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3

COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY: CREATING AND PRESENTING THE SELF

HERE ARE THE TOPICS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER:

- **Communication and the Self**
  - Self-Concept and Self-Esteem
  - Biological and Social Roots of the Self
  - Characteristics of the Self-Concept
  - Culture, Gender, and Identity
  - The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and Communication
- **Presenting the Self: Communication as Impression Management**
  - Public and Private Selves
  - Characteristics of Impression Management
  - Why Manage Impressions?
  - Face-to-Face Impression Management
  - Online Impression Management
  - Impression Management and Honesty
- **Self-Disclosure in Relationships**
  - Models of Self-Disclosure
  - Benefits and Risks of Self-Disclosure
  - Guidelines for Self-Disclosure
- **Alternatives to Self-Disclosure**
  - Silence
  - Lying
  - Equivocating
  - Hinting
  - The Ethics of Evasion
- **Summary**
- **Key Terms**

AFTER STUDYING THE TOPICS IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

1. Describe the relationship between self-concept, self-esteem, and communication.
2. Explain how self-fulfilling prophecies shape the self-concept and influence communication.
3. Compare and contrast the perceived self and the presenting self as they relate to impression management.
4. Describe the role that impression management plays in both face-to-face and mediated relationships.
5. Use the social penetration and Johari Window models to identify the nature of self-disclosing communication in one of your relationships.
6. Outline the potential benefits and risks of disclosing in a selected situation.
7. Assess the most competent mixture of candor and equivocation in a given situation.

Hiep Vu/Masterfile

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Who are you? Take a moment now to answer this question. You'll need the following list as you read the rest of this chapter, so be sure to complete it now. Try to include all the characteristics that describe you:

Your moods or feelings (e.g., happy, angry, excited)
Your appearance (e.g., attractive, short)
Your social traits (e.g., friendly, shy)
Talents you have or do not have (e.g., musical, nonathletic)
Your intellectual capacity (e.g., smart, slow learner)
Your strong beliefs (e.g., religious, environmentalist)
Your social roles (e.g., parent, girlfriend)
Your physical condition (e.g., healthy, overweight)

George Mayer/Bigstock

Now look at what you've written. How did you define yourself? By career status or social role? Your temperament? Gender or sexual orientation? By your age? Your religion? Your occupation?

There are many ways of identifying yourself. List as many as you can. You'll probably see that the words you've chosen represent a profile of what you view as your most important characteristics. In other words, if you were required to describe the "real you," this list ought to be a good summary.

COMMUNICATION AND THE SELF

You might be wondering how this self-analysis is related to interpersonal communication. The short answer is that who you are both reflects and affects your communication with others. The long answer involves everything from biology to socialization to culture to gender. We'll begin with a look at two terms that are basic to the relationship between the self and communication.

Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

The list you created is at least a partial answer to the question "Who do you think you are?" It's likely that the phrases you chose generated some emotional responses—perhaps terms like "happy" or "sad," "confident" or "nervous." Replies like these show that how you *feel* about yourself is a big part of who you think you are. What we think and feel about ourselves are important components of the self that we'll examine now.

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Self-Concept Who you think you are can be described as your **self-concept**: the relatively stable set of perceptions you hold of yourself. If a special mirror existed that reflected not only your physical features but also other aspects of yourself—emotional states, talents, likes, dislikes, values, roles, and so on—the reflection you'd see would be your self-concept. You probably recognize that the self-concept list you recorded earlier is only a partial one. To make the description complete, you'd have to keep adding items until your list ran into hundreds of words.

For most people this list dramatically illustrates just how fundamental the concept of self is. Even when the item being abandoned is an unpleasant one, it's often hard to give it up. And when asked to let go of their most central feelings or thoughts, most people balk. "I wouldn't be *me* without that," they insist. Of course, this proves our point: The concept of self is perhaps our most fundamental possession. Knowing who we are is essential because without a self-concept it would be impossible to relate to the world.

Self-Esteem While your self-concept describes who you think you are, **self-esteem** involves evaluations of self-worth. A hypothetical communicator's self-concept might include being quiet, argumentative, or self-controlled. His or her self-esteem would be determined by how he or she *felt* about these qualities. Consider these differing evaluations:

Quiet	"I'm a coward for not speaking up."
	versus
	"I enjoy listening more than talking."
Argumentative	"I'm pushy, and that's obnoxious."
	versus
	"I stand up for my beliefs."
Self-controlled	"I'm too cautious."
	versus
	"I think carefully before I say or do things."

People with high self-esteem tend to think well of others and expect to be accepted by them. On the other hand, those who dislike themselves are likely to believe that others won't like them either. Realistically or not, they imagine that others are constantly viewing them critically, and they accept these imagined or real criticisms as more proof that they are indeed unlikable people. Sometimes this low self-esteem is manifested in hostility toward others because the communicator takes the approach that the only way to look good is to put others down.

High self-esteem has obvious benefits, but it doesn't guarantee interpersonal success.[1] People with exaggerated self-esteem may *think* they make better impressions on others and have better friendships and romantic lives, but neither impartial observers nor objective tests verify these beliefs. It's easy to see how people with an inflated sense of self-worth could irritate others by

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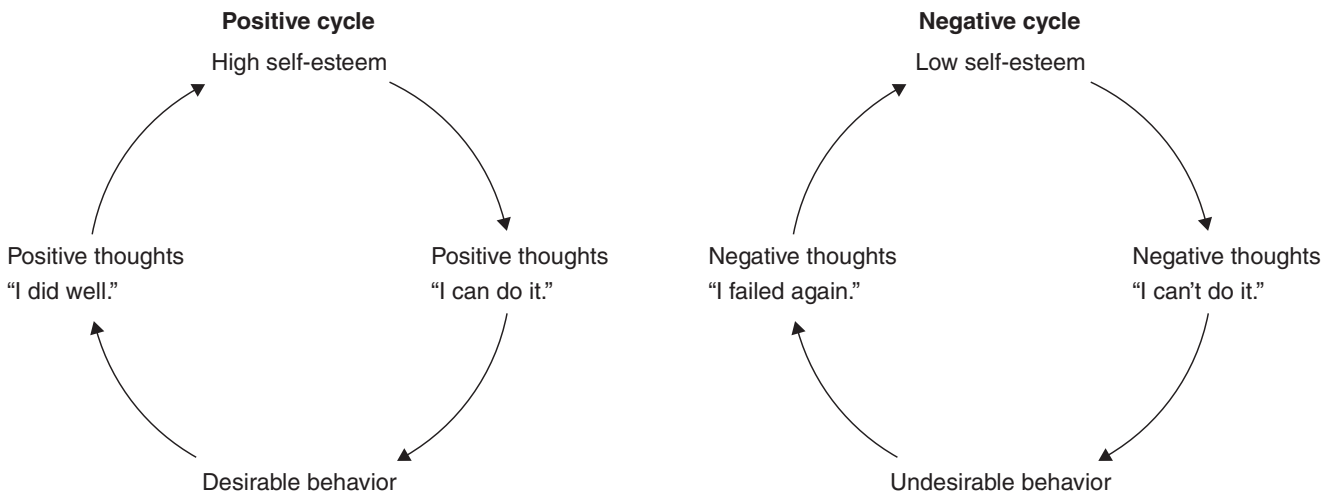

FIGURE 3.1 The Relationship between Self-Esteem and Communication Behavior

coming across as condescending know-it-alls, especially when their self-worth is challenged.[2]

Despite these cautions, self-esteem *can* be the starting point for positive behaviors and interactions. Figure 3.1 shows the cycles that may begin from both positive and negative self-evaluations. These patterns often become self-fulfilling prophecies, as we'll discuss later in this chapter.

