EMOTIONS AND COMMUNICATION

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Winning or losing the World Series can be an emotional experience for baseball players and their fans. When the St. Louis Cardinals beat the Texas Rangers in the seventh game of the World Series in 2011, the emotion of their come-from-behind victory was written all over their faces. The players rushed the field shouting and cheering, fans were seen in the stands hugging and laughing, and media footage showed people watching in bars and restaurants all over St. Louis who were exuberant with joy. Conversely, the disappointment among the Texas Rangers players and fans was palpable. The players retreated to their dugout hanging their heads, the media focused on a child in the stands who was crying, and fans generally were dumbfounded at the loss. During major sporting events like the World Series, players and fans experience a wide range of emotions.

St. Louis fans felt pride and joy in their team’s success, and Texas fans felt disappointment and frustration upon losing the final game in the series. In your own life, you feel emotion in response to your own triumphs and hardships, and you experience emotions when good or bad things happen to people you care about. For example, you might feel grief at the funeral of a loved one, joy at your best friend’s wedding, frustration when your team loses the World Series, and pride when you accept your college diploma. **Moods** are pervasive or lasting feelings that range from bad to good, and **emotions** are more fleeting feelings that arise in particular situations. Emotions are especially relevant to interpersonal communication, because interactions evoke feelings and your feelings shape how you communicate. In this chapter, we examine the nature of emotions, look at how feelings are at work when we communicate with others, and consider how the communication situation shapes the way we express our feelings. Finally, we explore the painful emotions that sometimes arise in our interactions with friends, family, and romantic partners.

**WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?**

Consider all of the different emotions you might have over the course of a typical day. When you wake up, you might feel content with a good night’s sleep, eager to face the day, or perhaps fearful about a midterm exam. As you make your way to work or campus, you could become frustrated by a traffic jam, worried about being late, or pleased when you run into a friend. After a class, you might be happy with high marks on an assignment, or disappointed by a low grade. And as you communicate with others, you might find yourself angered by an insult, grateful for a compliment, hurt by a careless remark, or embarrassed when you say the wrong thing. These examples show how your everyday experiences are rich with emotions. In this section of the chapter, we will take a closer look at types of emotions, the causes of emotions, and distinct facets of emotional experiences.
Types of Emotions

The different emotions that you feel allow you to relate to your circumstances in nuanced ways. And when you recognize different emotions in yourself and in others, you gain a more complete understanding of your interpersonal communication experiences. To help you appreciate the variety of emotions you experience, the following paragraphs examine three frameworks for distinguishing the emotions people experience.

One way to distinguish emotions is to focus on how positive or negative they are and how intensely the emotion is felt (Yik, Russell, & Barrett, 1999). In Figure 7.2, the horizontal dimension distinguishes between pleasant and unpleasant emotional experiences. Pleasant emotions include happiness, joy, and contentment, whereas unpleasant emotions include anger, sadness, and fear. The vertical dimension contrasts emotions that involve a high or low degree of arousal. As examples, consider the difference between annoyance and anger or contentment and happiness. This way of thinking about emotions emphasizes how emotions are generally more or less positive and more or less strong.

Another way to understand emotions is to identify the different types of feelings people have. Basic emotions include common and universal feelings like happiness,
surprise, sadness, fear, and anger. Each of these primary or “pure” emotions can take various forms (see Figure 7.3). For example, fear includes the feelings evoked by a poisonous snake, a horror film, a roller coaster, or a job interview (Russell & Barrett, 1999). Furthermore, basic emotions can come together to create blended emotions. As one example, consider the feelings involved in jealousy: fear that your love interest will leave you, anger at the interloper, and maybe just a dash of sadness that your relationship isn’t as strong as you hoped it was (Sharpsteen, 1991). This perspective helps you to
understand the most common emotions you experience, as well as how those emotions are related to more precise or more complex feelings.

Some emotions are specifically tied to your relationships or communication with other people (Guerrero & Andersen, 2000). These social emotions take four distinct forms (see Table 7.1). Affectionate emotions create attachment and closeness with other people. Self-conscious emotions arise from a focus on how the self is perceived by others. Melancholic emotions occur when interpersonal experiences aren’t fulfilling or have changed for the worse. Hostile emotions emerge from feelings of injury or threat in the context of interpersonal relationships. Although some of these emotions can occur outside of interpersonal experience, social contexts dramatically intensify these feelings. For example, imagine how differently you would feel if you tripped in the front of an empty classroom versus one that was filled with other students.

Causes of Emotions

Where do your emotions come from? The starting point is your perceptions of your circumstances. More specifically, appraisals are perceptions of whether you are getting what you want in a situation and whether conditions are favorable or unfavorable to your goals. For example, if your goal is to get your friend to loan you her car, you would take stock of barriers to that goal (the fact the she appears ready to drive to the store) or cues that suggest you might succeed (she is busy studying for an exam). You also make more specific appraisals concerning, for example, how hard you will have to work achieve your goals under the circumstances, how much you can control the situation, or how certain you are about what will happen (Dillard & Seo, in press). Thus, appraisals capture a variety of judgments you make about your circumstances.

