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The Basics of
Communication

A Relational Perspective

Steve Duck ■ David T. McMahan

SAGE

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Communication
A Relational Perspective

Written in a warm and lively style and packed with learning tools, **The Basics of Communication: A Relational Perspective** offers an engaging look at the inseparable connection between relationships and communication, highlighting the roles that interpersonal connections play in casual discussions as well as in public speaking. This groundbreaking text combines theory and application to introduce students to fundamental communication concepts. It also provides practical instruction on communicating interpersonally and in small groups and on making effective formal presentations. Authors Steve Duck and David T. McMahan encourage students to think critically about key topics, to link communication theory to their own experiences, and to improve their communication skills in the process.

Throughout, **The Basics of Communication**

- emphasizes communication theory and research that directly affects students' everyday lives;
- encourages development beyond personal views of communication concepts, ethics, and media; and
- examines how relationships are shaped by the communication tools and strategies that are used, whether through social networking sites or in interpersonal relationships.

Key Features

- Stresses the interaction and influence of the vital intersections between communication and relational contexts
- Offers a refreshing and original approach that engages students with lively, topical examples to challenge them and to invigorate classroom discussion
- Provides up-to-date insight into communication topics (such as identity, group communication, and public speaking) in a way that easily fits within a traditional course outline
- Integrates carefully chosen and purposefully positioned original pedagogical tools, designed to motivate students to become more active observers and to learn how they can easily and effectively apply topics in their own relationships
- Presents *Listen in on Your Own Life*, *Make Your Case*, and *Strategic Communication* boxes in each chapter and photos that are captioned with questions for the student to answer
- Devotes two chapters to the use of media and relational technology (such as cell phones, iPods, BlackBerrys, MySpace, and Facebook) in daily communication

Ancillaries

An **Instructor's Resource CD-ROM** that features PowerPoint slides, a computerized test bank, suggestions for course projects and activities, Internet resources, and more. (Contact Customer Care at 1-800-818-7243 to request a copy.) The robust online **Student Study Site (www.sagepub.com/bocstudy)** includes e-flashcards, video and audio clips, SAGE journal articles, links to a Facebook page for the text, and other interactive resources.

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Supplemental Materials Available

Instructor's Resources CD-ROM

- PowerPoint slides for each chapter for use during class lectures
- A test bank including multiple-choice, true/false, and short-answer/essay questions
- Chapter summaries, outlines, and objectives
- Suggested course projects, classroom activities, and discussion questions, including exercises that incorporate the Internet and other media
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Brief Contents

About the Authors

Steve Duck taught at two universities in the United Kingdom before taking up the Daniel and Amy Starch Distinguished Research Professorship in the communication studies department at the University of Iowa in 1986, where he is also an adjunct professor of psychology. He has taught several interpersonal communication courses, mostly on interpersonal communication and relationships but also on nonverbal communication, communication in everyday life, construction of identity, and communication theory. Always by training an interdisciplinary thinker, Steve has focused on the development and decline of relationships from many different perspectives, although he has also done research on the dynamics of television production techniques and persuasive messages in health contexts. Steve has written or edited 50 books on relationships and other matters and was the founder and, for the first 15 years, the editor of the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. His 1994 book *Meaningful Relationships: Talking, Sense, and Relating* won the G. R. Miller Book Award from the Interpersonal Communication Division of the National Communication Association. Steve cofounded the series of International Conferences on Personal Relationships that began in 1982. He won the University of Iowa's first Outstanding Mentor Award in 2001 and the National Communication Association's Robert J. Kibler Memorial Award in 2004 for "dedication to excellence, commitment to the profession, concern for others, vision of what could be, acceptance of diversity, and forthrightness." He wishes he could play the piano.

David T. McMahan graduated from Vincennes University with an AS degree. He received BS and MA degrees from Indiana State University and received his PhD from the University of Iowa. The courses he has taught span the discipline of communication, including multiple courses in interpersonal communication, media, communication education, theory, and criticism. David's research interests also engage multiple areas of the discipline with much of his research devoted to bridging the study of relationships and media. This work includes examining the discussion of media and the incorporation of catchphrases and media references in everyday communication. A great deal of research has been derived from his

experiences in the classroom and his commitment to education. His early work in this area focused on communication competence, self-conception, and assessment. His focus has since shifted toward topics that include both media and relationships, such as contradictions within advisor-advisee relationships and discussions of media in the classroom. His published work has appeared in such journals as *Review of Communication, Communication Education,* and *Communication Quarterly,* as well as edited volumes. A member of the National Communication Association, Central States Communication Association, Eastern Communication Association, Iowa Communication Association, and Speech Communication Association of Puerto Rico, David has served numerous roles within these organizations. In addition, he has received multiple awards for his work in the classroom and has also been the recipient of a number of public service and academic distinctions. He hopes to someday become a cattle baron.

Introduction

If you think there is anything important in your life that does not involve communication, leaf idly through this book and see if it makes you challenge your first thought. It will take only a couple of minutes, and then you can put the book back on the shelf. However, we do not think that you will be able to come up with very many activities in life that are not improved by communication and would not be made better by your ability to understand communication more thoroughly. We wrote this book partly because we believe that every student needs to know something about communication and how to improve life through understanding it, whether you are headed off to become a dental hygienist, a researcher, a preacher, a businessperson, a nurse, a physician, a member of a sales force, a parent, or just somebody's good friend.

We are passionate about the study of communication because it has so many obvious uses and influences in everyday life, and we believe very strongly that you too can benefit from knowing more about how communication works. We have never met a student who did *not* want to understand more about his or her everyday life and, in particular, about his or her relationships. We have tried to bind together these interests by writing this book, which answers questions about how communication and relationships hang together and connect with other parts of life, such as listening, culture, gender, media, giving presentations, or merely being you.

The publishers, and probably your instructors, officially call this "a *basic* text-book," and that means something special in the publishing and education world. Basic communication textbooks have a particular job to do: They must give a basic introduction to concepts and introduce some theoretical or practical ideas that help you apply the research and theory. A few of these books deal with issues like interpersonal communication and media/technology, and a few others try to obtain real contact with students' lives. The present book is a "hybrid," which means it not only introduces these basic concepts but also serves to instruct you on giving speeches. The book includes sections on (a) identity construction, (b) interpersonal communication, (c) group communication, (d) culture and society, (e) technology, (f) media, and (g) public speaking. We cover all of this with a particular theme in mind—the way you carry out your everyday life through your relationships with other people—and how the above are relevant to our theme.

The phrase *relationships with other people* draws your attention not only to how your relationships work and can be improved but also to how they affect you during the course of other activities that happen in your life. Your relationship with someone affects your ability to persuade that person to take your health advice, for example, or the media that you use can become topics of discussion between acquaintances. Cell phones and the Internet are forms of communication that have become relational tools in everyday life, especially if you are in long-distance relationships. So, in this book, we deal not just with the creation of relationships but with the way relationships flow into many other daily experiences as effects not only on those experiences themselves but also on everyday life communication.

We sincerely believe that your daily life as a student, friend, romantic partner, colleague, and family member along with all other aspects can be improved through the principles of communication theory. One of our purposes is to help you understand your daily life by making you more aware of how everyday life works through communication. We believe that all students desire to see, recognize, and understand their many instances of daily contact with communication research and theory. Another purpose is to develop your studies by encouraging more eager and independent thinking about research into such topics as conflict, relationship development, gender, culture, technology, and business and professional speaking.

Some of you will be taking the basic course as your only exposure to communication studies, so we have put in plenty of material that demonstrates the applications of what we are talking about, for example in developing listening skills, using technology, understanding nonverbal communication, creating persuasive strategies, or managing group conflict. In this way we hope to make the book relevant to business majors, to those in training for the health professions, and to many other students who have an interest in communication studies merely as a sideline or as a minor part of their degree studies. Others of you will be taking this course with plans to major in communication studies, in which case this book will provide you with a strong foundation for your future study and exploration of the discipline.

Whatever your purpose in reading this book, and whatever your ultimate goal in life, we hope that it will enrich your experience, sharpen your abilities to observe and analyze communication activity, and make your life a little bit more interesting because you can understand the processes going on around you. So take us up on our challenge once again and thumb through the contents and look at a few of the pictures to see if you now "get" what we think is important about communication and why you need to learn about it.

How This Book Is Structured to Help Your Learning

Because we are convinced of the importance of the topic and because we are passionate about helping people learn about it, we have used some special features

designed to make it particularly interesting and relevant to you. First of all, the tone of this book is somewhat different from other textbooks you may have come across. We have deliberately adopted an informal and conversational tone in our writing, and we even throw in a few jokes. We are not attempting to be hip or cool: Trust us; we are far from either, so much so that we are not even sure if the words *hip* and *cool* are used anymore. Instead, we use a conversational voice because we believe that it makes this book more engaging to read. Plus, we genuinely like and have a good time talking about this material, so we want to share our enthusiasm in a way that we hope is infectious. We have become used to seeing the significance of communication as if it speaks for itself, but we realize that not everybody else takes that view. Because we are also deeply committed to the importance of studying communication, we want to discuss it all in such a way that is clear, understandable, and applicable to your life. We hope that this will make it as exciting to you as it is to us.