Biological and Social Roots of the Self

How did you become the kind of communicator you are? Were you born that way? Are you a product of your environment? As you'll now see, the correct answer to both of these questions is "yes."

PAUSE *and* REFLECT

Your Self-Esteem

MindTap® **REFLECT . . .** on your own self-esteem, either here or online.

Take a self-guided tour of your self-esteem provided by the National Association of Self-Esteem. As you explore, consider how the past and present have shaped your current level of self-esteem. Additionally, speculate about how your current level of self-esteem affects your own communication style and interpersonal relationships. You can find the link to this site by visiting CengageBrain.com to access the Speech Communication MindTap for *Looking Out Looking In*. The activity will take about 10 to 15 minutes.

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Biology and the Self Take another look at the "Who am I?" list you developed at the beginning of this chapter. You will almost certainly find some terms that describe your **personality**—characteristic ways that you think and behave across a variety of situations. Your personality tends to be stable throughout your life, and often it grows more pronounced over time.[3]

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Research suggests that personality is formed in part by our genetic makeup.[4] For example, people who were judged shy as children still show a distinctive reaction in their brains as adults when they encounter new situations.[5] Some studies show that biology accounts for as much as half of communication-related personality traits such as extraversion,[6] shyness,[7] assertiveness,[8] verbal aggression,[9] and overall willingness to communicate.[10] In other words, to some degree, we come programmed to communicate in characteristic ways.

While you may have a disposition toward traits like shyness or aggressiveness, you can do a great deal to control how you actually communicate. More and more research suggests that personality is flexible, dynamic, and shaped by experiences.[11] Even shy people can learn how to reach out to others, and those with aggressive tendencies can learn to communicate in more sociable ways. One author put it this way: "Experiences can silence genes or activate them. Even shyness is like Silly Putty once life gets hold of it."[12] Throughout this book you will learn about communication skills that, with practice, you can build into your repertoire.

Socialization and the Self-Concept How important are others in shaping our self-concept? Imagine growing up on a deserted island, with no one to talk to or share activities. How would you know how smart you are—or aren't? How would you gauge your attractiveness? How would you decide if you're short or tall, kind or mean, thin or heavy? Even if you could view your reflection in a mirror, you still wouldn't know how to evaluate your appearance without appraisals from others or people with whom to compare yourself. In fact, the messages we receive from the people in our lives play a central role in shaping how we regard ourselves.

Social scientists use the metaphor of a mirror to identify the process of **reflected appraisal**: the fact that each of us develops a self-concept that reflects the way we believe others see us. In other words, we are likely to feel less valuable, lovable, and capable to the degree that others have communicated ego-busting signals; and we will probably feel good about ourselves to the degree that others affirm our value.[13]

To illustrate this point further, let's start at the beginning. Children aren't born with any sense of identity. They learn to judge themselves only through the way others treat them. As children learn to speak and understand language, verbal messages contribute to a developing self-concept. Every day a child is bombarded with scores of appraisals about himself or herself. Some of these are positive: "You're so cute!" "I love you." "What a big girl." Other messages are negative: "What's the matter with you?" "Can't you do anything

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right?" "You're a bad boy." "Leave me alone. You're driving me crazy!" Evaluations like these are the mirror by which we know ourselves. Because children are trusting souls who have no other way of viewing themselves, they accept at face value both the positive and negative appraisals of the apparently all-knowing and all-powerful adults around them.

These same principles in the formation of the self-concept continue in later life, especially when messages come from what sociologists term **significant others**—people whose opinions we especially value. A look at the "ego boosters" and "ego busters" you will develop later in this chapter will show that the evaluations of a few especially important people can be powerful. Family members are the most obvious type of significant other, and their ego busters can be particularly hurtful as a result.[14] Others, though, can also be significant others: a special friend, a teacher, someone you dated, or perhaps an acquaintance whose opinion you value can leave an imprint on how you view yourself—sometimes for better, sometimes for worse.[15] To see the importance of significant others, ask yourself how you arrived at your opinion of yourself as a student, as a person attractive to others, as a competent worker, and you'll see that these self-evaluations were probably influenced by the way others regarded you.

The impact of significant others remains strong during adolescence. Inclusion in (or exclusion from) peer groups is a crucial factor in self-concept development for teenagers.[16] The good news is that parents who are understanding of their children's self-concepts during the adolescent years typically have better communication with their teens and can help them create a strong self-concept.[17] The influence of significant others becomes less powerful as people grow older. After most people approach the age of thirty, their self-concepts don't change radically, at least not without a conscious effort.[18]

So far we have looked at the way in which others' messages shape our self-concept. In addition to these messages, each of us forms our self-image by the process of **social comparison**: evaluating ourselves in terms of how we compare with others.

Two types of social comparison need highlighting. In the first type, we decide whether we are *superior* or *inferior* by comparing ourselves to others. Are we attractive or ugly? A success or failure? Intelligent or stupid? It depends on those against whom we measure ourselves.[19] For instance, research shows that young women who regularly compare themselves with ultra-thin media models develop negative appraisals of their own bodies.[20] In one study, young women's perceptions of their bodies changed for the worse after watching just thirty minutes of televised images of the "ideal" female form.[21] Men, too, who compare themselves to media-idealized male physiques evaluate their bodies negatively.[22] People also use others' online

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profiles as points of comparison, and they may feel less attractive after doing so.[23]

You'll probably never be as beautiful as a Hollywood star, as agile as a professional athlete, or as wealthy as a millionaire. When you consider the matter logically, these facts don't mean you're worthless. Nonetheless, many people judge themselves against unreasonable standards and suffer accordingly.[24] This is particularly true of people with perfectionistic tendencies, whose self-concepts have been shaped by demanding messages from significant others.[25] These distorted self-images can lead to serious behavioral disorders, such as depression, anorexia nervosa, and bulimia.[26] You'll read more about how to avoid placing perfectionistic demands on yourself in Chapter 5.

In addition to feelings of superiority and inferiority, social comparison provides a way to decide if we are the *same as* or *different from* others. A child who is interested in ballet and who lives in a setting where such preferences are regarded as weird will start to accept this label if there is no support from others. When at a dance camp, however, the child will likely flourish. Likewise, adults who want to improve the quality of their relationships but are surrounded by friends and family who don't recognize or acknowledge the importance of these matters may think of themselves as oddballs. Thus, it's easy to recognize that the **reference groups** against which we compare ourselves play an important role in shaping our view of ourselves.

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In the film *The Way Way Back*, shy, awkward Duncan (Liam James) endures a host of negative appraisals during his early adolescence, leading to low self-esteem. He then spends a summer working for fun-loving boss Owen (Sam Rockwell) who gives Duncan plenty of affirming messages. Can you think of significant others who have influenced how you think and feel about yourself? How have those messages affected the way you communicate with others?

