CANADIAN EDITION

# Interplay

## THE PROCESS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Ronald B. Adler • Lawrence B. Rosenfeld
Russell F. Proctor II • Constance Winder

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**Original Contributions by Neil Towne**

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# Preface

It is hard to think of any academic subject more immediately important and valuable to students than interpersonal communication. Good personal relationships can make life worth living, and unsatisfying ones can make us miserable. Most students recognize this fact, and they enter the course ready to acquire information and skills that they can put to use in their own lives.

Despite the obvious importance of the subject, designing an academic course (and writing a textbook) on interpersonal communication is not an easy task. On the one hand, instructors and authors must avoid presenting the considerable amount of scholarship on the subject in so much detail that first-time students are overwhelmed. On the other hand, we have to avoid oversimplification so that the students don't dismiss the material as 'just common sense'. The whole package must fit within an academic term and be designed in a way that facilitates teaching and learning.

## Basic Approach of the Book

This edition of *Interplay* builds on the approach that has served professors and students well in the past. It strives to give first-time students a useful, compelling, and accurate introduction to the academic study of interpersonal communication. If we have done our job, the reader will come away with a new appreciation of how scholarship about communication in interpersonal relationships can make a difference in everyday life.

To that end, this edition retains the approach that will be familiar to long-time users:

- An accessible writing style based on the belief that even complicated ideas can be presented in a straightforward way.
- A commitment to showing how scholarship offers insights about the process of interpersonal communication. This edition cites more than one thousand sources, many of which are new to this edition.
- The use of a variety of thought-provoking photos, sidebars, and cartoons that illustrate points in the text in a way that is more interesting and compelling than text alone.

The coverage of the topics also retain the best features of the previous edition:

- A clean presentation of a communication model and its implications (Chapter 1)
- Information on how communicators manage their identities on the Internet (Chapter 2)
- A discussion of how successful relationships depend on negotiation of shared narratives (Chapter 3)
- An examination of types of emotions and influences on emotional expression, including personality and gender (Chapter 4)
- Research findings on the role of communication in increasing physical attractiveness (Chapter 6)
- A balanced treatment of the risks and benefits of self-disclosure and methods of maintaining privacy in personal relationships (Chapter 9)
- Material on reasons for defensiveness (Chapter 10)

### Special Features of the Canadian Edition

Almost half a century ago, Marshall McLuhan coined the metaphor of the world as a 'global village' where members of every nation are connected by communication technology. Since then, demographic changes have been transforming Canada into a microcosm of that global village. This new Canadian edition features expanded coverage of how cultural differences and new technologies affect interpersonal communication.

Canada's multicultural experience is reflected in the book's emphasis on strategies for effective intercultural communication. Issues of language and identity are explored as they pertain to First Nations people and francophones. The com-

parisons of the cultural aspects of communication are based on hundreds of research studies conducted in Canada, the United States, Europe, Australia, Africa, and Asia.

This edition contains several improvements that reflect both progress in the field and refinements that help make the material clearer and more useful to students. Some notable changes include:

- New information on research, theory, and skills that will help the reader understand how relationships in the family and at work can operate most effectively (Chapter 12)
- New 'Skill Builder' boxes to help students apply their knowledge to work-related scenarios

## Enhanced Pedagogy

This edition of *Interplay* builds on the pedagogical approach that has successfully helped students appreciate how scholarship leads to better understanding of communication in the 'real world'.

### New 'Self-Assessment' Instruments

Each chapter contains a 'Self-Assessment' instrument that allows readers to analyze their current communication behaviour and its consequences. For example, these activities help students recognize how interpersonal their own relationships are (Chapter 1), what their listening styles are (Chapter 7), how emotionally resilent they are and how much they self-disclose (Chapters 4 and 9), and how they handle verbal aggression (Chapter 10).

### New 'Focus on Research' Profiles

In every chapter, 'Focus on Research' sidebars highlight scholarship that students will find interesting and useful.

New profiles that address a diverse array of topics, including balancing interpersonal warmth and efficiency in customer service (Chapter 1); differences between how men and women communicate online (Chapter 2); the risks of misunderstandings when same-sex friends express affection (Chapter 3); how self-talk affects health and well-being (Chapter 4); the many interpretations of 'flaming' in e-mail messages (Chapter 5); how cultural misunderstandings contributed to the mistreatment of First Nations girls (Chapter 6); the development of new communication styles by health care professionals serving First Nations communities (Chapter 7); how children of immigrants manage the different expectations of their parents' culture and Canadian culture (Chapter 8); how social networks differ in rural and urban Canada (Chapter 9); bullying in the workplace (Chapter 10); conflicts in same-sex and opposite-sex friendships (Chapter 11); and topic avoidance in stepfamilies (Chapter 12).