Appraisal theories of emotion claim that different appraisals of the environment elicit different emotional responses (e.g., Roseman & Smith, 2001). Generally speaking, when you believe that the situation will enable you to achieve your goals, you experience positive emotions, and when you think that the situation will interfere with your goals, you experience negative emotions. Within this general framework, specific emotions are distinguished by the particular appraisals that you make (Planalp, 1999; Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001; see Table 7.2).

The link between appraisals and emotions are particularly relevant in the context of close relationships. Consider how you might feel if you saw your romantic partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affectionate emotions</th>
<th>Self-conscious emotions</th>
<th>Melancholic emotions</th>
<th>Hostile emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Jealousy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Envy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hurt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
flirting with someone else, or if your romantic partner wanted to have a talk about the future of your relationship. These types of events can increase your doubts and uncertainty about a relationship, which affects your emotional reactions to the event. In particular, people who perceive that they will have to work to resolve the situation tend to feel more anger, sadness, fear, and jealousy; people who believe they need to pay attention to the situation feel more sadness and fear; and people who see the situation as predictable are happier (Knobloch, 2005). Thus, appraisals of a situation are closely linked to the emotions we experience during interpersonal interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appraisal of the situation or event</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An injustice is interfering with a desired and obtainable goal</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something of value has been lost and can’t be recovered</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation allows a desired goal to be met</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An unpleasant outcome is possible, but not certain</td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have behaved in a way that violates my moral ideals</td>
<td>Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have behaved in a way that makes me look inept to others</td>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Think of the last time that you knew something wasn’t going to work out the way you wanted. What was the reason for that outcome? Did you feel mostly anger, sadness, grief, or anxiety? What role did other people play in your emotional experience?

Components of Emotions

The feelings that are set in motion by your appraisals have four distinct parts. Consider the example of Wendy, who is waiting for an important job interview. As you think about how Wendy is feeling, you can probably identify multiple facets of her emotional experiences.

Perhaps the most obvious component of emotions is your self-perceptions of emotion, in other words, your own awareness of how you feel. For example, Wendy will probably recognize if she is feeling nervous rather than confident about the interview. Because your perceptions of your emotions reflect how you label and interpret your feelings, they are an essential part of your experiences. In fact, people who have experienced traumatic events, like fighting in a war, develop a better understanding of their complex experiences.
feelings once they are able to put those emotions into words (Pennebaker, 1997). Thus, self-perceptions of your emotions allow you to define your feelings for yourself and others.

Anyone who has experienced intense anger, fear, or elation knows that emotions also have a physiological component. As Wendy awaits her interview, no doubt her heart is beating a bit faster, her skin temperature rises a bit, and she may even be queasy. Even variations on positive emotions, such as different types of love, correspond with distinct physiological reactions within your body (Shiota, Neufeld, Yeung, Moser, & Perea, 2011). The **physiology of emotion** refers to the physical changes that occur within body systems when you experience feelings. Within the cardiovascular system, heart rate, blood flow to different parts of the body, and oxygen or adrenaline levels in the blood vary with different emotions. Likewise, the respiratory system may speed up or slow down depending on experiences of sadness, anger, fear, etc. In a very real sense, emotions are physical experiences.

The physical changes during emotion are often visible to others. **Nonverbal markers of emotion** are changes in appearance that coincide with the experience of emotion. Nonverbal displays can be unconscious reflections of the physiological changes emotions produce, for example, the increase in blood flow to the face caused by embarrassment is visible as blushing. You can also consciously display or exaggerate nonverbal markers of emotion in an effort to communicate feelings to other people. In fact, people are likely to feel an emotion more strongly when they intentionally display that feeling (Matsumoto, 1987). Thus, while Wendy’s feelings of apprehension might be revealed by her crossed arms, her wide eyes, and her rigid posture, she might feel more at ease if she can relax her body and smile at the secretary. In these ways, nonverbal markers of emotion are the visible features that both reflect and affect your feelings.

Wendy’s emotions fuel her behavior during the interview – her anxiety prompts her to pay attention to the interviewer’s every word, and her confidence leads her to share information freely. The behaviors that emotions compel us to perform are called **action tendencies**. In fact, the physiological component of emotions makes the body ready to perform behaviors appropriate for particular feelings. For example, think of the last time that you felt really angry. Your heart was pounding, you were probably quite alert, and your muscles were tense. These changes poised you to do battle with the source of your anger. Alternatively, remember the last time that you felt sad. Your slow heart and respiratory rate were better suited to pulling the covers over your head. The behaviors promoted by emotions depend on the characteristics of the specific situation, but Table 7.3 summarizes some general action tendencies that have been associated with various emotions (Oatley, 1992). Because these links have been found across different cultural groups (Matsumoto, 2001), action tendencies are assumed to be a basic part of the experience of emotions.