You might argue that not every part of one's self-concept is shaped by others, insisting that certain objective facts are recognizable by self-observation. After all, nobody needs to tell a person that he is taller than others, speaks with an accent, has acne, and so on. These facts are obvious. Though it's true that some features of the self are immediately apparent, the *significance* we attach to them—the rank we assign them in the hierarchy of our list and the interpretation we give them—depends greatly on the opinions of others. After all, many of your features are readily observable, yet you don't find them important at all, because nobody has regarded them as significant.

By now you might be thinking, "It's not my fault that I've always been shy or insecure. Because I developed a picture of myself as a result of the way others have treated me, I can't help being what I am." Though it's true that to a certain extent you are a product of your environment, to believe that you are forever doomed to a poor self-concept would be a big mistake. Having held a poor self-image in the past is no reason for continuing to do so in the future. You *can* change your attitudes and behaviors, as you'll soon read.

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PAUSE *and* REFLECT

"Ego Boosters" and "Ego Busters"

MindTap® **REFLECT…** on your own "ego boosters" and "ego busters" by answering the following questions, either here or online.

1. Recall someone you know or once knew who was an "ego booster"—who helped enhance your self-esteem by acting in a way that made you feel accepted, competent, worthwhile, important, appreciated, or loved.
2. Now recall an "ego buster" from your life—someone who acted in a large or small way to reduce your self-esteem. Recall how you felt after receiving the damaging message.
3. Now that you've thought about how others shape your self-concept, recall a time when *you* were an ego booster to someone else—when you intentionally or unintentionally boosted another's self-esteem. Look for a time when your actions left another person feeling valued, loved, needed, and so on.
4. Finally, recall an instance in which you were an ego buster for someone else. What did you do to diminish another's self-esteem? Were you aware of the effect of your behavior at the time?

After completing the exercise, you should begin to see the role communication plays in shaping the self-concept.

Characteristics of the Self-Concept

Now that you have a better idea of how your self-concept developed, we can look closer at some of its characteristics.

The Self-Concept Is Subjective Although we tend to believe that our self-concept is accurate, in truth it may well be distorted. For example, researchers have found that there is no relationship between the way college students rate their ability as interpersonal communicators, public speakers, or listeners and their true effectiveness.[27] In all cases, the self-reported communication skill is higher than actual performance. In another study, college students were asked to rank themselves on their ability to get along with others.[28] Defying mathematical laws, all subjects—every last one of more than 800,000—put themselves in the top half of the population. Sixty percent rated themselves in the top 10 percent of the population, and an amazing 25 percent believed they were in the top 1 percent. Similarly, online daters often have a "foggy mirror"—that is, they see themselves more positively than others do.[29] This leads to inflated self-descriptions that don't always match what an objective third party might say about them.

Not all distortion of the self-concept is positive. Many people view themselves more harshly than the objective facts warrant. We have all experienced a

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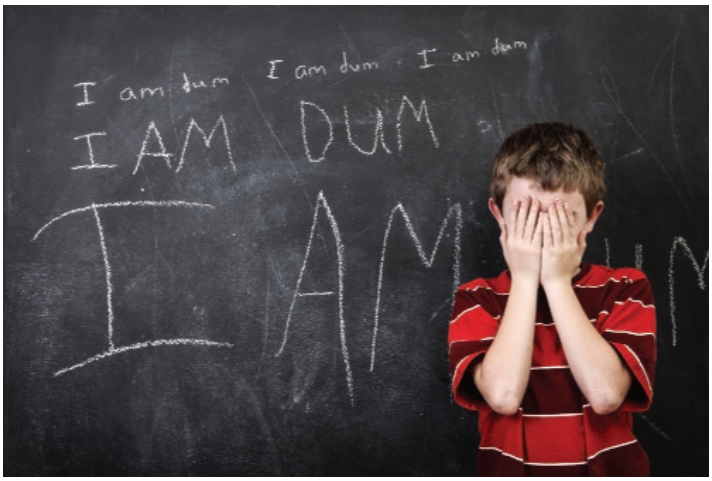
temporary case of the "uglies," convinced that we look much worse than others assure us we do. Research confirms what common sense suggests: People are more critical of themselves when they are experiencing these negative moods than when they are feeling more positive.[30] Although we all suffer occasional bouts of self-doubt that affect our communication, some people suffer from long-term or even permanent states of excessive self-doubt and criticism.[31] It's easy to understand how this chronic condition can influence the way they approach and respond to others.



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Distorted self-evaluations like these can occur for several reasons:

- *Obsolete information*. The effects of past failures in school or social relations can linger long after they have occurred, even though such events don't predict failure in the future. Likewise, your past successes don't guarantee future success.
- *Distorted feedback*. The remarks of overly critical parents, cruel friends, uncaring teachers, excessively demanding employers, or even memorable strangers can have a lasting effect. Other distorted messages are unrealistically positive. For instance, a child's inflated ego may be based on the praise of doting parents, and a boss's inflated ego may come from the praise of brownnosing subordinates.
- *Perfectionism*. From the time most of us learn to understand language, we are exposed to models who appear to be perfect. The implicit message is "A well-adjusted, successful person has no faults." Given this naive belief that everyone else is perfect and the knowledge that one isn't, it's easy to see how one's self-concept would suffer.
- *Social expectations*. Curiously, the perfectionist society to which we belong rewards those people who downplay the strengths we demand that they possess (or pretend to possess). We consider those who honestly appreciate their strengths to be "braggarts" or "egotists," confusing them with the people who boast about accomplishments they do not possess.[32] This convention leads most of us to talk freely about our shortcomings while downplaying our accomplishments.

After a while we begin to believe the types of statements we repeatedly make. The disparaging remarks are viewed as modesty and become part of our self-concept, and the strengths and accomplishments go unmentioned and are thus forgotten. And in the end, we see ourselves as much worse than we are. One way to avoid falling into the trap of becoming overly critical is to recognize your strengths rather than focusing exclusively on your shortcomings.

Scholars have coined the term *Internet-mediated reflected appraisal* to describe how communicators draw conclusions about themselves by considering

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how others view them online.[33] You might decide who you think you are (in part) by looking at how you portray yourself on social networking sites. Researchers asked participants to spend time reviewing their own Facebook profiles, then measured the participants' self-esteem. They found that participants felt better about themselves after looking at their Facebook pages.[34] In essence, the participants viewed their well-crafted profiles and thought, "This is how others see me—and I look pretty good!"

Of course, this raises questions about the validity of these self-appraisals. Facebook profiles are edited presentations that usually put a person's best foot forward. As you'll read later in this chapter, managing impressions via social media can lead to less-than-accurate portrayals and perceptions by the self and others. But at the very least, social networking sites can be a tool for helping people view themselves in the best light possible.

The Self-Concept Resists Change Although we all change, there is a tendency to cling to an existing self-concept, even when evidence shows that it is obsolete. This tendency to seek and attend to information that conforms to an existing self-concept has been labeled **cognitive conservatism**.

This tendency toward cognitive conservatism leads us to seek out people who support our self-concept. For example, both college students and married couples with high self-esteem seek out partners who view them favorably, whereas those with negative self-esteem are more inclined to interact with people who view them unfavorably.[35] It appears that we are less concerned with learning the "truth" about ourselves than with reinforcing a familiar self-concept.

It's understandable why we're reluctant to revise a previously favorable self-concept. A student who did well in earlier years but now has failed to study might be unwilling to admit that the label "good scholar" no longer applies. Likewise, a previously industrious worker might resent a supervisor's mentioning increased absences and low productivity. These people aren't *lying* when they insist that they're doing well despite the facts to the contrary; they honestly believe that the old truths still hold, precisely because their self-concepts are so resistant to change.