Another feature of this book is not what it includes but what it excludes. We did not want to fill the pages with countless boxes, illustrative cartoons, and graphics that might be amusing but do not always help you learn. Our experience has taught us that they offer little value and are often skipped by students and instructors alike. Instead, in this book, you will come across featured boxes, margin notes, pictures, and other instructional tools that have been selectively chosen to challenge you. Every single one of them is here with the purpose of improving your understanding of communication. Everything that appears in this book—even every picture—does so for a reason, and that reason centers on increasing your understanding, your application, and even your enjoyment of the material. For example, the pictures do not have standard captions, but every one asks a question that you must answer for yourself, although we provide possible answers at the end of each chapter. The pictures are here not just to make the book look pretty but because they serve a purpose of teaching you something and making you think for yourself.

Instead of beginning each chapter with focus questions before you know what the chapter is about, our **Focus Questions** follow an opening narrative for each chapter. They are so positioned because we want to ensure that you read them after you have seen the basic problem with which the chapter deals. We personally skipped them when we were in school: They appeared at the very beginning of the chapter, and we did not yet know what they were about. We strongly encourage you to read them. Because they come after the narrative that sets up the questions in each chapter, they will guide you through the chapter and provide you with insight as to what you should focus on as you read. Because they are important, we will also revisit and answer them at the end of each chapter so that you can see if your answers match ours. In fact, we do this instead of summarizing the chapter in the conventional way. The end of every chapter is therefore directly connected to the beginning.

Although we wanted to limit the number appearing in each chapter, boxes can have a great deal of value for your learning. Each chapter includes the following three types of boxes: (a) Make Your Case, (b) Strategic Communication, and

(c) Listen In On Your Own Life. **Make Your Case** boxes provide you with opportunities to develop your own positions or to perform an exercise about the material that might be used during class discussion. In the language chapter, for example, you are asked to find out the secret languages that you and your friends speak without realizing it. **Strategic Communication** boxes help you integrate the material into your life when influencing others. For instance, the technology chapter asks you to consider how the purpose of a message and the technological preferences of the person you are contacting will determine the appropriateness of face-to-face, telephone, or computer-mediated interaction. **Listen In On Your Own Life** boxes ask you to consider the material in relation to your own life and lived experiences. We want you start recognizing communication in your life and how the material discussed applies. For example, the listening chapter asks you to consider friends, family, classmates, or coworkers you would label as *good* and *bad* listeners. You are then asked to analyze what behaviors led to these evaluations and to determine measures to enhance the listening skills of others. These exercises, therefore, will also serve to further your understanding and comprehension of the material.

Two additional features are included within each chapter: margin notes and pictures. **Margin notes** provide additional information about the material or open-ended questions to ponder as you study it. Accordingly, some margin notes provide unique information, such as when the first "smiley face" emoticon was sent, who invented the Internet, or what percentage of people believe that they are shy enough to need treatment. Other margin notes urge you to reflect on the material by posing questions, such as whether or not families would be considered "groups," or explaining the technique that President Ronald Reagan used in order to make his speeches more appealing. **Pictures** are nothing new to textbooks, but in this book they serve as instructional tools rather than mere illustrative distractions. Each picture caption is stated in the form of a question that corresponds with material being discussed. You will be asked to examine the picture and answer the accompanying question(s) based on your understanding of the material in the chapter. These are not open-ended questions; rather, each one has a specific answer (given at the end of each chapter after you have had a chance to think about the answers for yourself first).

We mentioned above that the focus questions would come up again. Each chapter ends by **revisiting the Focus Questions** as a way of summarizing chapter material using structure rather than as a simple (and usually ignored) chapter summary. You cannot get by with just reading this section of the chapter, but it will help you check that you picked up on the key points being discussed.

The very end of each chapter includes features to further enhance your mastery and comprehension of the material. Once again, we thought very carefully about what to include here. We did not want questions that asked you to merely memorize and repeat what you just read but rather to *think* about it outside of class as you carry out the rest of your life. We wanted to include features that ask you to go beyond each chapter's contents and engage in higher levels of thinking. Accordingly, each chapter also includes the following features: (a) Ethical Issues, (b) Media Links, and (c) Questions to Ask Your Friends. **Ethical Issues** urge you to contemplate and

develop a position regarding ethical quandaries that arise in communication. For example, the technology chapter asks you to consider whether employers should use material on social networking sites, such as MySpace, when making hiring decisions, and the relationships chapter asks if it is ever ethical to have two romantic relationships going on at the same time and why (or why not). **Media Links** ask you to draw from media in order to further explore the issues discussed in each chapter. You are asked to watch a TV newscast and discover ways in which the newscasters establish a relationship with the audience, for example, and to read a newspaper article looking for examples of logical fallacies discussed in the chapter. The relationships chapter invites you to examine the Sunday newspaper section of marriages, engagements, and commitment ceremonies for similarities in attractiveness. Believe it or not, romantic partners often look alike! Finally, **Questions to Ask Your Friends** provide you with questions to ask your friends in order to further increase your awareness of the material and integrate it into your life. In the culture and society chapter, for example, you are urged to ask your friends about favorite children's stories and connect themes to cultural ideals. It may initially seem strange to drag your friends into your own learning, but in fact, just as in everyday life itself, you will learn from them, and you will be teaching them a thing or two as well. Plus, this activity will help underscore the significance of relationships in your life. As with the boxes, we are serious about having you try out these instructional tools to improve your study of the material.

Indeed, our writing style has been chosen to invite students—you and others you know—into the conversation about the issues we present as basics of communication. As part of that, we are trying to stretch your capacities to think about a problem and work through it with us, leaving you with a greater sense of having mastered the material by thinking through it for yourself, under guidance. Because we want to increase the discussion of communication generally, we continually mention everyday issues so that you can talk about them with your friends and become more helpful to *them* too. You should be able to reflect on your friends' and your own lives from time to time and apply to them what you have been reading about here. "You know, funny you should say that because I've just been reading about that exact same thing, and what the book said was …"

So, overall, we see the advantages of this book as fourfold:

1. It presents a passionate view of communication based on the theme of relational and everyday experience.

2. It has strong teaching features applied to your own personal experiences.

3. It includes chapters on identity, culture/society, technology, and media that are becoming more important in people's lives right now but do not appear in older textbooks.

4. We believe it offers a more interesting approach to existing topics by bringing your own life under the microscope.

See if you agree.

Final Thoughts

As we get ready to set out on our exploration of communication, we urge you to consider the many ways in which communication influences and is influenced by relationships and everyday life. This book will help you begin to recognize the significance of communication and to understand its tremendous impact in your life. However, it is our hope that you will go beyond what we offer by carefully examining what has been written and incorporating your own thoughts and experiences into the conversation. The study of communication can elicit a lifetime of learning, exploration, and enjoyment. We appreciate you joining us on this journey, and we hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we enjoyed writing it for you.

—Steve Duck and David T. McMahan

Self and Identity

We don't know you and you don't know us, but from reading this book, you probably have some impressions of us. You know who *you* are, though, don't you? Not just name and address but the kind of person you are. You have an identity, and we don't just mean an ID that you show people to prove your age. You are an individual, and you are friends with other individuals, each perhaps quirky in his or her own way and with a unique personality and identity. You might see these individuals and yourself as persons deep inside, with a history, a childhood set of experiences that made you who you are. You know things about yourself that no one else knows. You are you, you-nique!

This chapter will teach you that you have multiple layers to your identity—not just in the obvious way that some of your own private thoughts are secret, some are revealed in intimate moments of talk, and some are performed as roles ("I'm your classmate/sister/boss"). We will look at these but also show how layers of identity come out through communication in relationships. Some are brought forth and created by the situation in which you find yourself or in the company of certain people but not others. (Do you really behave the same way with your mother as you do with your best friend?) Some others are the result of cultural symbols attached to "being gay or lesbian" or "being a go-getter or a team player," and some are performed for an audience. In intimate relationships, you can perform and express most of your true self; in a police interview, you may want to conceal some of what you are; in a hospice at the end of your life, you may want to hang onto a little *dignity* as the skills, performances, and parts of your body and self that used to compose your identity have ceased to work so well, and you are now physically more dependent on others.

Identity in all of these forms is partly a characteristic (something that you possess), partly a performance (something that you do), and partly a construction of society. For example, society tells you how to be "masculine" and "feminine" and

indicates that "guys can't say that to guys" (Burleson et al., 2005), thus restricting the way in which men can give one another emotional support. Society also provides you with the categories for describing a personality, and the media cause you to focus on some traits more than others. Categories like gluttonous, sexy, short, slim, paranoid, and kind are all available to you, but they are not all equally valued.