From your perceptions of a situation to the actions you take, your feelings allow you to interface with the world around you. Appraisals focus on discrepancies between what you desire and what is present in a situation. These appraisals elicit specific emotions. Emotions, in turn, involve physiological changes to the body that allow you to perform certain actions. Those actions, quite conveniently, are often the very behaviors that can close the gap between your actual and preferred circumstances. In this sense, emotions are part of a finely tuned system that promotes fitting responses to the communication situations in which you find yourself.
Putting Theory into Practice: Recognizing and Communicating Emotions

Emotions arise out of your perceptions of your circumstances, and your feelings involve several components that work in concert. This knowledge can help you to more clearly identify and describe both your own emotional experiences and the emotions of people around you.

### TABLE 7.3 Emotional action tendencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Attack</td>
<td>Conquer a barrier to obtaining a desired outcome</td>
<td>The anger Mark feels when his co-workers haven’t done their share gives him the energy he needs to finish the project alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>Provide time to adjust to a loss</td>
<td>Sarah’s sadness at the break-up of her romantic relationship slows her down so that she can revise her future plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Take advantage of favorable circumstances</td>
<td>T.J.’s happiness at finding the printer he needs on sale helps him decide to make the investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Fight or flight</td>
<td>Eliminate a threat by either conquering it or out-running it</td>
<td>Lacey’s fear when the exam study guide was handed out motivates her to devote extra study time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Make amends</td>
<td>Restore one’s sense of oneself as moral</td>
<td>Brian’s shame over losing his temper with his daughter compels him to apologize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Get away from people who witnessed the incompetence</td>
<td>Rachel’s embarrassment over her poor class presentation prompts her to cut class the following week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PAUSE & REFLECT**

Think of the last situation that made you feel anxious. How was your increased vigilance an advantage or disadvantage as you coped with that situation?

**Putting Theory into Practice: Recognizing and Communicating Emotions**

Emotions arise out of your perceptions of your circumstances, and your feelings involve several components that work in concert. This knowledge can help you to more clearly identify and describe both your own emotional experiences and the emotions of people around you.
Seek out specific labels to describe feelings. Rather than describe how you are feeling in general, try to use the wealth of emotion labels to capture your precise emotions. Instead of “angry,” are you really frustrated, merely annoyed, exasperated, or raging mad? Similarly, encourage your communication partners to identify their specific feelings. For example, if your friend says that he is sad, probe those feelings to clarify whether he is gloomy, depressed, hurt, or heartbroken. By seeking out specific labels to describe feelings, you will help other people to understand your own emotions and you can respond more effectively to other people’s feelings. You can practice this skill by completing Communication in Action 7.1 exercise.

COMMUNICATION IN ACTION 7.1

Charting Your Emotions

This exercise is intended to help you understand your emotional experiences in greater detail. Using the form you download from the companion website, keep a diary of your emotions over the course of one full day. By logging your emotions every hour, and noting details about the situations surrounding your emotional experiences, you’ll gain insight into the circumstances that evoke emotions and how you tend to describe those emotions.

Address all of the components of emotions when you express or respond to feelings.

You can use your knowledge about the different parts of an emotional experience to both express and respond to feelings more effectively. Beyond your self-perceptions of emotion (“I’m frightened”), you might describe your physiological state (“my heart is pounding”) or how your emotions make you want to act (“I feel like hiding out in my room”). These descriptions can help others empathize with what you are feeling and appreciate its full effect on you. Likewise, keep in mind the multiple facets of emotions when other people share their feelings with you. The Communication in Action 7.2 activity will help you identify the physiological and behavioral aspects of your emotions.

COMMUNICATION IN ACTION 7.2

Beyond Self-perceptions of Emotion

This exercise will help you think about the physical changes you experience when you have different emotions. Visit the companion website for the instructions and to download a form for this activity.

Locate the cause of emotions within people’s appraisals. In the heat of the moment, you might find yourself pointing an emotional finger at others: “You make me angry.” “You
hurt my feelings." “You are bringing me down.” But remember, emotions arise from your appraisals of how a situation fits with your goals. In other words, the feelings you experience are the result of perceptions and objectives that exist within you. As you make sense of your feelings and communicate them to others, acknowledge that your own perceptions and goals are at the root of your emotions. Similarly, encourage other people to own their own emotions by helping them to identify the goals and appraisals that are fueling their feelings. The following questions might help you sort out your appraisals of your emotions:

- What is your goal in this situation?
- What is preventing you from reaching your goal?
- Why are you upset about the barriers preventing you from reaching your goal?
- How can you eliminate the barriers to your goal?
- How can you change how you are reacting to your unmet goals?

FEELINGS AND COMMUNICATION

Emotions and interpersonal communication go hand-in-hand. The strongest emotions you experience – for example, love, hate, or shame – occur within social situations. Even emotions that you experience by yourself, such as grief and loneliness, are connected to relationships with others. In this section, we examine how feelings shape and reflect interpersonal communication.