Curiously, the tendency to cling to an outmoded self-perception also holds when the new self-perception would be more favorable than the old one. We recall a former student whom almost anyone would have regarded as beautiful, with physical features attractive enough to appear in any glamour magazine. Despite her appearance, in a class exercise, this woman characterized herself as "ordinary" and "unattractive." When questioned by her classmates, she described how as a child her teeth were extremely crooked and how she had worn braces for several years in her teens to correct this problem. During this time she was often teased by her friends, who never let her forget her "metal mouth," as she put it. Even though the braces had been off for two years, our student reported that she still saw herself as ugly and brushed aside our compliments by insisting that we were just saying these things to be nice—she knew how she *really* looked.

Communicators who are presented with information that contradicts their self-perception have two choices: They can either accept the new data and change their perception accordingly, or they can keep their original perception and in some way refute the new information. Because most communicators

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are reluctant to downgrade a favorable image of themselves, their tendency is to opt for refutation, either by discounting the information and rationalizing it away or by counterattacking the person who transmitted it. The problem of defensiveness is so great that we will examine it in detail in Chapter 11.

There are times when changing a distorted or obsolete self-concept can be a good thing. For example, you may view yourself as a less competent, desirable, and skilled person than the facts would suggest. Here are a few suggestions for embracing a more positive self-image.

1. **Have a realistic perception of yourself**. While some people have inaccurately inflated egos, others are their own worst critic. A periodic session of recognizing your strengths, such as you tried earlier in this chapter, is often a good way to put your strengths and weaknesses into perspective. It's also wise to surround yourself with supportive people who will give you the positive feedback you need and deserve.
2. **Have realistic expectations**. If you demand that you handle every act of communication perfectly, you're bound to be disappointed. And if you constantly compare yourself with gifted people, you're going to come up short. Rather than feel miserable because you're not as talented as an expert, realize that you probably are a better, wiser, or more skillful person than you used to be, and that this is a legitimate source of satisfaction.
3. **Have the will to change**. Often we say we want to change, when in fact we're simply not willing to do what's required (we'll discuss the fallacy of helplessness and ridding yourself of "can't" statements in Chapter 4). You *can* change in many ways, if only you are motivated to do so.
4. **Have the skill to change**. Trying isn't always enough. In some instances you would change if you knew how to do so. Seek out advice from books such as this one, or ask for suggestions from instructors, counselors, and other experts. Observing models can also be a powerful way to master new ways of communicating. Watch what people you admire do and say, not so that you can copy them, but so that you can adapt their behavior to fit your own personal style.

Culture, Gender, and Identity

We have already seen how experiences in the family, especially during childhood, shape our sense of who we are. Along with the messages we receive at home, many other forces mold our identity, and thus our communication, including age, physical ability/disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Along with these forces, culture and gender are powerful forces that affect how we view ourselves and others and how we communicate. We will examine each of these forces now.

Culture Although we seldom recognize the fact, our sense of self is shaped, often in subtle ways, by the culture in which we have been reared.[36] Most Western cultures are highly individualistic, whereas other traditional cultures—most Asian ones, for example—are much more collectivist. When asked to identify themselves, individualists in the United States, Canada, Australia,

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and Europe would probably respond by giving their first name, surname, street, town, and country. Many Asians do it the other way around.[37] If you ask Hindus for their identity, they will give you their caste and village as well as their name. The Sanskrit formula for identifying one's self begins with lineage and goes on to state family, house, and ends with one's personal name.[38] When members of different cultures were asked to create an "I am" list similar to the one you completed earlier in this chapter, those from collectivist cultures made far more group references than those from individualistic cultures.[39]

The difference between individualism and collectivism shows up in everyday interaction. Communication researcher Stella Ting-Toomey has developed a theory that explains cultural differences in important norms, such as honesty and directness.[40] She suggests that in individualistic Western cultures where there is a strong "I" orientation, the norm of speaking directly is honored, whereas in collectivistic cultures, where the main desire is to build connections between the self and others, indirect approaches that maintain harmony are considered more desirable. "I gotta be me" could be the motto of a Westerner, but "If I hurt you, I hurt myself" is closer to the Asian way of thinking.

You don't need to travel overseas to appreciate the influence of culture on the self. Within societies, co-cultural identity plays an important role in how we see ourselves and others. For example, ethnicity can have a powerful effect on how people think of themselves and how they communicate. Recall how you described yourself in the "Who Am I?" list you created when you began this chapter. If you are a member of a nondominant ethnic group, it's likely that you included your ethnicity in the most important parts of who you are. There's no surprise here: If society keeps reminding you that your ethnicity is important, then you begin to think of yourself in those terms. If you are part of the dominant majority, you probably aren't as conscious of your ethnicity. Nonetheless, it plays an important part in your self-concept. Being part of the majority increases the chances that you have a sense of belonging to the society in which you live and of entitlement to being treated fairly. Members of less privileged ethnic groups often don't have these feelings.

Sex and Gender One way to appreciate the tremendous importance of gender on your sense of self is to imagine how your identity would be different if you had been born as a member of the other sex. Would you express your emotions in the same way? Deal with conflict? Relate to friends and strangers? The answer is quite likely "no."

From the earliest months of life, being male or female shapes the way others communicate with us, and thus our sense of self. Think about the first questions most people ask when a child is born. One of them is almost always "Is it a boy or a girl?" After most people know what the baby "is," they often behave accordingly.[41] They use different pronouns and often choose gender-related nicknames. With boys, comments often focus on size, strength, and activity; comments about girls more often address beauty, sweetness, and facial responsiveness. It's not surprising that these messages shape a child's sense of identity and how he or she will communicate. The implicit message is that some ways of behaving are masculine and others feminine. Little girls, for example, are more likely to be reinforced for acting "sweet" than are little boys.

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Talking with LITTLE GIRLS

NeonShot/Bigstock

I went to a dinner party at a friend's home last weekend and met her five-year-old daughter for the first time. Little Maya was all curly brown hair, doe-like dark eyes, and adorable in her shiny pink nightgown. I wanted to squeal, "Maya, you're so cute! Look at you! Turn around and model that pretty ruffled gown, you gorgeous thing!"

But I didn't. I always bite my tongue when I meet little girls, restraining myself from my first impulse, which is to tell them how darn cute/pretty/beautiful/well-dressed/well-manicured/well-coiffed they are.

What's wrong with that? It's our culture's standard talking-to-little-girls icebreaker, isn't it? And why not give them a sincere compliment to boost their self-esteem? 15 to 18 percent of girls under 12 now wear mascara, eyeliner, and lipstick regularly; eating disorders are up and self-esteem is down; and 25 percent of young American women would rather win *America's Next Top Model* than the Nobel Peace Prize. Even bright, successful college women say they'd rather be hot than smart.

Teaching girls that their appearance is the first thing you notice tells them that looks are more important than anything. It sets them up for dieting at age 5 and foundation at age 11 and boob jobs at 17 and Botox at 23. That's why I force myself to talk to little girls as follows:

"Maya," I said, crouching down at her level, looking into her eyes, "very nice to meet you. Hey, what are you reading?" I asked. Her eyes got bigger, and the practiced, polite facial expression gave way to genuine excitement over this topic.

"What's your favorite book?" I asked.