Thus, the ways you express yourself in talk or nonverbal communication and the way you respond to other people in your social context *transact* part of your identity, so your identity is partly constructed through your interactions with other people. Have you had the experience of being with someone who makes you nervous when you normally aren't nervous or who helps you feel comfortable and relaxed when you feel tense? In these instances, your identity is molded and transacted by the person, situation, or communication—all features that we will explore. You'll get used to a rather odd phrase that is used in communication studies: "*doing* an identity," which is sometimes used instead of "*having* an identity," because communication scholars now pay close attention to the ways in which people's behavior carries out, enacts, transacts, or *does* an identity in talk with other people.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- Is a person's identity like an onion, built layer by layer and communicated slowly as intimacy increases?
- How do daily interactions with other people form or sustain your identity?
- How much of your "self" is a performance of social roles where you have to act out "who I am" for other people?
- What is meant by a symbolic self, and why do we have to account to other people for who we are?
- What is the role of culture in your identity experiences?

Who Are You?

Consider this example. A young man kissed his grandmother on the cheek as he left home one evening to join his friends waiting in a car. As he took his place in the front seat, he waved goodbye and promised not to stay out too late. The car made its way up the block; he and his friends laughed as they recounted one friend's recent date with a girl from the neighborhood. The laughter stopped suddenly when they noticed a younger boy standing on the corner. This boy, a member of a rival gang, hoped to gain a higher rank by hanging out in enemy territory. The young man in the passenger seat glared at the boy, pulled out a gun from underneath the seat, and began shooting. One bullet struck the boy in the chest, killing him instantly. Another

bullet hit a nearby elderly woman walking home from the store. The car sped off as she fell to the ground. His friends in the car congratulated him on defending the block and then casually returned to their conversation. When the young man returned home later that evening, he kissed his grandmother on the cheek, checked Facebook, went into his room, and then drifted peacefully to sleep.

How could he have done that? How can anyone do something so vile as to shoot two people in cold blood? Your first thought is to blame his personality: He was an evil person, perhaps with psychopathic tendencies. Or you could put it down to the identity that had been constructed during his initiation into the gang when he was trained to accept the importance of defending gang territory. On the other hand, he probably saw himself in personality terms too, but more favorable ones—as a good grandson, a loyal person, devoted to his gang, and someone unafraid of doing what is necessary. He may have felt a twinge of guilt when the elderly woman got hit, or he may have shrugged and thought, "Well, that stuff happens in [gang] wars." Worse atrocities happened in the Holocaust, in Bosnia, and in Iraq. Hannah Arendt (1963) pointed out how banal and routine such atrocities become in wars. The routines of gang membership, war, or bureaucracy make it all too easy to come to see real human beings (other gang members, Serbs, Jews, Shias, Sunnis, American soldiers) as *just* targets, numbers, insurgents, subjects, or prisoners. They become anonymous elements of the daily routine, part of the job that needs to be done, dehumanized "others" who just need to be counted, sorted, and cleaned away. The people lose their personal identity, but so too in a strange way does the perpetrator (who becomes "just" a gang member, prison guard, or rifle sharpshooter).

What Arendt missed in her analysis of such perpetrators, however, is the importance of their daily *communicative* relationships with other people who act and think in the same way about these "others." Comrades implicitly accept the way that "others" are treated and reinforce the identity of gang member, guard, or assassin as "OK." Arendt saw the problem as getting so used to cruel acts because they happened all the time and became just part of doing the job. Communication scholars can look deeper and see that all ongoing relationships between people are what make it easier to carry out bad deeds or to perform an identity that we would regard as unacceptable from another vantage point.

Of course, *you* (or your friends) have never done anything that dehumanizes, stereotypes, or depersonalizes others, have you? You have never called anyone "a cheese-eating surrender monkey" or taken away a person's uniqueness by calling him or her "an illegal" or "a frat boy" or lumped someone together with all other "college kids" or chanted, "Oh, how I hate Ohio State."

Earlier chapters talked about frames for situations and thinking. Shotter (1984) sees identity as a frame for interpreting other people's actions, and Burke (1962) also saw motives and personality language as nothing more than helpful frames for interpretation (see Chapter 2). In short, your identity is going to be revealed in a language that reflects the priorities of a particular culture or relationship and

On October 26, 2007, a keen soccer fan was sent to jail in the United Kingdom for killing a father of two by stabbing him 29 times after the man had joked that he hoped the killer's favorite team (England) would lose a soccer game against Brazil ("Football," 2007).

LISTEN IN ON YOUR OWN LIFE

How would you describe yourself? National identity? Ethnic identity? Gender identity? Sexual identity? Age identity? Social class identity? Religious identity? What else?

Now check the categories that you can use to personalize your profile on Facebook or MySpace. Are they the categories you would use to describe yourself to a child, an employer, or a new neighbor? People actually are encouraged—perhaps even required—to identify themselves in particular categories and items, such as favorite videos and music, hobbies, and sexual orientation. How would you feel if your instructor composed a slideshow of all the Facebook profiles of the people in your class and showed it to everyone?

Finally, a deeper question: How do the categories that you are offered relate to products sold by the larger companies that own these sites, such as music, DVDs, MP3s, and movies?

its frames for thinking about how humans should act and describe themselves. The first point to recognize, then, is that human beings talk about their identities in ways that are steered by social norms and conventions in their society and that they expect other people to present such narratives and behaviors. Your culture also frames identity as a sense of a stable inner self; it therefore feels quite normal for you to think in those terms, and you can easily understand the idea that someone could let you know about his or her private self by revealing its layers. However, you would be thought crazy if you said, "My identity is blue with an elephant spirit inside." You'd soon be locked up. You have to use terms and phrases that your audiences recognize as symbolically meaningful in the culture: "I'm a go-getter but quite private, ambitious yet introverted." In other words, you *frame* your talk about yourself and your identity in the language that your culture has taught you to use.

Although we will start with the common-sense idea that you have a true inner self, by the end of the chapter we will show that communication studies can teach you much more about how personal identity is built by relationships with other people. The chapter should make you think about ways in which identity is connected to language; to other people; to the norms, rules, and categories in society/culture; and to narratives of origin and belonging to other relationships. This identity may be represented by such statements as "I'm an African American" or, on a bumper sticker, "Proud parent of an Honor Roll student at City High." Both of these examples make statements of identity yet are claiming it through relationships with other people or membership in groups. Of course, the gang member may not have thought about any of this when he pulled the trigger, but after reading this chapter you might see his actions in some new ways.

Identity as Inner Core: The Self-Concept

You usually think about persons as having some true inner core self that stays the same and makes them who they are—a personal, private, and essential core, covered with layers of secrecy, privacy, and convention. This is known as a **self-concept** and is the point of view from which you talk about people *having* an identity. Consequently, you are alarmed by people who have multiple personalities or are bipolar because you believe that someone should have only one consistent personality and that people who have more parts are disturbed or psychologically irrational. Your personality or identity may be hard for other people to reach, but according to many self-help books and celebrity biographies it is reachable. Communication serves merely to help people *talk about* or *express* what is inside, perhaps doing so in greater depth as you get to know one another better. Communication scholars can teach you the skill of expressing yourself well or helping you be open and honest and let the real you be heard.

Photo 5.1 ■ *How do daily interactions with other people form or sustain your identity? What is being communicated here about gender, identity, and culture? (See page 27.)*

You recognize the usefulness of this idea of self-concept and represent it normally as a consistent inner self made up of the person's broad habits of thought (e.g., someone is kind, outward-looking, introverted, or self-centered). You might see that self revealed communicatively in styles of behavior (e.g., someone is aggressive, calm, ambitious, reliable, hard-working, or manipulative) or in characteristic styles of perception (e.g., someone is paranoid, trusting, insightful, or obstinate). *Personality* is the label that you would first use to describe someone's *identity* if you were asked about it casually in a conversation by someone who wanted to know what that person was like.

All the same, it's a very odd idea indeed, given the fact that people are so complex. A person can simultaneously be many identities depending on your focus. For example, a person can simultaneously be a loving parent, a loyal friend, a vegetarian, a conservative, quick-tempered, a good dancer, a bad cook, business savvy, and a team player. Furthermore, you have a choice in the type of identity that you describe,

and you can focus on a relational identity (friend/parent), an interactional identity (worker/customer/server), a sex or gender identity (male/female/masculine/feminine/GLBT), a racial/ethnic identity (the boxes to check on government forms), or a behavioral identity (extrovert/introvert). You have a choice, then, about where to begin your description of your identity.