Readers who are familiar with the earlier, US editions will notice that the structure of the book has been partly reorganized, spelling and usage have been Canadianized, and the writing style has been adapted for a Canadian readership.

## Ancillaries

An updated, expanded Instructor's Manual by Ann Mitchell and Cami Bergquist of the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha and Connie Winder of George Brown College gives both experienced and new instructors strategies for teaching efficiently and effectively.

The *Interplay* website at www.oup.com/ca/he/companion/adlerinterplay provides a wealth of resources for instructors and students, including reviews of popular films that illustrate communication principles covered in the text.

Also available is a test bank containing class-tested examination questions that can be customized to fit each instructor's focus.

## Acknowledgements

Creating a book like *Interplay* simply isn't possible without the help of many talented people. We are grateful to the many colleagues whose suggestions have helped make this book a far better one: Jerry Buley, Arizona State University; Patrick Ecker, Jefferson Community College;

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We would like to thank Janet Bollow Alleyn for her contributions to the book's design. Sherri Adler enlivened the book by selecting most of the photos and illustrations. Their considerable talents are obvious, and we are grateful for them.

Finally, we thank our wives and families for their tolerance during the many hours when we put our own interpersonal relationships 'on hold' to work on *Interplay.*

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C.W.

# Chapter One

## Why We Communicate

- Physical Needs
- Identity Needs
- Social Needs
- Practical Needs

## The Communication Process

- A Model of Communication
- Insights from the Communication Model
- Communication Principles
- Communication Misconceptions

## Interpersonal Communication Defined

- Quantitative and Qualitative Definitions
- Personal and Impersonal Communication: A Matter of Balance
- Interpersonal Communication and Technology

## Interpersonal Communication and Cultural Diversity

- Culture
- Intercultural Communication
- Interpersonal and Intercultural Communication

## Comparison of Canadian and American Culture

- Attitudes toward Violence
- Tolerance of Diversity
- Relative Status of Men and Women

## Communication Competence

- Communication Competence Defined
- Motivation and Open-mindedness
- Knowledge of Other Cultures and Mindfulness
- Characteristics of Competent Communication

## Summary

## Activities

## Discussion Questions

## Key Terms

- Channel
- Co-culture
- Cognitive complexity
- Communication competence
- Computer-mediated communication (CMC)
- Content message
- Culture
- Dyad
- Ethnocentrism
- Environment
- Feedback
- Intercultural communication
- Noise (external, physiological, psychological)
- Qualitative interpersonal communication
- Quantitative interpersonal communication
- Relational message
- Self-monitoring
- Stereotyping
- Transactional

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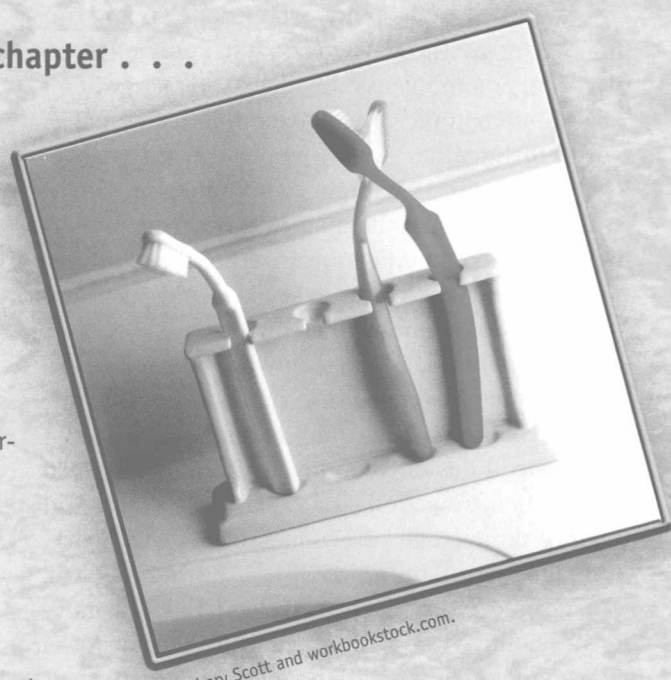
# Interpersonal Process

## After studying the material in this chapter . . .

### You Should Understand:

1. The needs that effective communication can satisfy.
2. Four insights from the communication model.
3. Five key principles of communication.
4. Four misconceptions about communication.
5. Quantitative and qualitative definitions of interpersonal communication.
6. The characteristics of competent communication.



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### You Should Be Able To:

1. Identify examples of the physical, identity, social, and practical needs you attempt to satisfy by communicating.
2. Demonstrate how the communication model applies to your interpersonal communication.
3. Describe the degrees to which your communication is qualitatively impersonal and interpersonal, and describe the consequences of this combination.
4. Identify situations in which you communicate competently, and those in which your competence is less than satisfactory.