"I'll go get it! Can I read it to you?"

Purplicious was Maya's pick and a new one to me, as Maya snuggled next to me on the sofa and proudly read aloud every word. Not once did we discuss clothes or hair or bodies or who was pretty. It's surprising how hard it is to stay away from those topics with little girls.

So, one tiny bit of opposition to a culture that sends all the wrong messages to our girls. One tiny nudge towards valuing female brains. One brief moment of intentional role modeling.

Try this the next time you meet a little girl. Ask her what she's reading. What does she like and dislike, and why? There are no wrong answers. You're just generating an intelligent conversation that respects her brain. For older girls, ask her about current events issues: pollution, wars, school budgets slashed. What bothers her out there in the world? How would she fix it if she had a magic wand?

Here's to changing the world, one little girl at a time.

Lisa Bloom

MindTap® **ENHANCE…** your understanding by answering the following questions, either here or online.

1. Do you think people talk differently to little girls than they talk to little boys? If so, offer examples.
2. What impact does communication with children have on the development of their self-concept and self-esteem?
3. Do you generally agree or disagree with the author's central point about talking to little girls? Explain why or why not.

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The same principle operates in adulthood: A man who stands up for his beliefs might get approval for being "tough" or "persistent," whereas a woman who behaves in the same way could be described by critics as a "nag" or "bitch."[42] It's not hard to see how the gender roles and labels like these can have a profound effect on how men and women view themselves and on how they communicate.

Self-esteem is also influenced by gender. In a society that values competitiveness more in men than in women, it isn't surprising that the self-esteem of adolescent young men is closely related to having abilities that are superior in some way to those of their peers, whereas teenage women's self-worth is tied more closely to the success of their social relationships and verbal skills.[43] Research also suggests that young women struggle more with self-esteem issues than do young men. For example, the self-esteem of about two-thirds of the males in one study (ages 14 to 23) increased.[44] The same study revealed that about 57 percent of females in the same age group grew to feel *less* good about themselves.

Don't resign yourself to being a prisoner of expectations about your gender. Research demonstrates that our sense of self is shaped strongly by the people with whom we interact and by the contexts in which we communicate.[45] For example, a nonaggressive young man who might feel unwelcome and inept in a macho environment might gain new self-esteem by finding others who appreciate his style of communicating. A woman whose self-esteem is stifled by the limited expectations of bosses and coworkers can look for more hospitable places to work. Children usually can't choose the reference groups that shape their identities, but adults can.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and Communication

The self-concept is such a powerful force on the personality that it not only determines how you see yourself in the present but also can actually influence your future behavior and that of others. Such occurrences come about through a phenomenon called the self-fulfilling prophecy.

A **self-fulfilling prophecy** occurs when a person's expectations of an event, and his or her subsequent behavior based on those expectations, make the event more likely to occur than would otherwise have been true.[46] A self-fulfilling prophecy involves four stages:

1. Holding an expectation (for yourself or for others)
2. Behaving in accordance with that expectation
3. Coming to pass of the expectation
4. Reinforcing the original expectation

You can see how this process operates by considering an example. Imagine you're scheduled to interview for a job you really want. You are nervous about how you'll do, and not at all sure you are really qualified for the position. You share your concerns with a professor who knows you well and a friend who works for the company. Both assure you that you're perfect for the job and that the firm would be lucky to have you as an employee. Based on these comments, you come to the interview feeling good about yourself. As a result, you speak with authority and sell yourself with confidence. The employers are clearly

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impressed, and you receive the job offer. Your conclusion: "My friend and professor were right. I'm the kind of person an employer would want!"

This example illustrates the four stages of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thanks to the assurances of your professor and friend, your expectations about the interview were upbeat (Stage 1). Because of your optimistic attitude, you communicated confidently in the interview (Stage 2). Your confident behavior—along with your other qualifications—led to a job offer (Stage 3). Finally, the positive results reinforced your positive self-assessment, and you'll probably approach future interviews with greater assurance (Stage 4).

It's important to recognize the tremendous influence that self-fulfilling prophecies play in our lives. To a great extent we become what we believe. In this sense, we and those around us constantly create and re-create our self-concepts.

"I don't sing because I am happy. I am happy because I sing."

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Types of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies There are two types of self-fulfilling prophecies. *Self-imposed prophecies* occur when your own expectations influence your behavior. In sports you've probably psyched yourself into playing either better or worse than usual, so that the only explanation for your unusual performance was your attitude. Similarly, you've probably faced an audience at one time or another with a fearful attitude and forgotten your remarks, not because you were unprepared, but because you said to yourself, "I know I'll blow it."

Research has demonstrated the power of self-imposed prophecies.[47] In one study, communicators who believed they were incompetent proved less likely than others to pursue rewarding relationships and more likely to sabotage their existing relationships than did people who were less critical of themselves.[48] On the other hand, students who perceived themselves as capable achieved more academically.[49] In another study, subjects who were sensitive to social rejection tended to expect rejection, perceive it where it might not have existed, and overreact to their exaggerated perceptions in ways that jeopardized the quality of their relationships.[50] Research also suggests that communicators who feel anxious about giving speeches seem to create self-fulfilling prophecies about doing poorly that cause them to perform less effectively.[51]

A second category of self-fulfilling prophecies is imposed by one person on another. A classic example was demonstrated by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in a study described in their book *Pygmalion in the Classroom*.[52] The experimenters told teachers that 20 percent of the children in a certain elementary school showed unusual potential for intellectual growth. The names of these 20 percent were drawn randomly. Eight months later, these "gifted" children showed significantly greater gains in IQ than did the remaining children, who had not been singled out for the teachers' attention. The change in the teachers' behavior toward these allegedly special students led to changes in the intellectual performance of these randomly selected children. Among other things, the teachers gave the "smart" students more

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Summit Entertainment/Allstar

The film *Divergent* depicts a dystopian society where citizens are pigeonholed into categories that shape their adult lives—in essence, an other-imposed prophecy. Sixteen-year-old Tris Prior (Shailene Woodley) doesn't fit those categories, so she sets out to define herself on her own terms. In doing so, she demonstrates the power of self-fulfilling prophecies to help us become the kind of person we choose. What are some other-imposed messages that shaped you in your formative years? Which of those did you accept and which did you reject?

time to answer questions, more feedback, and more praise. In other words, the selected children did better—not because they were any more intelligent than their classmates, but because their teachers held higher expectations for them and treated them accordingly.

This type of self-fulfilling prophecy has been shown to be a powerful force for shaping the self-concept and thus the behavior of people in a wide range of settings outside of schools.[53] In one study, a group of welders with relatively equal aptitudes began training. Everyone, including the trainer, was told that five of the welders had higher scores on an aptitude test—even though they were chosen randomly. All five finished at the top of the class. They had fewer absences and significantly higher final test scores. Most impressively, they learned the skills of their trade twice as quickly as those who weren't identified as being so talented. In another [54] study, military personnel who were randomly labeled as having high potential performed up to the expectations of their superiors. They were also more likely to volunteer for dangerous special duty.[55]

It's important to note that an observer must do more than just *believe* to create a self-fulfilling prophecy for the person who is the target of the expectations. The observer also must *communicate* that belief in order for the prediction to have any effect. If parents have faith in their children, but the kids aren't aware of that confidence, they won't be affected by their parents' expectations. If a boss has concerns about an employee's ability to do a job but keeps those concerns to herself, the employee won't be influenced. In this sense, the self-fulfilling prophecies imposed by one person on another are as much a communication phenomenon as a psychological one.