Actually, you already know another key point about identity from your everyday experience. People not only are multilayered but also can have different moods and be good company on one day and bad on another. You also recognize that people can fluctuate during the course of the day and that events may happen to them that cause them to act "out of character." These fluctuations help demonstrate that it's a peculiar idea that somebody could have a *fixed* inner identity if it can also be so variable and complex over time. The best you can hope for, then, is that the more you get to know someone through talk, the more you can understand the person's usual self and the events or people that trigger it to spin off into different styles and forms. You need all the help you can get for such a task, so, right or wrong, you tend to view it as an especially valuable form of information when other people give you inside scoop about their identity or self-concept, as if they were peeling away layers. Indeed, psychologists Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973) used the analogy of peeling an onion to describe the way we get to learn about other people's identities.

The upshot, though (and we are sorry to spoil it for you), is that all the magazine articles that offer to tell you about "the real [Brad Pitt/Beyoncé/Jennifer Lopez/Hillary Rodham Clinton/Adolf Hitler]" are always going to be nonsense. The notion that someone has a real single inner core is suspect for communication scholars from the get-go. Also, if identities could not be changed or reviewed, there would be no therapists or communication textbooks with advice on how to develop your communication and presentation skills.

The Johari window, developed in 1955 by two guys called Joe (Luft) and Harry (Ingham)—and we're not kidding—distinguishes between the things that a person knows about self and the things that others know about the person. As you can see in Figure 5.1, people have blind spots—that is, everyone but the person in question can see a particular thing about him or her (for example, that he or she is "a pain")—and there are cases where we pretend (façade), concealing from people something that we know about ourselves (guilty secrets and so forth). The arena is basically where we openly act out a public identity that everyone else knows and recognizes.

Describing a Self

If you ask people to tell you who they are, they will tell you their name and start unfolding their self-concept, usually with a narrative that places their self in various contexts. "Steve Duck" indicates to someone in your culture that the person is male and has had to put up with many entirely predictable and very unoriginal jokes. Although he has lived in the United States of America for more than 20 years, he is a Brit, and his family comes from Whitby in North Yorkshire, England, where the
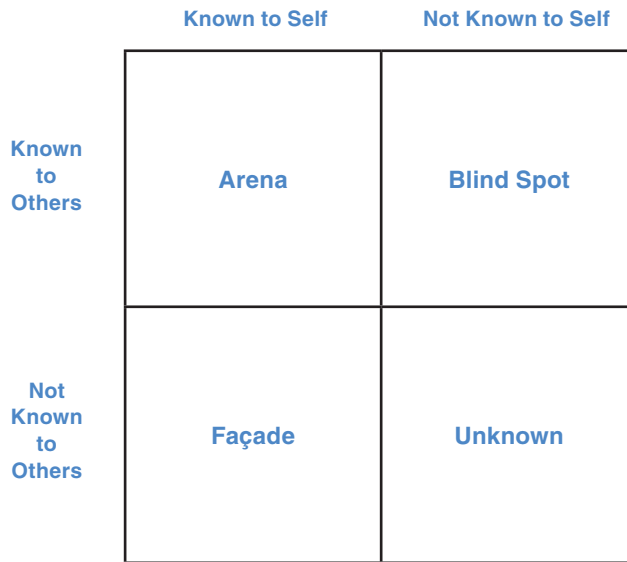
	Known to Self	Not Known to Self
Known to Others	Arena	Blind Spot
Not Known to Others	Façade	Unknown

Figure 5.1 ▪ *The Johari Window*

Source: From "The Johari Window, A Graphic Model of Interpersonal Awareness," by J. Luft and H. Ingham, 1955, proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development, Los Angeles: UCLA. Reprinted with permission.

first recorded Duck (John Duck) lived in 1288. John Duck and Steve Duck evidently share the same skeptical attitude toward authority figures, since John is in the historical record because he sued the Abbot of Whitby over ownership of a piece of land. John was descended from the Vikings who sacked and then colonized Whitby in about 800 AD, and we know this because "Duck" is a Viking nickname-based surname for a hunchback. (Have you ever ducked out of the way of anything? If so, you have crouched like a hunchback.)

Steve Duck is also relatively short for a man, is baldheaded but bearded, likes watching people but is quite shy, and can read Latin, which is how he found out about John Duck while researching his family tree. Steve likes the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams, enjoys doing cryptic crosswords, knows about half the words that Shakespeare knew, and has occasionally lied. He resents his mother's controlling behavior, was an Oxford college rowing coxswain, loves reading history (especially Roman history), and is wheat/gluten intolerant. He thinks he is a good driver; is proud of his dad, who was a Quaker pacifist (that antiauthority thing again); and has lived in Iowa for 23 years. He has had two marriages and four children, carries a Swiss Army knife (and as many other gadgets as will fit onto one leather belt), and always wears two watches.

Notice that some of this information about his identity is *self-description.* That is, these words describe him in much the same way that anyone else could without knowing him personally (for example, short, bald, two watches). Self-description usually involves information about self that is obvious in *public* (or on your résumé). If you wear your college T-shirt, talk with a French accent, or are short, this evidence about you is available even to strangers who can see your physical appearance or hear how you sound. "Identity" in this sense, then, is communicated publicly by verbal and nonverbal means, including skin color and physique, and it parks the individual in categories or national, racial, or ethnic groups or else lumps them in stereotypes. It isn't really an individual identity but more a group membership.

Self-Disclosure

Some points in Steve's description of himself count as **self-disclosure**—that is, the revelation of personal information that other people could not know unless Steve *made* it known. In the above example, these are the points that describe particular feelings and emotions that other people would not know unless Steve specifically disclosed them. The "resents," "is proud of," "enjoys," and "thinks he is a good driver" parts give you a view of his identity that you could not directly obtain any other way, though you might work them out from what Steve says or does. These parts, since they are openly stated as insights into his thinking, would count as self-disclosure rather than as self-description. The term *self-disclosure,* then, is specifically limited to revelation of private, sensitive, and confidential information that is relevant to identity, such as your values, fears, secrets, assessments, evaluations, and preferences, usually revealed to one or two other persons at a time.

Jourard (1964, 1971) wrote about self-disclosure as making your identity "transparent" to others. He felt that people who made the most disclosures were acting in the most psychologically healthy manner. Early research connected self-disclosure not only with healthy psychology but also with growth in intimacy. Indeed, classic reports (e.g., Derlega et al., 1993) found that the more people become intimate, the more they disclose to each other information about themselves that is both broad and deep. Also, the more you get to know someone's inner knowledge structures, the closer you feel to them. This closeness generally develops only if the information is revealed in a way that indicates you are receiving privileged information that other people do not know. For example, if a man lets you (and only you) know the secret that he has a serious invisible illness (such as diabetes, lupus, or prostate cancer), an unusually strong fear of spiders, or a significantly distressed marriage, you may feel valued and trusted as a result of that disclosure, because he let you into his inner life.

But there is an important relational process going on here: When someone tells you about his or her inner identity, you may feel you are being honored and valued by someone's revelation of the inner self, or you may actually not care for what you are hearing. The important point, then, is that the disclosure itself does not make a difference to a relationship; the relationship, rather, makes a difference to

the value of the self-disclosure. If you feel the relationship is enhanced by self-disclosure, it is; if you don't, no matter how intimate the disclosure, the relationship does not grow in intimacy. Later research has refined this idea (Dindia, 2000; Petronio, 2002). For example, too much disclosure of identity is not necessarily a good thing at all times. You've probably been bored by somebody constantly telling you more than you wanted to know about herself—TMI! On the other hand, people who are closed and don't tell anything about themselves are usually regarded as psychologically *un*healthy in some way.

In addition, communication scholar Kathryn Dindia (2000) points out that the revelation of identity is rarely just a simple progression and is certainly not just the declaration of facts and then—bam!—intimacy. Self-disclosure is a dynamic process tied to other social processes that relate to your identity and how you want to disclose yourself over time. It is a process that can be continued through the life of relationships and is not a single one-time choice: to disclose or not to disclose. Indeed, part of your identity is the skill with which you reveal or conceal information about yourself and your feelings, as any good poker player knows.

In fact, the revelation of your identity, like identity itself, is an open-ended process that continues indefinitely in relationships even after they have become deeply intimate. It is dynamic, continuous, and circular so that it is hard to say where self-disclosure or identity begins or ends. It is also influenced by the behavior and communication of the other person(s)—the audience. Self-disclosure and identity both occur in the context of a relationship that has ups and downs, and all of these elements are interdependent. For example, José learns more about Juanita's identity when he hears her disclose something about herself that makes him feel more positive about her and their relationship. It also makes him nervous because, in the past, he did something that her disclosure shows she would not like. So he tells her what he did and how sorry he is about it. Juanita likes the fact that he confides in her and feels better about the relationship as a result, but she wonders if José is still the same person he was when he did the bad thing or if he is genuinely sorry and has changed . . . and so on. Thus, identity, self-disclosure, and relationships are mutually connected transactions, not just simply the peeling away of layers.