Feelings Cause Communication

Most emotions can be addressed by using communication to confront, avoid, embrace, or repair the situation that provoked your feelings. The anger you feel when someone interferes with your goals might compel you to raise your voice and argue. Likewise, you can relive situations that made you happy by telling your friends about those experiences. Research shows that feeling lonely or disconnected causes people to engage others through social media, such as Facebook (Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011). In the workplace, feeling guilty often motivates people to work harder and, in turn, feel greater commitment to their job (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012). In ways such as these, the emotions you experience underlie many of your communication experiences.

Emotions also explain why people react to a particular situation in different ways. For example, people who feel sympathy for a friend in distress use communication to solve the problem or to make their friend feel better, whereas people who feel angry will try to make the friend take responsibility for the problem (MacGeorge, 2001). Similarly, when people feel angry about an unexpected event in a dating relationship, they are more likely to confront their partner, but when they feel sad, they prefer to avoid communication (Knobloch, 2005). As these examples illustrate, your communication goals and behaviors reflect the action tendencies of specific emotions (Burleson & Planalp, 2000; Dillard & Seo, in press).
Communication Describes Feelings

Some of the most intimate interpersonal interactions involve messages about emotions and feelings themselves. You might unconsciously reveal your emotions through physical displays, such as teary eyes or slumped shoulders, and you also deliberately communicate your feelings to others. Research shows that most people describe their emotions to at least one other person (Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991). Indeed, many people use emoticons in email, instant, or text messages to convey feelings to communication partners (Carter, 2003). Discussing emotions can also be a prominent part of coping with negative life events, such as losing a job (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). Both consciously and unconsciously, our verbal and nonverbal behaviors convey our emotions to others.

Communication Affects Feelings

From the warmth you experience after a jovial exchange with a friend to the elation of hearing “I love you” from that someone special, the messages you receive from others have tremendous emotional potential. Not surprisingly, people sometimes tap that potential to shape the emotions of people around them. People sometimes craft messages to make others feel embarrassed (Bradford & Petronio, 1998), guilty (Chang, 2011; Vangelisti, Daly, & Rudnick, 1991), or jealous (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011). You can also use communication to make people feel better. For example, when Jen’s grandfather was dying of lung disease, she didn’t dwell on medical tests and gloomy topics when she went to visit him. Instead, she tried to entertain him with stories about graduate school and debates about politics. You can also cheer people up by helping them to change the appraisals that are at the root of bad feelings (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). For example, when Denise’s friend lost her job, Denise tried to persuade her to view the situation not as a loss, but as an opportunity to start her own business or perhaps go back to school. In these ways, producing or changing emotions might be the driving force behind interpersonal communication.

Feelings Shape Interpretations of Messages

Your feelings also influence how you interpret messages from others. At a general level, moods influence how people perceive a situation, and people in a bad mood react more critically when they are asked to do something (Forgas, 1995, 1998). You also tend to
focus on information that is relevant to your specific emotions. For example, people who are afraid of the consequences of drunk driving are more likely to seek information on how to protect themselves (Nabi, 2003). Similarly, people who feel positively toward a presidential candidate tend to notice the strengths of that candidate’s performance in a political debate (Hullett, Louden, & Mitra, 2003).

Research by James Dillard and Eugenia Peck (2000) shows how messages can cause emotions that, in turn, shape how people respond to the messages. Dillard and Peck studied public service announcements (PSAs), which encourage viewers to buckle their seatbelts, stop smoking, avoid recreational drugs, practice safer sex, or stop littering. These televised messages evoke a variety of emotions, including surprise, fear, anger, sadness, happiness, and contentment. Dillard and Peck found that the emotional responses viewers had to the PSA predicted their subsequent attitudes about the advice given in the message. For example, people who felt fear in response to a PSA were more likely to be persuaded by the message, but people who felt anger tended to reject the advice offered in the PSA. In a similar fashion, your feelings and your interpretations of messages are intertwined within interpersonal interactions.

**Putting Theory into Practice: Expressing and Responding to Emotions**

Emotions are woven into the fabric of interpersonal interactions. Once you embrace feelings as an inevitable part of communicating with others, you can take steps to improve both how you express your emotions and how you respond to the feelings expressed to you by others.

*If you’re going to show your emotions, you might as well express them.* Oftentimes, people leave it to their nonverbal cues to convey emotions to others. In other words, instead of expressing your joy, you simply act happy; instead of apologizing, you act remorseful; or instead of explaining your anger, you act mad. Of course, there are occasions when you might want to downplay your emotions (such as when you’ve just received an awful birthday present from your romantic partner). When you want to share your emotions, you’ll be more effective if you can find a way to verbalize your feelings. Use the Communication in Action 7.3 exercise to help you put your emotions into words.

