifying the information you notice. We can organize information into categories of physical constructs, role constructs, interaction constructs, and psychological constructs.
- Interpretation means assigning meaning to a stimulus you have selected for attention and organized. How we interpret a stimulus, such as a behavior, affects our perception of the person enacting that behavior.

LO5.2 Explain the reasons why people commit perceptual errors.

- Cultures and co-cultures influence perceptions and can cause perceptual errors.
- Stereotypes influence perceptions and can cause perceptual errors.
- Primacy and recency effects influence perceptions and can cause perceptual errors.
- Perceptual sets influence perceptions and can cause perceptual errors.

LO5.3 Differentiate self-serving bias and fundamental attribution error.

- The self-serving bias is our tendency to attribute our successes to stable, internal causes

while attributing our failures to unstable, external causes.

- The fundamental attribution error is the tendency to attribute other people's behaviors to internal rather than external causes.

LO5.4 Explain how the nature of self-concept is partially subjective.

- Our self-concept is composed of our stable perceptions about who we are. It is also called our identity.
- The self-concept has many possible facets.
- Some facets of the self-concept are objective, meaning they are based on fact and not on someone's opinion. Many other facets, however, are subjective, meaning they are based on the impression we have of ourselves rather than on objective facts.

LO5.5 Describe three pathways through which self-concept can shape communicative behavior.

- Self-monitoring is an awareness of how you look and sound and how your behavior is affecting those around you.
- A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a prediction causes people to act and communicate in ways that make that prediction come true.
- Self-esteem is your subjective evaluation of your value and worth as a person.

LO5.6 Identify the ways in which image management is collaborative, involves the management of multiple identities, and is complex.

- How you manage your image is affected by the people around you, and whether they accept or question the image you are portraying of yourself, making image management collaborative.

- Most people manage multiple identities, meaning they show different parts of themselves to different people in their lives.

- Image management can be complex because we often have multiple competing goals for our interactions with others.



A LOOK BACK

Let's go back to the opening scenario to see some of the ways perception may influence our interactions. Liz complains to Caleb about Aisha, one of the graphics designers, in a way that shows they may be misperceiving Aisha because of self-serving bias, the fundamental attribution error, and stereotypes. Even though Liz did get the graphics a day before a deadline with the client, she attributes her own inability to finish the website updates by the deadline to external

causes (scheduled meetings). Caleb reinforces this self-serving explanation by telling Liz she wasn't at fault. Liz may make the fundamental attribution error by thinking the cause of Aisha's delay is internal (Aisha doesn't care about meeting deadlines). Finally, Caleb uses a stereotype (graphics designers don't worry about clients' wants) to reinforce and justify Liz's and his perceptions of Aisha.

KEY TERMS

attribution 110
autonomy face 119
competence face 119
face 119
face needs 119
face-threatening act 119
facework 119
fellowship face 119

fundamental attribution error 111
identity 112
image management 116
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perceptual set 108
primacy effect 106
recency effect 107
selection 103
self-concept 112
self-esteem 115
self-fulfilling prophecy 115
self-serving bias 111
stereotype 106

CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is perception, and how is it distinct from interpersonal perception? **LO5.1**
2. Define and give examples of selection, organization, and interpretation as they relate to the perception-making process. **LO5.1**
3. What are three characteristics that make a given stimulus more likely to be selected for attention? **LO5.1**
4. Define and give workplace examples of physical, role, interaction, and psychological constructs. **LO5.1**
5. How do personal experience, knowledge, and relationship closeness affect the interpretations you make of someone's behavior? **LO5.1**
6. In what ways might people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in their perceptions of the same behavior? **LO5.2**
7. What are the three parts of the stereotyping process? Using the three parts, give an example of a stereotype that is common in your personal or professional life. **LO5.2**
8. Compare and contrast the primacy and recency effects and explain their relevance to the perception-making process. **LO5.2**
9. What is a perceptual set? How does it embody the idea that "I'll see it when I believe it"? **LO5.2**
10. What question does an attribution answer? **LO5.3**

11. What do we mean when we say that attributions vary in locus, stability, and controllability? **LO5.3**
12. When making attributions, why do you suppose people are susceptible to the self-serving bias? **LO5.3**
13. How does the fundamental attribution error influence people's attributions? **LO5.3**
14. What constitutes a self-concept? **LO5.4**
15. Define and give examples of the open, hidden, blind, and unknown areas of the Johari window. **LO5.4**
16. What does it mean to say that the self-concept is partly subjective? **LO5.4**
17. In the working world, how might it be an advantage to be a high self-monitor? How might it be a disadvantage? **LO5.5**
18. When does a self-fulfilling prophecy occur? **LO5.5**
19. What are some advantages of having high self-esteem? What are some drawbacks? **LO5.5**
20. What is image management, and how is it related to one's life story? **LO5.6**
21. In what way(s) do you manage multiple identities in your own life? **LO5.6**
22. According to Goffman, what is "face," and what is "facework"? **LO5.6**
23. Define and give examples of fellowship, autonomy, and competence face. **LO5.6**
24. What are people usually motivated to do when they experience a face-threatening act? **LO5.6**

SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISES

Differentiating Attribution Errors (**LO5.3**)

Divide students into groups to share examples of a time when they have committed the self-serving bias or fundamental attribution error in either their professional or personal life. As a class, discuss an example from each group and brainstorm ideas for avoiding biases in the future.

Engaging with Face Needs (**LO5.6**)

Divide students into three teams and assign a fundamental face need to each group. Have the teams create dramatic skits that illustrate a workplace interaction in which participants needed to save fellowship, autonomy, or competence face.

Understand the Limitations of Stereotypes (**LO5.1, LO5.2**)

Watch the TED talk *The Danger of a Single Story* by Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie. Then hold a class discussion by posing these questions:

- How was Adichie influenced by the stories she read as a child?
- What is the "single story" that Adichie discusses?
- What does Adichie mean by suggesting that the way to reduce a people to a single story is to start that story by saying "secondly"?
- In what way are stereotypes an incomplete story? Are they also untrue?
- How do stereotypes make it difficult to see the truth about other people?

Aspects of Self-Awareness (**LO5.4, LO5.5**)

Assign students to watch YouTube clips of business leaders being interviewed or describing their work. Ask students to analyze the business leaders' statements with respect to which pane(s) of the Johari window those statements reflect. When do they reveal information known to the self but unknown to others, for instance? When do they allude to information known to others but not to the self?

Online Image Collage (**LO5.4, LO5.6**)

To underscore the importance of managing their online image professionally, pair students with a classmate they do not know well and ask each person in the pair to Google the other. Each student should prepare a report or collage of some sort reflecting the information learned online about his or her classmate. Then, ask each student to imagine being a prospective employer and to reflect on whether his or her classmate's online profile would help or hinder the classmate's chances of being hired.

Personal Ad for a Job (**LO5.5, LO5.6**)

As an in-class or out-of-class writing assignment, challenge students to write their own personal ad seeking a new job. Have students swap their ads with a classmate. Classmates should identify the characteristics and attributes that students used to describe themselves and the type of job they are seeking, and comment on how these reflect the students' self-concepts and aspirations.

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