People also place a limit on the amount of information that they reveal to others, and some choose to remain private, even in intimate relationships. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identify a push-pull **dialectic tension** of relationships. Dialectic tensions occur whenever you are in two minds about something or feel a simultaneous pull in two directions. Some communication scholars (e.g., Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008) suggest that there simply is no singular core of identity but a dialogue between different "voices" in your head. For example, in relationships, you want to feel connected to someone else, but you do not want to give up all of your independence. You can see how you—and your identity—can grow by being in a relationship, but you can also see that this comes at a simultaneous cost or threat to your identity, independence, and autonomy. The autonomy-connectedness dialectic is one dialectic tension, but another is openness-closedness, where people

feel social pressure to be open yet also want to retain control over private information. This tension leads to people sometimes giving out and sometimes holding back information about self. Even in the same relationship, a person can feel open and willing to reveal information sometimes but crowded and guarded at other times. These tensions are simply part of being in a relationship that has its own flow: A personal relationship is not a consistent or simple experience any more than identity is. Each affects the other over time.

In fact, people in relationships negotiate boundaries of privacy (Petronio, 2002). For example, part of the difference between friendship and mere acquaintance is that you have stronger boundaries around your identity for acquaintances than you do for friends. Also, as Jon Hess (2000) notes, you simply don't like some people, so you don't want them to know personal stuff about you, and you may actively try to limit what they find out about you. Caughlin and Afifi (2004) have shown that even intimate partners sometimes prefer to completely avoid topics that may annoy or provoke the other person. Petronio (2002) deals with the inconsistencies in the revelation of information by pointing to the importance of boundary management of the topics that have specific meanings within different relational settings. People experience a tension between a desire for privacy and a demand for openness differently in different relationships. Couples make up their own rules for controlling the boundaries of privacy based on the particular nature of their relationship. So, for example, a couple may define, between themselves, the nature of topics that they will mention in front of other people and what they will keep private. A married couple may decide what topics they can discuss in front of the children, for instance, and these topics may change as the children grow older. In other words, people show, employ, and work within different parts of their identity with different audiences at different times.

> *Self-disclosure reacts to a norm of reciprocity (i.e., an unspoken rule about fairness and giving back about as much as you receive). If I say something self-disclosing to you in everyday life, you should tell me something about yourself in return. If one person keeps telling information but gets nothing back, the person will stop doing it. Oddly enough, the norm of reciprocity can actually be used to interrogate people or find out information about them indirectly. If you say something personal about yourself, that loads an obligation on the other people to respond by saying something equally personal about themselves.*

One of the important points that Petronio (2002) makes, then, is that the suitability of something for disclosure is itself affected by relational context and by agreement between the partners. She also draws attention to the ways in which a couple can decide how much to disclose. Amount, type, or subject of self-disclosure can be topics for discussion (often called *metacommunication* or communication about communication). In short, in contrast to Jourard's (1964, 1971) idea that there are absolute rules about self-disclosure of identity, Petronio strongly indicates that it is often a matter of personal preference or is worked out explicitly between the partners in a relationship through communication.

The upshot of this discussion of self-disclosure as a revelation of layers of self, then, is that your identity is not just a straightforward layered possession of your own inner being. Neither is your self-disclosure of that identity just your decision alone but something jointly owned by you and a partner, so to speak. By now you are recognizing that there is more to identity than just *having* or *revealing* one, then. The norms of appropriateness and reciprocity and the rules about amount of information and the revelation of negative information show that there is a social context for communication about identity. Identity is revealed within that set of social rules, cultural norms, and contexts.

Identity and Other People

Saying that there is a social context for identity is basically making two points:

1. Society as a whole broadly influences the way you think about identity in the first place.

2. The other people who meet a person may influence the way that person's identity is expressed.

When you reveal your identity, you often use stories to tell the audience something about yourself and help them shape their sense of who you are. As with self-disclosure, so too with stories: They are influenced by both society/culture and the specific persons or audience to whom you do the telling.

Narrative Self and Altercasting: Transacting Identity by Labels and Stories

People tell stories about themselves and other people all the time and often pay special care to what they will say, particularly for occasions like job interviews, sales pitches, and strategic communication of all sorts. You may have noticed that you tell stories of your identity for consumption by other people in a social context involving key features of all human stories (see Chapter 2). A report about an identity often characterizes the self by means of a memory or history in its narrative or a typical or an amusing instance that involves character (your identity), plot, motives, scenes, and other actors (see Chapter 2). Therefore, even when you reveal an internal model of self, it organizes your identity in ways other people understand in terms of the rules that govern accounts, narratives, and other social reports. As Koenig Kellas (2008) has pointed out, narratives can be ontology (how I came to be who I am), epistemology (how I think about the world), individual construction, or a relational process, such as when a couple tells the story about how they first met.

Reports about an identity have a narrative structure that builds off both the sense of origin derived from early life and a sense of continuity. The self comes from

Photo 5.2 ▪ *How much of your "self" is a performance of social roles where you have to act out "who I am" for other people? (See page 28.)*

somewhere and has roots—"I'm Hispanic," "I'm a true Southerner," "I'm a genuine Irish McMahan." Identity comes in part from narratives of origin, whether personal, cultural, or species. ("Where did I come from?" "Where did our culture come from?" "How did humans get started?") A sense of origin leads, for most people, straight back to their family, the first little society that they ever experienced. The specific context of family experience is a major and first influence on a person's sense of origin and identity, and it gives the person a sense of connection to a larger network of others; indeed, in African American cultures "the family" can be seen as a whole community that goes beyond the direct blood ties that define "family" for some other cultures. The earliest memories from which you build your sense of origin are represented in your experiences in childhood in some form of family or family-like environment.

However, your early memories are not neutral facts. They are loaded, like dice, by the experiences you had in your family. A horrible childhood can make a person absorb an identity that gives them low self-esteem, for example. People who learn from their childhood *experiences* with parents, teachers, and peers that they are essentially worthless tend to develop a low self-esteem and therefore to treat the later relational world a lot more cautiously and with greater anxiety than do people who are treated in childhood as interesting, worthy, and good. The latter end up confident and secure about themselves, whereas those treated by their parents or caretakers as nuisances not only come to see themselves that way but also become anxious in relationships or avoid them altogether. A key point, then, is that by both direct and indirect means, your interactions and communication with other people shape your views of yourself even when you don't realize it or necessarily want it to happen—and this influence is not automatically something you just grow out of.

Early experiences with other people influence your later life significantly, as a result of their impact on the thought worlds/worlds of meaning that you develop and the sense of identity that they create through narratives that you form about yourself

and your history. The ways they do this range from effects on the way a person ends up feeling about self and worth as a person, to the goals that people set for life, to the levels of ability that they feel they have in particular areas, to the ways they relate to other people, to the dark fears that they hoard all their lives, to their beliefs about the way to behave properly and appropriately (religious beliefs, rituals about birthdays, who cares for people emotionally, whether sports "matter"), to whether life is peacefully cozy or violently conflicted. Early experiences in "the family" lay down many of the tracks upon which your later life will run.

In part, what you identify as true about yourself relies on you reporting in a way your audience believes to be coherent and acceptable. It is not just that you *have* a self but that you shape the *telling* of your identity in a way that your culture, your friends, and your audience will accept. This distinction is like the difference between the words in a joke and the way someone tells it: The telling adds something performative to the words, and a person can spoil a joke by telling it badly. Likewise with identity, it has to be performed or told in appropriate ways. When the gang member, Purdue fan, or frat boy brags about his achievements to friends, he probably tells it differently than he would to the police, Indiana University fans, or the dean of students.

Another way to create and publish an identity is through **labeling**—that is, by adopting a particular style of name that labels the characteristics you want to stand out. If a faculty member refers to himself as "Dr. Dave," that creates a certain kind of image, a mixture of professionalism and accessibility and also an amusing cross-reference to the cultural icon Dr. Phil. These nicknames and labels for the self and others can be used for creation or reinforcement of a type of identity. In the case of *other people,* a technical term used in discussion of communication and identity is **altercasting**. Altercasting refers to the how language can force people into a certain identity and then burden them with the duty to live up to the description, which can be positive or negative (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967). For example, you are altercasting when you say, "As a good friend, you will want to help me here" or "Only a fool would . . ." These direct statements involve a labeling of the listener as a certain kind of person (or not). The labels position the person to respond appropriately (as a friend or not as a fool). More subtly, people can be altercast by some of the language tactics discussed in Chapter 2. If a mechanic or computer geek uses technical language (divergence), this altercasts the other person as "nonexpert." You could respond by accepting the "one-down" role of a nonexpert and feeling like a fool, or you could resist by saying something that reasserts your expertise. Even such small elements of communication transact your identity and the identities of those people around you.