**COMMUNICATION IN ACTION 7.3**

**Verbal Expressions of Emotion**

This exercise involves using the form on the companion website to think of a time when a friend, romantic partner, sibling, parent, or co-worker did something that upset you, and to reflect on how you can put those emotions into words.
Consider other people’s goals when you respond to their emotions. When people express their feelings to you, think about what’s driving those messages and tailor your responses to those goals. When a friend shares his fears with you, he may want you either to protect him from harm or to reassure him that he is safe. If you are on the receiving end of someone’s anger, explore whether she wants you to understand her feelings, to help her achieve a goal, or to get out of her way. By recognizing the action tendencies that accompany emotions, you can more effectively help your friends recover from embarrassment, relieve a parent of guilt, cheer up a sad co-worker, and prolong a child’s joy. When you find yourself on the receiving end of someone’s emotional expression, use the following questions to guide your response:

- Why is this person telling me about this event?
- Am I the cause of this emotion or am I supposed to help this person resolve the emotion?
- What might I have done to contribute to this emotion?
- How is this emotion relevant to the context of this interaction?
- What is this person trying to accomplish by expressing this emotion?
- What can I do to help this person achieve his or her goal?

FACTORS THAT AFFECT EMOTIONS AND COMMUNICATION

The links between emotions and communication depend on the cultural context, characteristics of the people involved, and their interpersonal relationship. By understanding how these factors shape how feelings are expressed, you can improve your ability to decipher other people’s emotional messages. In turn, you will be able to respond more effectively to the emotions that communication partners express to you.

Cultural Norms

Some aspects of emotional experiences are shared across cultures – these include the automatic or unconscious parts of emotion such as physiological changes, facial displays, and action tendencies. Moreover, basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and surprise are experienced by people of all cultures. However, when it comes to how people consciously act upon their emotions, culture plays a major role. A culture’s display rules tell its members when, where, and how emotions should be expressed. Consider, for example, how people of different religions grieve the death of a loved one. Within Judaism, a death is followed by seven days of intensive mourning, during which mirrors are covered, men do not shave, and family members wear a black ribbon. In contrast, Buddhism sees death as part of the normal order of the universe, and only a one-hour period of prayer or meditation is typical.

In a similar fashion, culture dictates how people express everyday emotions like happiness, anger, jealousy, pride, etc. In general, culture shapes people’s willingness to rely on others for emotional support (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005). For example, compared to the United States, people from Costa Rica are more comfortable
expressing positive emotions to either family or non-family members, but they are generally less comfortable expressing negative emotions (Stephan, Stephan, & de Vargas, 1996). Another study concluded that Japanese culture discourages the display of both strong negative emotions and positive emotions, compared to North American cultures (Safdar et al., 2009). In the context of romantic relationships, European Americans report feeling and expressing emotions more intensely than Japanese Americans do (Aune & Aune, 1996). As these examples illustrate, culture influences whether, to whom, and how intensely emotions are communicated.

PAUSE & REFLECT

In what ways do your experiences and expressions of happiness, pride, anger, and sadness reflect your cultural background?

Culture can also set different standards for emotional expression based on a person’s age. In American society, we tolerate extreme expressions of anger, frustration, sadness, and joy from children in their “terrible twos” (Figure 7.4) – can you imagine a middle-aged adult expressing raw emotions in the same way? Relative to older adults, adolescents and young adults experience more negative emotions when they have interpersonal problems (Birditt & Fingerman, 2003). Moreover, elderly people exert more emotional control than younger adults (Thomsen, Mehlsen, Viidik, Sommerlund, & Zachariae, 2005). Although older adults are sometimes overcome by their emotions, people generally expect mature individuals to manage their emotions and express their feelings responsibly. Complete the Communication in Action 7.4 activity to test your assumptions about emotions and aging.

Biological sex has been linked to the experience and expression of emotions in ways that both span and reflect cultural norms. In general, studies of people from different nations and age groups suggest that women experience emotions more frequently and
intensely than men do (Brebner, 2003; Thomsen et al., 2005). A study of people from Japan, Canada, and the United States found similar sex differences across these cultures, such that men tended to express powerful emotions like anger more than women, while women were more likely than men to express sadness, fear, and happiness (Safdar et al., 2009). Within American society, display rules also tend to discourage men from disclosing their emotions (Burleson, Holmstrom, & Gilstrap, 2004). Accordingly, research conducted in the United States shows that women are more willing than men to rely on others for emotional support (Ryan et al., 2005). In addition, American women notice more distinctions and nuances in feelings than men do (Barrett, Lane, Sechrest, & Schwartz, 2000). Thus, these findings highlight how culture shapes how men and women express and make sense of emotional messages.

Emotional Intelligence

Within any cultural group, you’ll find that some people are more tuned into emotional messages than others. Emotional intelligence refers to people’s ability to understand and manage their own feelings, as well as the moods and emotions of others. Because feelings are complex, emotional intelligence requires self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, and social skill (Singh, 2004). More specifically, emotional intelligence includes being able to recognize emotional nuances, to put emotional information to use, to understand how emotions work, and to either promote or suppress emotional experiences in one’s self and in others (Goleman, 2006). Thus, an emotionally intelligent person is insightful, articulate, and in control when it comes to affective experiences; someone who is agreeable, likeable, and respected by others; and someone who engages in positive social experiences, rather than personally or interpersonally destructive behaviors (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The How Do You Rate? 7.2 exercise can help
you to learn about one facet of emotional intelligence: an ability to rely on others for emotional support.