PRESENTING THE SELF: COMMUNICATION AS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

So far we have described how communication shapes the way communicators view themselves. We will now turn the tables and focus on the topic of **impression management**—the communication strategies that people use to influence how others view them.[56] You will see that many of our messages aim at creating a desired impression.

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Public and Private Selves

To understand how impression management operates, we have to discuss the notion of self in more detail. So far we have referred to the "self" as if each of us had only one identity. In truth, each of us has several selves, some private and others public. Often these selves are quite different.

The **perceived self** is a reflection of the self-concept. Your perceived self is the person you believe yourself to be in moments of honest self-examination. We can call the perceived self "private," because you are unlikely to reveal all of it to another person. You can verify the private nature of the perceived self by reviewing the self-concept list you developed at the beginning of this chapter. If you were completely forthright when compiling that list, you'll probably find some elements of yourself there that you would not disclose to many people and some that you would not share with anyone. You might, for example, be reluctant to share some feelings about your appearance ("I think I'm rather unattractive"), your intelligence ("I'm smarter than most of my friends"), your goals ("The most important thing to me is becoming rich"), or your motives ("I care more about myself than about others").

In contrast to the perceived self, the **presenting self** is a public image—the way we want others to view us. The presenting self is sometimes called one's **face**. In most cases the presenting self that we seek to create is a socially approved image: diligent student, loving partner, conscientious worker, loyal friend, and so on. Social norms often create a gap between the perceived and presenting selves. In one study of college students, both men and women said their perceived selves included being "friendly" and "responsible." When it came to their public selves, the men wanted to be seen as "wild" and "strong," while the women presented themselves as "active" and "able."[57]

You can recognize the difference between public and private behaviors by recalling a time when you observed a driver, alone in his or her car, acting in ways that would never be acceptable in public. All of us engage in backstage ways of acting that we would never do in public. Just recall how you behave in front of the bathroom mirror when the door is locked, and you will appreciate the difference between public and private behaviors. If you knew that someone was watching, would you act differently?

Characteristics of Impression Management

Now that you have a sense of what impression management is, we can look at some characteristics of this process.

We Strive to Construct Multiple Identities It is an oversimplification to suggest that each of us uses impression management strategies to create just one identity. In the course of even a single day, most people perform a variety of roles: "respectful student," "joking friend," "friendly neighbor," and "helpful worker," to suggest just a few.

As you grew up you almost certainly changed characters as you interacted with your parents. In one context you acted as responsible adult ("You can trust me with the car!"), and in another context you were the helpless child ("I can't

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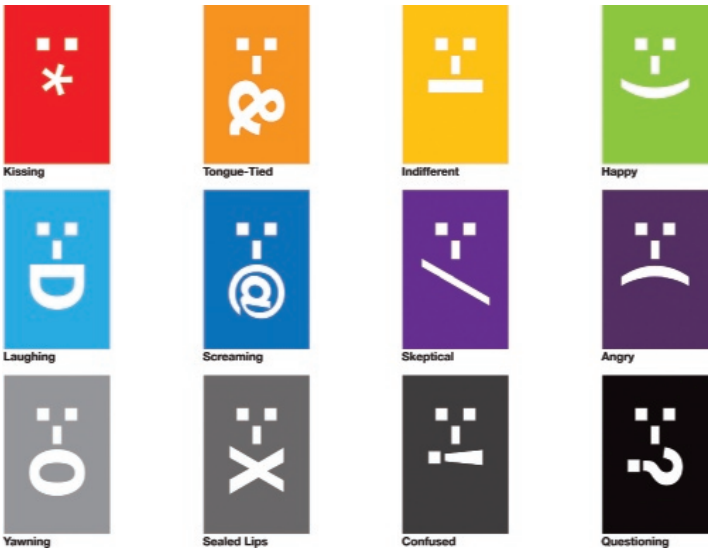

Gary Blakeley/Fotolia

find my socks!"). At some times—perhaps on birthdays or holidays—you were a dedicated family member, and at other times you may have played the role of rebel. Likewise, in romantic relationships we switch among many ways of behaving, depending on the context: friend, lover, business partner, scolding critic, apologetic child, and so on. And as you read in Chapter 1, the ability to shift styles from setting to setting and culture to culture is a feature of communication competence.

Impression Management Is Collaborative Sociologist Erving Goffman used a dramatistic metaphor to describe impression management.[58] He suggested that each of us is a kind of playwright who creates roles that reflect how we want others to see us, as well as a performer who acts out those roles. But unlike the audience for most forms of acting, our audience is made up of other actors who are trying to create their own characters. Impression-related communication can be viewed as a kind of process theater in which we collaborate with other actors to improvise scenes in which our characters mesh.

You can appreciate the collaborative nature of impression management by thinking about how you might handle a gripe with a friend or family member who has not returned your repeated calls to coordinate important details for a party. Suppose that you decide to raise the issue tactfully in an effort to avoid seeming like a nag (desired role for yourself: "nice person") and also to save the other person from the embarrassment of being confronted (hoping to avoid suggesting that the other person's role is "screw-up"). If your tactful bid is accepted, the dialogue might sound like this:

You: By the way, I've left a couple of messages on your cell. I'm not sure whether you've gotten them. We need to talk about the invitations before they go out tomorrow.

Other: Oh, sorry. I've been meaning to get back with you. It's just that I've been really busy lately with school and work.

You: That's okay. Could we talk about it now?

Other: How about I call you back in an hour?

You: Sure, no problem.

In this upbeat conversation, both you and the other person accepted one another's bids for identity as thoughtful, responsible friends. As a result, the conversation ran smoothly. Imagine, though, how differently the outcome would be if the other person didn't accept your presenting self:

You: By the way, I've left two messages on your cell. I'm not sure whether you've gotten them …

Other: *(Defensively)* Okay, so I forgot. It's not that big a deal. You're not perfect yourself, you know!

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PAUSE *and* REFLECT

Your Many Identities

MindTap® **REFLECT…** on your many identities by keeping a record, either here or online.

You can get a sense of the many roles you try to create by keeping a record of the situations in which you communicate over a one- or two-day period. For each situation, identify a dramatic title to represent the image you try to create. A few examples might be "party animal," "helpful housekeeper," "wise older sibling," and "sophisticated film critic."

At this point you have the choice of persisting in trying to play the original role of "nice person": "Hey, I'm not mad at you, and I know I'm not perfect!" Or, you might switch to the new role of "unjustly accused person," responding with aggravation, "I never said I was perfect. But we're not talking about me here …"

As this example illustrates, *collaboration* in impression management doesn't mean the same thing as *agreement*. The small issue of the phone message might mushroom into a fight in which you and the other person both adopt the role of combatants. The point here is that virtually all conversations provide an arena in which communicators construct their identities in response to the behavior of others. As you read in Chapter 1, communication isn't made up of discrete events that can be separated from one another. Instead, what happens at one moment is influenced by what each party brings to the interaction and what happened in their relationship up to that point.