The idea that you have this onion self revealed in layers is all very well, then, until you stop to think that you would hardly bother to speak your identity at all—in fact, there would be no shared language in which to do it—if there were no other people to be your audience. One absolute requirement for communication is that someone else hears and understands what you say. When you communicate about yourself, therefore, it must be because you assume that the audience will understand

you, so you must assume a shared basis for understanding other people. On top of that, you must assume that some special people—friends, for example—not only understand your "self" but also do reality checks for you. When people talk about themselves, then, they assume you, their audience, will be able to comprehend, interpret, and probably support it to some extent. The above description of Steve, for example, mentions a Swiss Army knife because that particular item is assumed to be known in your culture. That means, however, that any description of an identity is not just a revelation of an inner core but is steered by beliefs about the criteria, categories, and descriptions that will matter to, or even impress, the relevant audience. For example, people project a professional identity by wearing smart business clothes to a job interview, and people can communicate their culture through their accent and behavior. You have some idea from your own personal experiences about the ways and categories in which other people experience and expect you to communicate "who you are"—and that is a *relational* point.

Symbolic Identity: Is Your Sense of Self in You or in Your Relationships?

You can already glimpse ways in which your sense of self is influenced by language frames, culture, origin, membership, and other people's thoughts about you. But are you really "who you are" without specific interactions with specific other people? Don't you actually *do* a lot of your identity for other people? You probably do not behave exactly the same way with your best friend as you do with your mother, your instructor, or a traffic cop. Most people have a range of identities that they can turn on as necessary according to circumstances and the other people in the interactions with them. In that case, identity is not so much something that you have as it is something that you *do* and communicate to other people in ways that they recognize. For example, you do not have "Indiana University fan" carved on your inner core, but you *do* "Indiana University fan", for example, by wearing Indiana University clothing, going to Indiana University games, and making jokes to your friends about Purdue.

Do you feel like a different person when you are with your friends than when you're talking to your mother? Are you the same person all the time, or do you have good and bad days, and do you ever do things you regret or regard as not typical of you as a person? Most people have protested that someone has misrepresented them (and so *resisted* or *contested* an altercasting by refusing to accept it). A hostile or negative person can make you feel very bad about yourself. Have you ever met anyone who didn't really "get" what you are about? On the other hand, you may have had a close relationship with a partner that felt good because you were able to be your *true self* around the other person or because the person helped bring out sides of you that other people could not. Did you struggle to assert an identity independent from your parents when you were a teenager? If you have had any of these experiences, you must already be asking yourself how that is possible if "you" are really one identity. You may also have started to think about how advertising,

religion, and social fashions influence the ways you dress and act. Other people can affect what you regard as important, the values you aspire to, the choices that you make, and how these feed into your sense of identity. Your culture and your identity at the very least interact with one another, and at most culture accounts for quite a lot of who you are and how you act.

The lesson is simple: Your identity is shaped by the people you interact with because you can reflect that your "self" is an object of other people's perceptions and that they can do critical thinking or listening about you as well. In short, your identity is a **symbolic self**, a self that exists for other people and goes beyond what it means to you; it arises out of social interaction with other people. As a result, when and if you reveal yourself, you do so in the terms that society at large uses to explain behavior. We fit identity descriptions into the form of narratives that your society and your particular acquaintances know about and accept. Hence, any form of identity that you present to other people is partly connected to the fact that you buy into a bank of shared meaning that the particular audience or community accepts as important in defining a person's identity.

For example, part of the gang member's identity is a result of the fact that he talked with his gang every day, greeted them each day, asked about their families, and joked around with them. He also probably discussed rival gangs with them, saw himself as dutiful and good by his/their standards, and knew that his fellow gang members, at least, would be people he would meet again the next day for conversation and laughter. In short, he was living in a cultural context that tolerated his actions and, more important, was in a series of repeated relationships with the same people who shared his values. Tomorrow he would have to preserve and project his identity to his gang, and he would do this in his conversation, his everyday connections with them, and the sheer banality of his everyday experience of being alive in their company—just being the sort of dutiful gang member that he was in his own eyes and the sort of reliable guy he was in their eyes. If you cheer for Purdue or Indiana University, you do it in a group of people who share your views and probably are your friends, people you talk to. You act out your loyalty to your team among your fellow fans.

Another way of thinking about someone's identity, then, is in terms of how broad social forces affect or even transact an individual's view of who he or she is, a set of ideas referred to as **symbolic interactionism**. In particular, George Herbert Mead (1934) suggested that people get their sense of self from their dealings with other people and from being aware that other people observe, judge, and evaluate your behavior. Think of how many times you have done or not done something because of how you would look to your friends if you did it. Has your family ever said, "What will the neighbors think?" Mead called this phenomenon the human ability to adopt an **attitude of reflection**, to think about how you look in other people's eyes, or to reflect on the fact that other people can see you as a social object from their point of view. Guided by these reflections, you do not always do what you want to do but what you think people will accept. Or you may end up doing something you don't want to do because you cannot think how to say no to another

person in a way that looks reasonable to other people ("SHAN'T!" won't do). Your identity, then, is not yours alone. Indeed, Mead also saw self as a transacted result of communicating with other people: You learn how to be an individual by recognizing the way that society treats you. You come to see yourself (your identity) as representing someone who is a meaningful object for other people. People recognize you as who you are and treat you differently from other people, so you come to see yourself as distinct not only in their eyes but also in your own. For example, physically attractive people often act confidently because they are aware of the fact that other people find them attractive. On the other hand, unattractive people have learned that they cannot rely on their looks to make a good impression and may therefore adapt and develop other ways of impressing other people (for example, by developing a great sense of humor; Berscheid & Reis, 1998). You come to see yourself, to some extent, as others see you. You come to see yourself as having the characteristics that other people treat you as having, and in many cases you play to those social strengths.

You can, therefore, go further in connecting identity through relationships to communication. If other people treat you with respect and you come to see yourself as a respected individual, self-respect becomes part of your inner being. If your parents treat you like a child even though you have now grown up, they evoke from you some sense that you are still a child, which may cause you to feel resentment. If you are intelligent and people treat you as interesting, you may come to see yourself as having different value to other people than does someone who is not intelligent. You get so used to the idea that it gets inside your "identity" and becomes part of who you are, but it originated from other people, not from you. If you are tall, tough, and muscular (not short, bald, and carrying a Swiss Army knife), perhaps people habitually treat you with a bit of respect and caution. Over time you get used to the idea, and identity is enacted and transacted in communication as a person who expects respect and a little caution from other people. Eventually, you will not have to act in an intimidating way in order to make people respectful. Your manner of communicating (whether in talk or nonverbal behavior or both) reflects their approach to you, and their way of communicating reflects it back. Yet your identity began in the way you were treated by other people, and it eventually becomes transacted in communication.

Another way of thinking about this is to see how "society" gets your friends to do its work for it. You have never met a society or a culture, and you never will. You will only ever meet people who (re)present some of a society's or a culture's key values to you. This contact with other folks puts them in the role of *society's secret agents.* These people you meet and talk with are doing your culture's and your society's work and are enacting the way in which that culture represents the sorts of values that are desirable within it. In short, when you communicate with other people in your culture, you get information about what works and what doesn't, what is acceptable and what isn't, and how much you count in that society—what your identity is "worth." For example, the dominant culture in the United States typically values ambition,

good looks, hard work, demonstration of material success, and a strong code of individuality, and people stress those values in their talk with one another or else feel inadequate because they don't stack up against these values.

Of course, you cannot escape the influence on your self-concept of people with whom you are forced to interact whether you like them or not (coworkers, professors, or relatives, for example), but the principle is the same even though you most often think of the influence of your friends and relatives or key teachers on

When you go home from college where you are "an adult," you may end up being treated in the family back home as "a kid" or, at the very best, "a grown-up kid." What communicative styles and techniques can you identify as bringing this about?

yourself. Nonfriends may challenge aspects of your sense of identity and make you reflect on the question, "Who am I?" Sometimes this reflection results in your confidence in your opinions being reinforced, and sometimes it results in them being undermined, reconsidered, or modified, but even the challenges and discussions of everyday communication transact some effect on your view of self, your identity. Your sense of self/identity comes from interactions with other people in society as a whole.

Photo 5.3 ■ *What is meant by a symbolic self, and why do we have to account to other people for who we are? (See page 28.)*

Transacting a Self in Interactions With Others

In keeping with this book's theme, you can't have a self without also having relationships with other people—both the personal relationships you choose and the social relationships you reject. More than that, it's impossible for a person to have a concept of self unless he or she can reflect on identity via the views of these other people with whom he or she has social or personal relationships. Your identity is *transacted* or constituted in part from two things: First, you take into yourself—or are reinforced for taking into yourself—the beliefs and prevailing norms of the society in which you live. Second, you are *held to account* for the identity that you project by those people you hang out with. The gang member would have lost status in the gang if he had not shot his target. As a Purdue fan, you lose face if you don't know the score during your game with Indiana University or cannot name your own team's quarterback. As a student, you are expected to know answers about the book you are reading for your class.