Research has connected emotional intelligence to several important outcomes. For example, people who are higher in emotional intelligence report having a better quality of life, in general (Singh, 2004). Emotional intelligence has also been linked to both leadership ability and a person’s performance as a member of a problem-solving team (George, 2000; Jordan & Troth, 2004). In contrast, a lack of emotional intelligence is associated with a variety of negative outcomes, including drug and alcohol abuse, deviant behavior, and poor relationships with friends (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004). Moreover, romantic couples in which both partners are low in emotional intelligence are more superficial, less supportive, and more prone to conflict than couples where at least one partner is emotionally intelligent (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005). When viewed in this light, emotional intelligence is revealed as a consequential aspect of people’s personality.

The Relationship Context

Another factor that shapes the expression of emotions is the nature of the relationship between partners. Close relationship partners have many opportunities to help or hinder each other’s goals in ways that evoke emotions (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2004). Research has shown that having a romantic partner who fulfills your needs increases your day-to-day experience of positive emotions (Le & Agnew, 2001). Conversely, people experience more intense negative emotions when a romantic partner, rather than a friend, dismisses their concerns (Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2005). Moreover, people’s disagreeable behaviors in relationships make their partner feel worse the more often they occur (Cunningham, Shamblen, Barbee, & Ault, 2005). In these ways, our closest relationships are also the most emotionally volatile.

Communicating emotions leaves you vulnerable to the other person’s response; therefore, you are more likely to express your emotions to relationship partners you trust. Not surprisingly, then, people are generally more willing to express emotions to partners in personal, rather than business, relationships (Clark & Finkel, 2005). In addition, college students in the United States report that they rely on their best friends for emotional support more than anyone else (Ryan et al., 2005, studies 1 and 2). Within romantic associations, both the expression of jealousy and the perceived appropriateness of expressing jealousy increase with the length of the relationship (Aune, Buller, & Aune, 1996; Aune & Comstock, 1997). As these examples illustrate, the nature and duration of a relationship influence how much the partners disclose their feelings.

HOW DO YOU RATE? 7.2

Willingness to Rely on Others for Emotional Support

Do you tend to “go it alone,” or do you turn to others in times of need? Complete the scale on the companion website to assess how much you turn to others when you are experiencing strong emotions. Ryan et al. (2005) found that the average score for emotional reliance on friends among participants in their study was 4.36. How do you compare? If you repeat this test, thinking about a family member or co-worker instead of a friend, how different would your scores be?

PAUSE & REFLECT

How do you express strong emotions like anger or love with different people, such as your parents, grandparents, friends, siblings, or a romantic partner?
One notable exception to the tendency for people to express emotions in close, rather than nonintimate, relationships is the practice of sharing emotions in online venues. For some people, visiting chatrooms, using Twitter, or blogging gives them a place to describe their feelings to an often large number of friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. If you have a Facebook account, take a quick look at the newsfeed coming in from your array of friends. On any given day, you might find a diversity of emotions running through your friendship network. Perhaps one friend expresses disappointment that her favorite NFL team lost (while another friend's spirits are lifted by the opposing team's victory). Or, maybe you have friends who use Facebook to comment on their frustration with their job, their children, their parents, or their neighbor's noisy dog. While it's true that many people prefer to discuss their emotions with close friends and relationship partners, the Internet also allows us to share our feelings with a much broader audience.

**Putting Theory into Practice: Developing Emotional Intelligence**

Within the boundaries set by culture, people's personal traits and skills influence how they communicate emotions, and the relationship between communicators shapes emotional messages. Armed with an understanding of how context shapes emotional messages, you can increase your emotional intelligence.

**Consider context when you express your feelings to others.** Although some aspects of your emotional experiences are automatic, emotional intelligence involves tailoring emotional messages to fit the situation. Here are strategies for incorporating context into your communication of emotions:

- If you are communicating with someone from a culture other than your own, keep in mind that your communication partner may have different rules for expressing emotions.
- Ask yourself in what ways your age, gender, or other characteristics might influence how others perceive your emotional messages.
- If you have especially strong or complex feelings to work through, seek out a friend who has the emotional intelligence to appreciate and respond to your emotions.
- Consider the extent to which your relationship with a communication partner allows you to share your feelings openly.

If you adapt your emotional messages to the situation, your communication partner will be more likely to understand your feelings and respond in the ways you had hoped.

**Use the social context to understand the emotions expressed by others.** Many people can recognize the emotions conveyed by a smile, a glare, or a trembling lip. Being able to understand the intensity or complexity of the feelings behind these displays, however, can be considerably more challenging. As you make sense of other people's emotional messages, think about how the context might be shaping their messages. In particular, consider these issues:

- How might your communication partner's cultural display rules require or prohibit the expression of particular emotions?
How skilled is your communication partner when it comes to expressing feelings – is this someone you can read like a book, or a person who typically sends ambiguous emotional messages?

Is your relationship prompting a partner to hide their emotions from you or express their feelings at full strength?