Impression Management Can Be Deliberate or Unconscious There's no doubt that sometimes we are highly aware of managing impressions. Most job interviews and first dates are clear examples of deliberate impression management. As noted in Chapter 1, high self-monitoring is usually helpful in these situations. But in other cases, we unconsciously act in ways that are really small public performances.[59] For example, experimental subjects expressed facial disgust in reaction to eating sandwiches laced with a supersaturated saltwater solution only when there was another person present. When they were alone, they made no faces while eating the same sandwiches.[60]

Another study showed that communicators engage in facial mimicry (such as smiling or looking sympathetic in response to another's message) in face-to-face settings only when their expressions can be seen by the other person. When they are speaking over the phone, and their reactions cannot be seen, they do not make the same expressions.[61] Studies like these suggest that most of our behavior is aimed at sending messages to others—in other words, impression management.

The experimental subjects described in the preceding paragraphs didn't consciously think, "Somebody is watching me eat this salty sandwich,

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Self-Assessment

Self-Monitoring Inventory
You can complete this activity by visiting CengageBrain.com to access the Speech Communication MindTap for *Looking Out Looking In*.

so I'll make a face" or "Because I'm in a face-to-face conversation, I'll show I'm sympathetic by mimicking the facial expressions of my conversational partner." Decisions like these are often instantaneous and outside of our conscious awareness. In the same way, many of our choices about how to act in the array of daily interactions aren't highly considered strategic decisions. Rather, they rely on "scripts" that we have developed over time.

Despite the pervasiveness of impression management, it seems like an exaggeration to suggest that *all* behavior is aimed at making impressions. Young children certainly aren't strategic communicators. A baby spontaneously laughs when pleased and cries when sad or uncomfortable without any notion of creating an impression in others. Likewise, there are times when we, as adults, act spontaneously. Despite these exceptions, most people consciously or unconsciously communicate in ways that help construct desired identities for themselves and others.

Why Manage Impressions?

Why bother trying to shape others' opinions of you? Social scientists have identified several overlapping reasons.[62]

To Start and Manage Relationships Think about times when you have consciously and carefully managed your approach when meeting someone you would like to know better. You may do your best to appear charming and witty—or perhaps cool and suave. You don't need to be a phony to act this way; you simply are trying to show your best side. Once relationships are up and running, we still manage impressions—perhaps not as much, but often.

To Gain Compliance of Others We often manage our impressions to get others—both those we know and strangers—to act in ways we want. You might, for example, dress up for a visit to traffic court in the hope that your image (responsible citizen) will convince the judge to treat you sympathetically. You might chat sociably with neighbors you don't find especially interesting so that you can exchange favors or solve problems as they come up.

To Save Others' Face We often modify the way we present ourselves to support the way other people want to be seen. For example, able-bodied people often mask their discomfort upon encountering someone who is disabled by acting nonchalant or stressing similarities between themselves and the disabled person.[63] Young children who haven't learned about the importance of face-saving often embarrass their parents by behaving inappropriately ("Mommy, why is that man so fat?"), but by the time they enter school, behavior that might have been excusable or even amusing just isn't acceptable.

To Explore New Selves Sometimes we try on a new self in the same way we try on a different style of clothing: to see if it changes the way others view us and how we think and feel about ourselves. Toward this end, trying on new

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selves can be a means to self-improvement. For example, one study found that teens—especially lonely ones—who experimented with new identities online wound up reaching out more to people of different ages and cultural backgrounds than they did in their face-to-face lives. As a result, they actually increased their social competence.[64]

Face-to-Face Impression Management

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In face-to-face interaction, communicators can manage their front in three ways: manner, appearance, and setting.[65] *Manner* consists of a communicator's words and nonverbal actions. Physicians, for example, display a wide variety of manners as they conduct physical examinations. Some are friendly and conversational, whereas others adopt a curt and impersonal approach. Much of a communicator's manner comes from what he or she says. A doctor who remembers details about your interests and hobbies is quite different from one who sticks to clinical questions. One who explains a medical procedure creates a different impression than another who reveals little information to the patient.

Along with the content of speech, nonverbal behaviors play a big role in creating impressions.[66] A doctor who greets you with a smile and a handshake comes across differently from one who gives nothing more than a curt nod. Manner varies widely in other professions and settings—professors, salespeople, hair stylists, and so on—and the impressions they create vary accordingly. The same principle holds in personal relationships. Your manner plays a major role in shaping how others view you. Chapters 6 and 7 will describe in detail how your words and nonverbal behaviors create impressions. Because you have to speak and act, the question isn't *whether* your manner sends a message, but rather *what* message it will send.

A second dimension of impression management is *appearance*—the personal items that people use to shape an image. Sometimes appearance is part of creating a professional image. A physician's white lab coat and a police officer's uniform both set the wearers apart as someone special. A tailored suit or a rumpled outfit creates very different impressions in the business world. Off the job, clothing is just as important. We choose clothing that sends a message about ourselves, sometimes trendy and sometimes traditional. Some people dress in ways that accent their sexuality, whereas others hide it. Clothing can say, "I'm an athlete," "I'm wealthy," or "I'm an environmentalist." Along with dress, other aspects of appearance play a strong role in impression management. Do you wear makeup? What is your hairstyle? Do you make an effort to look friendly and confident?

A final way to manage impressions is through the choice of *setting*—physical items that we use to influence how others view us. In modern Western society, the automobile is a major part of impression management. This explains why many people lust after cars that are far more expensive and powerful than they really need. A sporty convertible or fancy imported

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sedan doesn't just get drivers from one place to another; it also makes statements about the kind of people they are. The physical setting we choose and the way we arrange it are another important way to manage impressions. What colors do you choose for the place you live? What artwork? What music do you play? Of course, we choose a setting that we enjoy, but in many cases we create an environment that will present the desired front to others.

Online Impression Management

The preceding examples involve face-to-face interaction, but impression management is just as common and important in other types of communication.

At first glance, the technology of mediated communication seems to limit the potential for impression management. Texting, emailing, and blogging, for example, appear to lack the richness of other channels. They don't convey the tone of your voice, postures, gestures, or facial expressions. However, communication scholars recognize that what is missing in online communication can actually be an *advantage* for communicators who want to manage the impressions they make.[67]

Communicating online generally gives us more control over managing impressions than we have in face-to-face communication. As you read in Chapter 2, asynchronous forms of mediated communication like email, blogs, and web pages allow you to edit your messages until you create just the desired impression.[68] With email (and, to a lesser degree, with text messaging), you can compose difficult messages without forcing the receiver to respond immediately, and ignore others' messages rather than give an unpleasant response. Perhaps most important, when communicating via text-based technology, you generally don't have to worry about stammering or blushing, apparel or appearance, or any other unseen factor that might detract from the impression you want to create. (Photos, video, and streaming may be involved in some mediated communication—but you have choices about those as well.)

Of course, communicating via social media also allows strangers to change their age, history, personality, appearance, and other matters that would be impossible to hide in person.[69] A survey of one online dating site's participants found that 86 percent felt others misrepresented their physical appearance in their posted descriptions.[70] Online daters acknowledge the delicate task of balancing an ideal online identity against the "real" self behind their profile. Many admit they sometimes fudge facts about themselves—using outdated photos or "forgetting" information about their age, for instance. But they are less tolerant when prospective dates post inaccurate identities. For example, one date-seeker expressed resentment upon learning that a purported "hiker" hadn't hiked in years.[71] We'll talk about the ethics of such misrepresentations in the following section.