Let us rephrase this point: Because individuals acquire individuality through the social practices in which they exist and carry out their lives, they encounter powerful forces of society that are actually enforced on the ground by society's secret agents, their relationships with other people that affect their identities. (That "raised eyebrow" from your neighbor/instructor/team fan was actually society at work!) Your "self" is structured and enacted in relation to those people who have power over you in formal ways, like the police, but most often you encounter the institutions within a society through its secret agents: public opinion and the people you know who express opinions about moral issues of the day and give you their judgments. You, too, are one of society's secret agents, guiding what other people do and thinking just as they do.

Again, your identity is a complex result of your own thinking, history, and experience and of your interaction with other people and their influence on you, both as an individual and as one of society's secret agents. Behind all those things that you think of as simply abstract social structures, like "the law," individuals are acting in relation to one another (you and the police officer). These social relations get internalized into yourself, and you slow down at speed-limit signs not because you want to but because you saw the police car and don't want a ticket.

It is important to note how the routine banality of everyday-life talk with friends who share the same values and talk about them day by day actually does something for society and helps make you who you are. Such routines reinforce people's perspectives and put events in the same sorts of predictable and routine frameworks of meaning through trivial and pedestrian communication with one another in everyday life (Wood & Duck, 2006). But—here's the point of this section, so remember it well—you *do* your identity in front of the audiences, and they might evaluate and comment on whether you're doing it right. Although we used the extreme case about the gang member as an attention grabber, the same kinds of processes are going on in interaction when you profess your undying allegiance to one football team and

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Look at your Facebook profile. How do you think you look? Take a closer look, this time at the profiles of the members of your class. How do you think they are trying to present themselves as individuals? Take notes and discuss it in class.

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your supposed hatred of the opposing team. The people around you do not resent it but actually encourage you and reinforce your expression of that identity. They share it and support it. Just as the gang member accepted his identity with all its disturbing implications, so do you when you categorize the opposing team as some kind of enemy. The underlying idea—that a group of people can be treated as nothing more than depersonalized, dehumanized others—runs through team loyalty and rivalry, town versus college kids, and any other kind of stereotyping.

Performative Self

So now that you know the importance of other people in influencing who you are, you are ready to move on to look more closely at the curious idea that you don't just *have* an identity; you actually *do* one. Part of an identity is not just *having* a symbolic sense of it but *doing* it in the presence of other people and doing it well in their eyes. This is an extremely interesting and provocative fact about communication: Everyone *does* his or her identity for an audience, like an actor in a play. Facework is part of what happens in everyday-life communication (Chapter 2), and people have a sense of their own dignity and image—the person they want to be seen as. That is part of what gets transacted in everyday communication by the person and by others in the interaction who politely protect and preserve the person's "face." We can now restate this idea for the present chapter as being the performance of one's identity in public, the presentation of the self to people in a way that is intended to make the self look good.

Erving Goffman (1959) dealt with this particular problem and indicated the way in which momentary social forces affect identity portrayal. Goffman was particularly interested in how identity is performed in everyday life and how people manage their image in a way that makes them "look good" (Cupach & Metts, 1994). You will already have worked out for yourself that the concept of "looking good" means "looking good *to other people.*" It is therefore essentially a relational concept, but it takes you one step closer to looking at the interpersonal interaction that occurs on the ground every day. Rather than looking at society in the generalized and abstract way that George Herbert Mead did, Goffman focused on what you actually do in conversations and interactions.

As you recall, your portrayal of yourself is shaped by the social needs at the time, the social situation, the social frame, and the circumstances surrounding your performance. Remember the server from Chapter 1? She does not introduce herself that way to her *friends* ("Hi, I'm Roberta, and I'll be your server tonight . . .") except as a joke, so her performance of the server identity is restricted to those times and places where it is called for and appropriate. Goffman differentiated a **front region** and **back region** to social performance: The front region/front stage is where your professional, proper self is performed. For example, a server is all smiles and civility in the front stage of the restaurant when talking to customers. This behavior might be different from how he or she performs in the back region/backstage (say, the restaurant kitchen) when talking with the cooks or other servers and making jokes about the customers or being disrespectful to them. That means the performance of your identity is not sprung into action by your own free wishes but by social cues that this is the right place and time to perform your "self" in that way.

An identity is a person making sense of the world not just for him- or herself but in a way that makes sense within a context provided by others. Any identity connects to other identities. You can be friendly when you are with your friends, but you are expected to be professional when on the job and to do student identity when in class. An individual inevitably draws on knowledge that is shared in any community to which he or she belongs, so any person draws on information and knowledge that are both personal and communal. If you change from thinking of identity as about "self as character" and instead see it as "self as performer," you also must consider the importance of linguistic competence in social performance, and that includes not doing or saying embarrassing or foolish things.

Performing Self Badly: Embarrassment and Predicaments

Embarrassment is one of the big problems of social life and involves you actually performing a behavior that is inconsistent with the identity or face that you want to present. Cupach and Metts (1994; Metts, 2000) have done a large amount of research on this topic. Someone who wants to impress an interviewer but instead spills coffee on her lap will be embarrassed because her "face" of professional competence is undercut by clumsiness; someone who wants to present a "face" of being cool but who suddenly blushes or twitches will probably feel embarrassed because the nonverbal behavior contradicts the identity of being cool. In both cases the actual *performance* of an identity (face) is undercut by a specific behavior that just does not fit that presentation of face.

People can be embarrassed by dumb acts that undercut their **performative self**, the doing of the identity that they have claimed for themselves (such as professional competence), momentarily like this, or they can get into longer-term **predicaments** that present a greater challenge to the performative self. Think of

predicaments as extended embarrassment. If you go to a job interview and your very first answer makes you look stupid, you know you are still going to have to carry on through the interview anyway, with the interviewers all thinking you are a hopeless, worthless, and unhireable idiot. You'd rather jump into a vat of boiling sulfur right now, but you cannot; you have to sit it out watching their polite smiles and feeling terrible.

Predicaments, like standing up to give a speech and realizing you brought only Page 1 of your 10 pages of notes can be a real test of character (it was for one of us authors, anyway), but predicaments test the performative self and challenge the person to live up to the claims presented in the symbolic identity that the face set up. Of course, predicaments are modified by relationships. As people become closer and more intimate, they are allowed to breach the presentation of one another's face to a greater degree than strangers may do (Metts, 2000). Part of knowing someone well is that you can cross the normal social, physical, or psychological boundaries that exist for everyone else who does not know him or her so well.

Mock putdowns are quite a common form of intimate banter in English-speaking countries but not in Eastern cultures, which suggests that the notion of face and identity is a culturally influenced one on top of everything else that influences it. However, the idea that people work together in relationships to uphold one another's face through politeness is an important one, called **teamwork** by Goffman (1971). Direct challenges to another person's competence ("You are a failure!") are openly offensive in most circumstances, although, the more intimate the relationship is, they are tolerated to a greater degree. Friends are permitted a great deal more latitude in making such comments than strangers are, and less offense is taken when a friend says such a thing than would be taken if a stranger or relatively distant and unknown colleague at work said it. Bosses may say it directly to an inferior because they have social power to break normal social rules, but it can still hurt. A worker who said it to a boss would be seen quite unambiguously as stepping outside the proper relational and hierarchical boundaries. This very fact makes a point that both context *and* relationships serve to define the sorts of communication about identity that are accepted, and vice versa. Except in live standup comedy shows where audience members attend expecting to see someone (preferably someone else) humiliated, the open attack on someone's identity management is a relational communication with great power and shock value.

MAKE YOUR CASE

What was your most embarrassing experience, and why was it embarrassing? What did it say about you? What did you do about it?

How the Self Is Constituted/Transacted in Everyday Practices

Although this chapter has been about personal identity, we have seen that identity is molded by the ways in which the surrounding culture influences its expression, the way that you *do* your identity and are recognized as having one. Once you recognize that your identity is not just an internal structure but also a practical performance, the relevant communication involved in "being yourself" is affected by the social norms that are in place to guide behavior in a given society. People judge your identity performance and expect you to know about the same practical world and explain or account for yourself.

Your identity is done in a material world that affects who you are. For example, the fact that you can communicate with other people more or less instantaneously across huge distances by mobile telephone materially affects your sense of connection to other people. This practical self—and how the ability to do practical things affects your sense of self—is illustrated by the importance to many young people of learning to drive a car. When you can drive, not only do you go through the transformation of self as "more of a grown-up," but you can actually do lots of things when you have a car that you cannot do when you do not have one, so your sense of identity expands. Part of your *performance* of self is connected to the practical artifacts, accompaniments, and "stuff" that you use in your performance. If you have the right "stuff" (professional suit, bling, or a sports car), the self that you project is different from the self you perform when those things are not influencing your performance.