Everyone communicates. Students and professors, parents and children, employers and employees, friends, strangers, and enemies—all communicate. We have been communicating with others from the moment of our birth and will keep on doing so until we die.

Why study an activity you've done your entire life? There are three reasons. First, studying interpersonal communication will give you a new look at a familiar topic. For instance, in a few pages you will find that some people can go years—even a lifetime—without communicating in a truly interpersonal manner. In this sense, exploring human communication is rather like studying anatomy or botany—everyday objects and processes take on new meaning.

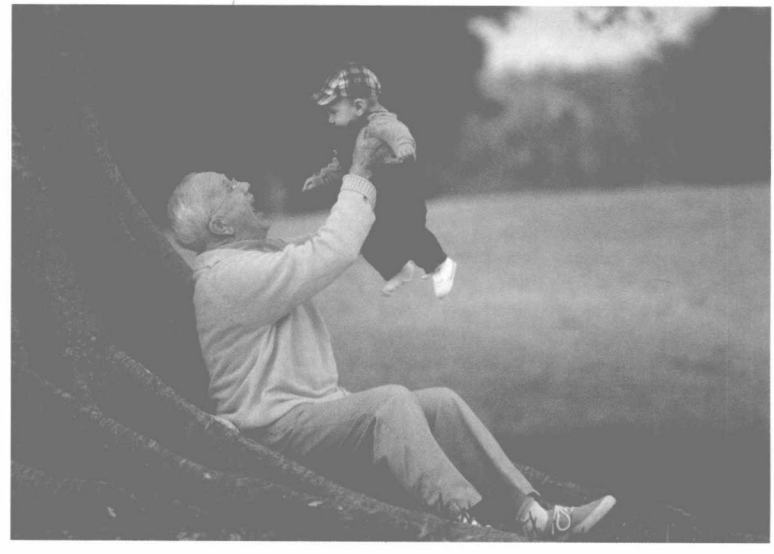
A second reason for studying the subject has to do with the staggering amount of time we spend communicating. For example, a study of over one thousand employees at *Fortune* 1000 companies revealed that workers send and receive an average of 178 messages every working day (Ginsburg, 1999). Another survey (Nellermoe et al., 1999) revealed that business professionals spend 80 per cent of their business day communicating with colleagues and clients.

There is a third, more compelling reason for studying interpersonal communication. To put it bluntly, all of us could learn to communicate more effectively. Our friendships, jobs, and studies suffer because we fail to deal with others as effectively as is necessary. A group of senior executives cited lack of interpersonal skills as one of the top three skill deficits in today's workforce (Marchant, 1999). In an American survey, 'lack of effective communication' was given as the cause of relational breakups—including divorce—more often than anything else, including money, relatives or in-laws, sexual problems, previous relationships, or children (National Communication Association, 1999). If you pause now and make a mental list of communication problems you have encountered, you'll see that, no matter how successful your relationships are at home, with friends, at school, and at work, there is plenty of room for improvement in your everyday life. The information that follows will help you improve the way you communicate with some of the people who matter most to you.

## Why We Communicate

Research demonstrating the importance of communication has been around longer than you might think. Frederick II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from 1220 to 1250, was called *stupor mundi*—'wonder of the world'—by his admiring subjects. Along with his administrative and military talents, Frederick was a leading scientist of his time. A medieval historian described one of his dramatic, if inhumane, experiments:

> He bade foster mothers and nurses to suckle the children, to bathe and wash them, but in no way to prattle with them, for he wanted to learn whether they would speak the Hebrew language, which was the oldest, or Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, or perhaps the language of their parents, of whom they had been born. But he laboured in vain because all



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> the children died. For they could not live without the petting and joyful faces and loving words of their foster mothers. (Ross and McLaughlin, 1949, p. 366)

Fortunately, contemporary researchers have found less drastic ways to illustrate the importance of communication. In one study of isolation, five subjects were paid to remain alone in a locked room. One lasted for eight days. Three held out for two days, one commenting, 'Never again.' The fifth subject lasted only two hours (Schachter, 1959, pp. 9–10).

The need for contact and companionship is just as strong outside the laboratory, as people who have led solitary lives by choice or necessity have discovered. W. Carl Jackson, an adventurer who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean alone in fifty-one days, summarized the feelings common to most loners:

> I found the loneliness of the second month almost excruciating. I always thought of myself as self-sufficient, but I found life without people had no meaning. I had a definite need for somebody to talk to, someone real, alive, and breathing.

You might object to stories like this, claiming that solitude would be a welcome relief from the irritations of everyday life. It's true that all of us need solitude, often more than we get. On the other hand, each of us has a point beyond which we do not *want* to be alone. Beyond this point, solitude changes from a pleasurable to a painful condition. In other words, we all need people. We all need to communicate.