Paying attention to cultural norms, your partner’s emotional intelligence, and the kind of relationship you have can help you determine whether your communication partners are considerably more angry, sad, frightened, or happy than they appear.

**THE DARK SIDE OF EMOTIONS IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

Throughout this chapter, you have seen how feelings are an inevitable part of interpersonal communication. In this final section, we turn our attention to the intensely
negative emotions that can arise within our closest relationships. The **dark side of interpersonal communication** includes those aspects of interaction that relate to socially inappropriate goals, harmful behaviors, or painful experiences (for example, deception, violations, and abuse; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2007). To highlight how people use interpersonal communication to both cause and relieve painful emotions, consider hurt, grief, and jealousy.

**Hurt, Grief, and Jealousy**

The intimacy that makes close relationships so special can also leave people vulnerable to the hurtful actions of their partners. **Hurt** is considered a blended emotion that includes sadness, fear, and sometimes anger (Feeney, 2005; Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005). It is a uniquely social emotion, in that it arises from the injury produced by another person’s words or actions (Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). More specifically, you feel hurt when someone communicates that they don’t appreciate you, they don’t value the relationship as much as they used to, or they don’t feel they need to be supportive, faithful, open, and trustworthy (Feeney, 2005; Leary, 2001; Mills, Nazar, & Farrell, 2002). The form of a hurtful message also influences the pain it causes (Vangelisti, 1994). Compare two hurtful messages that Olivia might receive from her father, Alan. If Alan says, “I think you’re making a mess of your life,” Olivia might be hurt, but she can also argue the point. If Alan says, “I never loved you as much as your brother,” she is left without a rebuttal. These examples show both how interpersonal communication can be hurtful, and how some messages do more harm than others.

In the case of hurt, interpersonal communication creates negative feelings—for other emotions, interpersonal communication might be your only option for relieving your pain. **Grief** is a state of extreme sadness that includes feelings of despair, panic, guilt, and anger (Golish & Powell, 2003; Hogan, Greenfield, & Schmidt, 2001). Grief arises from the loss of something that was deeply valued, that you expected to enjoy into the future, and that is irreplaceable. Consider, for example, how grief might be associated with events such as a romantic break-up, a loved one’s cancer diagnosis, the loss of a job, or a death in the family. In cases such as these, grief is made worse when the loss is sudden, untimely, preventable, or violent (Stewart, 1999).

**FIGURE 7.6** Nias, Indonesia, March 30, 2005: A woman waits as rescuers search for the bodies of her missing family during rescue operations following an earthquake.

Source: Photo by Daniel Berehulak/Getty Images.
Although grief involves a sense of hopelessness, interpersonal communication does provide some relief. For example, research has shown that talking about an infant’s death allows parents to reconstruct their fractured identity (Hastings, 2000), and it decreases the experience of both grief and melancholy thoughts (Kamm & Vandenberg, 2001; Lepore, Silver, Wortman, & Wayment, 1996). Even the specific language used to discuss a terminal illness or to communicate with the grief-stricken can help to control intense feelings and show concern and support (Adamolekun, 1999; Frey, Adelman, & Query, 1996). In fact, one of the most helpful things you can do to comfort someone who is grieving is simply to express your willingness to listen (Range, Walston, & Pollard, 1992). Although nothing can recover the losses that lead to grief, interpersonal communication can be a key part of a person’s emotional recovery. The study that is described in the Inside Communication Research box focuses on the links between interpersonal communication and grief.

INSIDE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Communication and Grief

Given the tragic and personal nature of events that cause grief, studying how communication influences the recovery process is no simple task. People might be reluctant to talk to researchers about their losses. Even when people want to participate in studies of grief, their feelings might be too overwhelming or complex for them to describe easily. How, then, do scholars study interpersonal communication and grief? One example is provided by Tamara Golish and Kimberly Powell, who examined how grief and joy are intertwined when parents experience the premature birth of a child (Golish & Powell, 2003).

Golish and Powell began by posting an announcement on list-serves for parents of premature babies that asked for volunteers to participate in a study of the impact of premature births on family communication. People who responded were emailed a questionnaire, which they completed and sent back to the researchers. This questionnaire took the form of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to tell the story of the childbirth and their reactions to it.

Golish and Powell then conducted a qualitative/interpretive analysis of responses to the questionnaire. This method required both researchers to read and re-read the questionnaire responses in search of themes or issues. After reaching consensus about the themes that were present, the researchers read the questionnaires a final time to note how frequently each issue was mentioned.