One study asked undergraduate Facebook users how they believe they come across in their profiles.[72] Most acknowledged that their self-presentations are highly positive—but not *too* positive. In general, they believed their profiles portrayed them as better than reality on certain dimensions (e.g., "funny," "adventurous," "outgoing"), accurately on other dimensions (e.g., "physically attractive," "creative"), and worse than reality on yet other dimensions

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What I Instagrammed versus What Was Really Happening, Or, My Entire Life Is a Lie

I love Instagram. Whether I'm drinking a coffee, heading to the gym, or simply feeling in the mood for the occasional (okay, a little more than occasional) selfie, I love posting photos and interacting with other users.

Instagram, like all social media, is about presenting the ideal version of yourself. It's not *not* yourself per se.... It's more like, all the best parts of you displayed to the world and ignoring all the worst parts. So I, like most people, post the things that are going to reflect the best aspects of my life and personality.

Anyway, as a sort of confession: here is what I'm really doing in all those Instagrams versus what I presented to the world. Prepare to be shocked.

The Ultimate Selfie

Olivia muenter

What It Looks Like I'm Doing...

I just got back from vacation and thought I'd share my new, totally natural glow with all of you. I AM SO HAPPY BECAUSE MY LIFE IS TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY PERFECT. I took this photo one time. One time. This is how I look all the time. All. The. Time.

What I'm Actually Doing/ Thinking...

Do you want to know how many pictures I shot before I actually captured a photo that both accurately (and attractively) displayed how happy I was in this moment? 56. I hope you're judging me, because I am. Also, the entire epidermis of my forehead is peeling off in this photo because I didn't use sunscreen one day by the pool. Ah, cropping.

The Farmers Market Shot

Olivia muenter

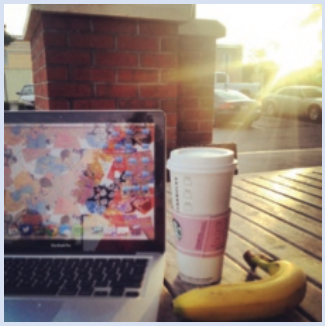
What It Looks Like I'm Doing...

AH, PRODUCE! So bright. So fresh. So healthy. Perhaps I will throw some blueberries and spinach in my high-speed blender and create some juice to take to the office today. I only buy locally. And if you don't, I am judging you.

What I'm Actually Doing/ Thinking...

I wonder how long that fruit has been sitting there. I'm going to buy a blueberry muffin the size of my head instead.

The "I Am Productive" Shot



Olivia muenter

What It Looks Like I'm Doing...

What? You're not a morning person. How unfortunate. I start my day with green tea and fresh fruit every day, at the crack of dawn. I like to check my emails as the sun rises, right before I head to yoga.

What I'm Actually Doing/ Thinking...

I had to wake up at 7 A.M. because I had three assignments that I had quite literally left until the day that they were due. I have no recollection of whether I passed any of those assignments, but my memory is leaning toward no. P.S.: I hate mornings.

Olivia Muenter

MindTap® **ENHANCE...** your understanding by answering the following questions, either here or online.

1. In what ways do you present yourself differently online than you do in person?
2. Have you ever carefully managed social media posts to portray yourself in a particular way, similar to what Olivia Muenter describes here?
3. Are there ethical boundaries that shouldn't be crossed when engaging in online impression management?

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On the JOB

Managing Your Professional Identity

According to the *New York Times*, 70 percent of U.S. recruiters have rejected job candidates because of personal information online.[a] It's not hard to imagine how a careless image or post could scuttle your chances with a prospective employer.

To see how your online identity might help or harm your job prospects, start by plugging your name into one or more search engines. If the results might work against you, consider changing privacy settings on your profiles, customizing who can see certain updates and deleting unwanted information about yourself.[b]

Along with discovering unflattering information, you might be surprised to find that another person with the same name and an embarrassing profile pops up. To minimize the chances of mistaken identity, consider distinguishing your professional self by including your middle name or middle initial on your résumé and all other information you post where online seekers might find it.

If you find potentially damaging information about yourself online and you can't remove it, consider seeking professional help to set the record straight. Services like www.reputation.com will monitor your online identity and take steps to protect your privacy and have damaging information removed.

Once you're on the job, recognize that your mediated messages are a powerful way to create and maintain your identity. Typos, brusque tone, and potentially offensive humor can be career-killers.[c]

("intelligent," "polite," "reliable"). It appears that the participants realized—perhaps intuitively—that their Facebook sites are an exercise in impression management.

Blogs, personal web pages, and profiles on social networking sites all provide opportunities for communicators to construct an identity.[73] Even the simple choice of a screen name ("lovemyporsche," "fun2bewith," "footballdude") says something about you and is likely to lead others to create impressions of you.[74] And interestingly, research shows that regularly viewing your own Facebook page can enhance your self-esteem.[75] This makes sense: Assuming you're carefully managing impressions on that site, it can be an ego-booster to remind yourself what you look like "at your best."

Impression Management and Honesty

After reading this far, you might think that impression management sounds like an academic label for manipulation or phoniness. There certainly are situations where impression management is dishonest. A manipulative date who pretends to be affectionate in order to gain sexual favors is clearly unethical and deceitful. So are job applicants who lie about academic records to get hired or salespeople who pretend to be dedicated to customer service when their real goal is to make a quick buck.

But managing impressions doesn't necessarily make you a liar. In fact, it is almost impossible to imagine how we could communicate effectively without making decisions about which front to present in one situation or another. It would be ludicrous to act the same way with strangers as you do with close

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friends, and nobody would show the same face to a two-year-old as he or she would to an adult.

Each of us has a repertoire of faces—a cast of characters—and part of being a competent communicator is choosing the best face for the situation. Consider a few examples:

- You offer to teach a friend a new skill: playing the guitar, operating a computer program, or sharpening up a tennis backhand. Your friend is making slow progress with the skill, and you find yourself growing impatient.
- You've been exchanging texts for several weeks with someone you met online, and the relationship is starting to turn romantic. You have a physical trait you haven't mentioned.
- At work you face a belligerent customer. You don't believe anyone has the right to treat you this way.
- A friend or family member makes a joke about your appearance that hurts your feelings. You aren't sure whether to make an issue of the joke or to pretend that it doesn't bother you.

In each of these situations—and in countless others every day—you have a choice about how to act. It is an oversimplification to say that there is only one honest way to behave in each circumstance and that every other response would be insincere and dishonest. Instead, impression management involves deciding which face—which part of yourself—to reveal. For example, when teaching a new skill, you choose to display the "patient" instead of the "impatient" side of yourself. In the same way, at work you have the option of acting defensive or nondefensive in difficult situations. With strangers, friends, or family you can choose whether to disclose your feelings. Which face to show to others is an important decision, but in any case you are sharing a real part of yourself. You may not be revealing everything, but as you will learn in the following section, complete self-disclosure is rarely appropriate.

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN RELATIONSHIPS

One way by which we judge the strength of our relationships is the amount of information we share with others. "We don't have any secrets," some people proudly claim. Opening up certainly is important. As you read in Chapter 1, disclosure is an ingredient in qualitatively interpersonal relationships. Given the obvious importance of self-disclosure, we need to look closer at the subject. Just what is it? When is it desirable? How can it best be done?

The best place to begin is with a definition. **Self-disclosure** is the process of deliberately revealing information about oneself that is significant and would not normally be known by others. Let's look closer at this definition. Self-disclosure must be *deliberate*. If you accidentally mention to a friend

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