An important element of doing an identity in front of an audience is that you become an **accountable self**, which essentially allows your identity to be morally judged by other people. What you do can be assessed by other people as right or wrong according to existing habits of society. Any practical way of performing identity turns identity itself into a moral action—that is, identity as a way of living based on choices made about actions that a person sees as available or relevant but that others will judge and hold to account. This point moves the discussion about social construction of identity on from interaction with other people through the force of society and its value systems. Society as a whole encourages you to take certain actions (do not park next to fire hydrants, protect the elderly and the weak, be a good neighbor, recycle!)

Moral accountability (which is related to the moral context for narratives) is a fancy way of saying that society as a whole makes judgments about your actions and choices and then holds you to account for the actions and choices that you make, but it also forcefully encourages you to act in particular ways and to see specific types of identity as "good" (patriot is good, traitor is bad; loyalty is good, thief is bad; open self-disclosure is good, passive aggression is bad, for example).

The identity that you thought of as your own personality, then, is not made up of your own desires and impulses but is formed, performed, and expressed within a set of social patterns and judgments built up by values and practices in a community or

Photo 5.4 ■ *How is your identity transacted in everyday practices? (See page 28.)*

culture through the relationships that people have with one another in it. The gang members did not call the shooter to account; the Indiana University fan is not asked why she is cheering for Indiana University by other Indiana University fans.

For all of these reasons, it makes sense to see a person's identity as a complex and compound concept that is partly based on history, memory, experiences, and interpretations by the individual, partly evoked by momentary aspects of talk (its context, the people you are with, your stage in life, your goals at the time), and partly a social creation directed by other people, society and its categories, and your relationship needs and objectives in those contexts. Your performance of the self is guided by your relationships with other people, as well as your social goals. Even your embodiment of this knowledge or your sense of self is shaped by your social practices with other people and your sense of their valuing your physical being. Your self-consciousness in their presence and the ways you deal with it also influence the presentation of yourself to other people. Although a sense of self/identity is experienced on the ground in your practical interactions with other people, you get trapped by language into reporting it abstractly as some sort of disembodied

"identity," a *symbolic* representation of the little practices and styles of behavior that you actually experience in your daily interactions with other people. Once again, then, another apparently simple idea (identity, personality, self) runs into the relational influences that make the basics of communication so valuable to study.

The following table summarizes what we've learned in this chapter about identity and relationships.

TABLE 5.1   **Some Ways to See Identity Communication and Relationships**

Psychic/Reflective Self	*Habits of thought/of behavior/of perception/"personality"* What you normally think of as identity a priori: Your communicative behavior just expresses the inner self.
Symbolic Self	*Broad social forces affect self differentiation/characterization.* Self arises out of social interaction and not vice versa; hence it does not "belong to me." You are who you are because of the people you hang out with, interact with and communicate with; you can be a different identity in different circumstances
Performative Self	*Present social situation affects self-portrayal.* Selves act themselves out in a network of social demands and norms; you do your identity in front and back regions differently and try to present the right "face" to the people you are with.
Practical Self	*Material world affects self/how you think of self.* Practical aspects of materiality transform the concept of self. Your identity is represented by objects that symbolically make claims about the sort of person you are.
Accountable Self	*Social context influences broad forms of portrayal.* Personality is just an abstract concept. People act within a set of social ideas and habitual styles of thinking, allowing other people to comment and steer how we behave.
Improvisational Performance	*There is a rhetorical spin to this and how "self" is presented.* Ideology affects the manner of presentation of terms, characteristics, and so on. We try to narrate ourselves in the way that our society expects us to represent identity.

Focus Questions Revisited

- **Is a person's identity like an onion, built layer by layer and communicated slowly as intimacy increases?**

  For some reasons and purposes, it makes sense for us to see identity this way, but it really is not the only way that "identity" actually works in the everyday encounters of relationship life.

- **How do daily interactions with other people form or sustain your identity?**

  In at least two ways: Their responses to us affect the way we feel about ourselves; also they act as society's secret agents in innocently enforcing society's norms and beliefs through their comments on our own styles of behavior and identity performance.

- **How much of your "self" is a performance of social roles where you have to act out "who I am" for other people?**

  Much of what you do in everyday life is steered by your awareness of yourself as a social object for other people—hence, your performance for them of the roles and styles of behavior that are appropriate in the circumstances. Your "inner self" may be constrained by this awareness.

- **What is meant by a symbolic self, and why do we have to account to other people for who we are?**

  Your "self" is presented to other people as a symbol, and you have to describe yourself in terms and phrases that your audiences recognize as symbolically meaningful in the culture. You are also able to take an attitude of reflection that recognizes that you are an object of other people's perceptions and judgment. You will remember from Chapter 1 that people can observe your behavior and "go beyond" it to its symbolic meaning.

- **What is the role of culture in your identity experiences?**

  Culture has multiple roles in identity experience. For one thing, cultures regard "individuality" differently; for another thing, your origin from a particular culture steers the way you think about people and their styles of behavior; for still another thing, your culture is part of your identity, and people proudly claim their cultural heritage as part of "who they are."

Key Concepts

accountable self	dialectic tension
altercasting	front region
attitude of reflection	identity
back region	labeling

moral accountability

norm of reciprocity

performative self

predicaments

self-concept

self-disclosure

symbolic interactionism

symbolic self

teamwork

Questions to Ask Your Friends

■ Discuss with your friends or classmates the most embarrassing moment that you feel comfortable talking about, and try to find what about the experience threatened your identity. What identity were you projecting at the time, and what went wrong with the performance?

■ Look at how advertisers sell the *image* of particular cars in terms of what they will make you look like to other people; the advertisers recognize that your identity is tied up in your material possessions. Include in this consideration the following topics: How is your identity affected by your preferences in music, the Web, fashion magazines, resources, or wealth?

■ Get a group of friends together and ask them each to write down what sort of vegetable, fish, dessert, book, piece of furniture, style of music, meal, car, game, or building best represents their identity. Read the responses out loud and have everyone guess which person is described.

Media Links

■ Watch the movie *Sideways* and fast-forward to the veranda scene where Miles talks to Maya about his preference for wine and it becomes apparent that he is using wine as a metaphor about himself. He projects his identity through his interest in and knowledge about the subtleties of wines, and he uses it to describe himself and his hopes that Maya will learn to understand him.

Maya: You know, can I ask you a personal question, Miles?

Miles: Sure.

Maya: Why are you so in to Pinot?

Miles: [*laughs softly*]

Maya: I mean, it's like a thing with you.

Miles: [*continues laughing softly*] Uh, I don't know, I don't know. Um, it's a hard grape to grow, as you know. Right? It's uh, it's thin-skinned, temperamental, ripens early. It's, you know, it's not a survivor like Cabernet, which can just grow anywhere and uh, thrive even when it's neglected. No, Pinot needs constant care and attention. You know? And in fact it can only grow in these really specific, little, tucked away corners of the world. And, and only the most patient and nurturing of growers can do it, really. Only somebody who really takes the time to understand Pinot's potential can then coax it into its fullest expression. Then, I mean, oh its flavors, they're just the most haunting and brilliant and thrilling and subtle and . . . ancient on the planet.

- Bring examples to class from magazines or TV shows that demonstrate how media representation of ideal selves (especially demands on women to be a particular kind of shape, but try to be more imaginative than just these images) are constantly thrown in our path.

- How do media shows encourage us to be open, honest, and real? Does *The Jerry Springer Show* and the like teach us anything about the "right" ways to be ourselves?

Ethical Issues

- If your identity is partly constructed by other people, how does this play out in relation to diversity, cultural sensitivity, and political correctness versus speaking the truth?

- Analyze the difficulties for someone "coming out" in terms of performance, social expectations, norms, and relationships with those around the person.

- If you have a guilty secret and are getting into a deep romantic relationship with someone, should you tell him or her early on or later? Or should you not tell him or her at all?

Answers to Photo Captions

- **Photo 5.1** ■ Answer to photo caption on page 5: There are messages about identity both "inside" the picture and "outside" it: The performance of femininity and womanhood are being communicated to the girl, a sense of the importance of looks and the enhancement of natural appearance in

private. The picture also communicates to outsiders the role of personal hygiene in personal identity.

■ **Photo 5.2** ■ Answer to photo caption on page 12: On special occasions we adopt prescribed roles, dress in prescribed ways, and enact prescribed rituals and behaviors in order to "do the right thing." A wedding is a classic example of how two individuals can temporarily lose control over their relationship as other people tell them how to perform and pressure them into acting as others want them to.

■ **Photo 5.3** ■ Answer to photo caption on page 17: Your identity represents something symbolic to other people, and they may respond to aspects of yourself that trivialize and humiliate you. The African Americans are being driven off a "Whites only" beach in 1963.

■ **Photo 5.4** ■ Answer to photo caption on page 23: Interactions and experience with other people give us a sense of our own identity and what it means to hold certain values and carry out certain types of action. This boy is learning how to "be a man" in his local community.

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