The researchers concluded that the premature birth of a baby creates a crisis stemming from an ambiguous loss. On one hand, participants described their shock, sadness, and anger about both their infant’s medical condition and the loss of a full-term pregnancy; at the same time, these parents were celebrating the birth of their child. Communication also served many functions for the participants. Parents used communication to educate both themselves and their family members about premature births. In addition, communication from others was a source of support, reassurance, and community. Couples also used communication to develop a sense of solidarity and to stay connected with each other’s experience of the crisis. Finally, parents coped with the situation by focusing their talk on the present, rather than mourning the past or worrying about the future. These results provide a nuanced portrayal of the crisis created when the celebration of birth is mixed with grief.
Jealousy is yet another emotion that arises from perceptions of vulnerability and loss – in this case, feelings result from the perception that a valued relationship is threatened by a partner's competing interests (White & Mullen, 1989). Jealousy includes feelings of passion, fear, envy, hostility, irritation, guilt, sadness, and even love (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998; Guerrero, Trost, & Yoshimura, 2005). How do people cope with such varied and intense emotions? As summarized in Table 7.4, people can use interpersonal communication to pursue a variety of goals when they feel jealous. Table 7.4 also reveals that the responses to jealousy include options as diverse as denying feelings, confronting the rival, accusing the partner of infidelity, or showcasing one's strengths as a partner.

How people respond when they are jealous is influenced by the emotions they feel most strongly. For example, hostility promotes more violent reactions to jealousy, but fear leads people to try to regain their partner's affections (Guerrero et al., 2005). Although it isn't always easy to control negative reactions when your relationship is threatened, research has shown that communicating constructively and sharing feelings can heal the relationship (Andersen, Eloy, Guerrero, & Spitzberg, 1995). The process linking the emotions of jealousy to relationship outcomes is depicted in Figure 7.7. As you review that model, note how short-lived feelings of jealousy can lead to communication decisions that have a long-term impact on a romantic relationship.

**TABLE 7.4** Communication goals and strategies for responding to jealousy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals for communication about jealousy</th>
<th>Responses to jealousy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain the relationship: <em>We have to find a way to get through this together.</em></td>
<td>Physically distance yourself from the partner: <em>I need to get away for awhile.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recover from the loss of self-esteem: <em>I’m going to show that it’s her loss!</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce uncertainty about the situation and/or relationship: <em>I need to know what’s going on.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reassess the nature of the relationship: <em>This changes how I feel about her.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliate against the partner or rival: <em>I’m getting even, no matter what!</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 7.4 continued

Psychologically distance yourself from the partner: *I’m not going to think or talk about this.*
Engage in covert surveillance to gather more information: *I wonder what is going on?*
Display negative affect by crying or acting upset: *I’m upset with you.*
Confront and accuse the partner: *I think you have been unfaithful.*
Communicate or behave violently: *You’re not getting away with this!*
Manipulate your partner’s feelings: *As if I haven’t had a lot of offers better than you.*
Contact and confront the rival: *How dare you?*
Discuss the situation with your partner to gather information: *Tell me what happened.*
Be especially nice, so your partner will prefer you: *I’d like to take you out to a special dinner.*

![Diagram showing the impact of jealous emotions](image-url)

**FIGURE 7.7** The impact of jealous emotions
Putting Theory into Practice: Keeping Emotional Consequences in Check

As interpersonal communication is intertwined with the experience, management, and resolution of some of the darkest emotions, use your communication skills to limit the effect of these feelings within relationships you value.

Buffer yourself and others from the consequences of dark emotions. When we experience intense emotions, we might find ourselves responding in extreme ways. To keep your negative emotions from wreaking havoc on relationships you value, learn to recognize when you are in the throes of these intense and dark emotions. At those times, be especially cautious about going where your feelings would take you. Might it be worth it to gather more information about your partner's hurtful comment before ending the relationship? Might talking with someone help you recover from your terrible loss? Might those feelings of jealousy point you to issues in your relationship that you can address and improve? Attention to the dark side of interpersonal communication reminds us that hurt, loss, and infidelity are as much a part of interpersonal relationships as love and joy; however, we needn't be hostage to these feelings.

SUMMARY

This chapter focused on feelings as a part of interpersonal interaction. As a foundation for this discussion, we began by clarifying the nature of emotions. You saw that emotions can range from positive to negative and involve more or less arousal, they can be pure or blended forms of several basic emotions, and they can be distinguished by the social functions that they serve. You also learned that emotions arise from people's appraisals of their environment, and that the experience of emotion involves self-perceptions, physical reactions, nonverbal markers, and action tendencies. In short, the experience of emotion is a complex phenomenon.

Our examination of the relationship between emotions and interpersonal communication revealed four distinct links. Because emotions involve action tendencies, they can motivate communication to address the conditions that produced our feelings. In addition, you might use communication to describe your feelings to others. You also employ communication to influence how other people feel – perhaps to cheer them up, make them feel guilty, or evoke feelings of love. Finally, your own feelings frame how you interpret the messages you receive from others. In these ways, emotions permeate both the creation and perception of interpersonal communication.
The expression of emotion during interpersonal interactions is also shaped by culture, the traits of the people involved, and the relationship that exists between the parties. Cultural display rules specify which emotions you should express, as well as when and to whom you can express your feelings. Emotional intelligence – the ability to perceive and manage feelings – helps you to communicate your feelings more carefully and to respond to other people’s emotions more skillfully. And within the constraints and opportunities created by the cultural context and your personal skills, your relationship with another person influences whether and how you express feelings. In particular, close interpersonal relationships are a place where some of our most negative emotions are created and soothed.