### Physical Needs

Communication is so important that its presence or absence affects physical health. Recent studies confirm that people who process a negative experience by talking about it report improved life satisfaction, as well as enhanced mental and physical health, compared to those who only think about it (Sousa, 2002). A study conducted with police officers found that being able to talk easily to colleagues and supervisors about work-related trauma was related to better physical and mental health (Stephens and Long, 2000).

In extreme cases, communication can even become a matter of life or death. It is not surprising that one of the worst punishment that inmates in western prisons are subjected to is solitary confinement. Known to North American prisoners as 'the hole', segregation units have been described by both psychologists and inmates as far more damaging and harder to bear than physical punishment. The isolation from both the physical world (so that one does not know if it is day or night or what the weather is like) and the complete lack of meaningful communication with other people combine to create a situation in which most inmates would prefer to die. In his book, *Justice behind the Walls*, law professor and human rights advocate Michael Jackson (2002) describes the effects of solitary confinement on Canadian prisoners.

> My journey has taken me into segregation units—contemporary versions of Dante's Inferno—where prisoners scream abuse and hurl their bodily fluids and guards respond violently with fire hoses and nightsticks. I have sat with prisoners hopeless beyond tears as they contemplate suicide, and knelt at a segregation cell door, scanning through the narrow food slot the barren interior of a prisoner's world, begging a man not to use a razor blade to slash his eyeballs.

Satisfying communication isn't a necessity just for prisoners. Evidence gathered by medical researchers (e.g., Cohen et al., 1997; Hall and Havens, 2002; Maté, 2003; Ruberman, 1992) and social scientists (e.g., Duck, 1998) shows that satisfying relationships can literally be a matter of life and death for people who lead normal lives. For example:

- People who lack strong relationships run two to three times the risk of early death, regardless of whether they smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, or exercise regularly.

- Terminal cancer strikes socially isolated people more often than those who have close personal relationships.
- Divorced, separated, and widowed people are five to ten times more likely to need psychiatric hospitalization than their married counterparts.
- Perceived loneliness is one of the strongest predictors of poor health among the elderly.
- Pregnant women under stress and without supportive relationships have three times as many complications as pregnant women who suffer from the same stress but have strong social support.
- Social isolation is a major risk factor contributing to heart disease, comparable to physiological factors such as an inadequate diet, cigarette smoking, obesity, and lack of physical activity.
- Socially isolated people are four times as susceptible to the common cold as those who have active social networks.

Research like this demonstrates the importance of satisfying personal relationships, and it explains the conclusion of social scientists that communication is essential (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Not everyone needs the same amount of contact, and the quality of communication is almost certainly as important as the quantity. Nonetheless, the point remains: personal communication is essential for our well-being. To paraphrase a popular song, 'people who need people' aren't 'the luckiest people in the world': They're the *only* people!

### Identity Needs

Communication does more than enable us to survive. It is the way—indeed, the *major* way—we learn who we are (Fogel et al., 2002). As you'll read in Chapter 2, our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other people. Are we smart or stupid, attractive or ugly, skilful or inept? The answers to these questions don't come from looking in the mirror. We decide who we are on the basis of how others react to us.

Deprived of communication with others, we would have no sense of identity. In his book *Bridges Not Walls*, John Stewart (2002) dramatically illustrates this fact by citing the case of the famous 'Wild Boy of Aveyron', who spent his early childhood without any apparent human contact. The boy was discovered in January 1800 while digging for vegetables in a French village garden. He showed no behaviour one would expect in a social human. He could not speak but uttered only weird cries. More significant than this absence of social skills was his lack of any identity as a human being. As author Roger Shattuck (1980, p. 37) put it, 'The boy had no human sense of being in the world. He had no sense of himself as a person related to other persons.' Only after the influence of a loving 'mother' did the boy begin to behave—and, we can imagine, think of himself—as a human.

Modern stories support the essential role that communication plays in shaping identity. In 1970, the authorities discovered a twelve-year-old girl (whom they called 'Genie') who had spent virtually all her life in an otherwise empty, darkened bedroom with almost no human contact. The child could not speak and had no sense of herself as a person until she was removed from her family and 'nourished' by a team of caregivers (Rymer, 1993).

Like Genie and the boy of Aveyron, each of us enters the world with little or no sense of identity. We gain an idea of who we are from the way others define us. As Chapter 2 explains, the messages we receive in early childhood are the strongest identity shapers, but the influence of other people continues throughout our lives.

### Social Needs

Some social scientists have argued that besides helping define who we are, communication is the principal way relationships are created (Duck and Pittman, 1994). For example, Julie Yingling (1994) asserts that children 'talk friendships into existence'. As Chapter 8 explains, sometimes we deal with social needs directly by discussing our relationships with others. But more often, communication satisfies a variety of social needs without our ever addressing them overtly. Rebecca Rubin

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