**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN COMMUNICATION**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

***Once they have read this chapter, students will be able to:***

1.1 Explain why it is important to study human communication.

1.2 Name and describe the seven primary components of communication.

1.3 Explain how the Synergetic Model of Communication differs from previous models.

1.4 Formulate your own communication ethic.

1.5 Articulate what makes a communicator competent.

**CHAPTER OUTLINE**

1. The Importance of Studying Human Communication
2. Communication differs from other social science disciplines.
3. The study of communication has a long history.
4. It is necessary to study communication because it is an intricate process.
5. *Alternative View: Co-rumination: When Too Much Talk Is As Bad As Not Enough*
   1. *Co-rumination occurs when we talk too much about problems in our lives.*
   2. *It is unhealthy because it focuses on negative effects rather than solutions.*
6. Critical Thinking: A Key to Successful Communication
   1. Identify the assertion or action.
   2. Ask, “what is the evidence for and against the assertion or action?”
   3. Ask, “what does the bulk of the evidence point to?”
   4. Ask, “what other explanations or conclusions are possible?”
   5. Continue to keep an open mind.
   6. Advantages of Studying Human Communication
   7. We can use communication to meet people, develop satisfying relationships, or terminate unsatisfying ones.
   8. We use communication to establish our identity to self and others.
   9. Good communication can positively transform lives.
   10. Studying communication can prepare you for your career.
7. *It Happened to Me: Chelsea*
8. What Is Human Communication?
9. **Human communication** is a transactional process in which people generate meaning through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages in specific contexts, influenced by individual and societal forces, and embedded in culture.
10. Components of Human Communication
    1. **Message** creationinvolves converting ideas into messages (**encoding**) and interpreting meaning from those messages (**decoding**).
       1. Communication is symbolic.
       2. **Symbols** are arbitrary.
11. *It Happened to Me: Alyssa*
12. Meaning creation is the goal of communication.
    1. Each message carries two types of meaning: **content** and **relationship**.
    2. Communication creates shared meanings.
13. **Setting** refers to the location and environment of the communication.
14. **Participants** are the people engaged in communication.
15. **Channels** are the means by which messages are transmitted.
16. **Noise** is any stimulus that interferes with the quality of a message.
17. **Feedback** refers to verbal or nonverbal response to a message.
18. A Model of Human Communication: The Synergetic Model
    1. Human communication has been modeled in two ways.
    2. The earliest models were linear.
       1. The **Synergetic Model** is a transactional model.
    3. Communication Is Transactional
    4. Each participant is a sender and receiver at the same time.
    5. Meaning is created as people communicate together.
    6. Communication is an ongoing process.
    7. Previous communication events and relationships influence messages’ meanings.
    8. Communication Is Influenced by Individual Forces
       1. Individual forces include demographic characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, regional identity, and social economic class.
       2. Individual forces also include **field of experience**, such as one’s education and personal experiences.
       3. Our experiences are not value free and are unique to the individual.
    9. Communication Is Influenced by Societal Forces
    10. Social forces include the political, historical, economic, and social structures of a society.
    11. Values placed on individual characteristics come from societal values.
    12. Most societies historically have been patriarchal.
    13. Communication Is Influenced by Culture
19. **Culture** is or the learned patterns of perceptions, values, and behaviors shared by a group of people.
20. Culture is dynamic and heterogeneous.
21. Culture affects almost all communication interactions.
    1. Communication Is Influenced by Context
       1. Context includes the setting.
       2. Context includes participants and the occasion.
22. Communication Ethics
    1. We are responsible for the choices we make as communicators.
       1. These choices are vital to professional and personal relationships.
       2. Studying communication can help to form your own ethical code.
    2. Defining Your Communication Ethic
       1. **Communication ethics** describes the standards of right and wrong that one applies to messages that are sent and received.
       2. Ethical communication involves several dimensions:
          * 1. Truthfulness
            2. Sharing or withholding information
            3. Benefit and harm of messages
            4. **Absolutism** versus **relativism**
    3. Communication Ethics in Practice
       1. Many situations arise that are ambiguous, complex, and multilayered.
       2. All communicators need to create an ethical stance based on their own beliefs, values, and moral training.
23. Putting It All Together: Communicating Competently
    1. The goal is to become a competent communicator.
24. **Communication competence** is composed of two elements: **appropriateness**, which is defined as following the relevant rules, norms, and expectations for specific relationships and situations; and **effectiveness**, which involves achieving one’s goals successfully.
25. Speakers have three types of goals during an interaction: content, relationship, and identity goals.

**KEY TERMS**

human communication

messages

encoding

decoding

symbol

content meaning

relationship meaning

setting

participants

channel

noise

feedback

Synergetic Model

field of experience

culture

ethics

communication ethics

absolutism

relativism

communication competence

appropriateness

effectiveness

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Think about current events. (Instructor can write some ideas on the board.) How has communication been transformative for good or for ill in these situations?
2. Many communication scholars believe that one cannot avoid communicating in interpersonal contexts. Given the definition of communication as a transactional process, do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. Technology provides us with more channels for communication. Do you think that some channels allow for more competent (effective *and* appropriate) communication than others? Are there circumstances in which you would avoid a particular channel and use another?
4. Your school represents its own type of culture. Do students at your school have individual ways of communicating? What cultural identifiers are unique to your school? (For example, if a school views education in part as a business transaction in which students pay for a product, how might this cultural value influence student communication with instructors?)
5. What principles would guide your decisions about whether a given communication behavior is ethical or unethical? For example, how would you define gossip? Is that different from “venting” about another person? How so? Are these communication behaviors ethical or unethical?

**CLASS EXERCISES**

***This Is Us***

Show a movie or television clip of two people interacting (although almost any interaction between a dyad will work, the television show *This Is Us* is full of scenes that would work well). Either in small groups or as a large class discussion, have students identify the six basic components of human communication present in this clip. Ask how they perceive each of these elements as shaping and influencing the communication encounter. You may also want to discuss how proponents of linear and transactional models of communication would analyze this encounter. Which of these models of communication do your students stand behind?

***Dramatizing Meaning***

Each message contains both content and relational levels of meaning. To illustrate this in class, ask students to pair up in dyads and create a short dramatization. Give the students content messages to be communicated, such as:

* get someone to turn the television volume down
* get someone to take out the trash
* tell someone you disagree with his/her opinion
* tell someone you think his/her new haircut isn’t flattering

Ask students to first role play the way that they would communicate the content to someone with whom they have a close, positive relationship (like a friend or valued family member) and then how they would communicate the content to someone they aren’t very close to or don’t like (like a new roommate or an annoying coworker). Have the remaining students watching the dramatization and comment on how the same content is communicated with different relational messages. Ask students what elements of communication change between the role plays of each group. They are likely to mention several elements of nonverbal communication (like tone, gestures, facial expressions, etc.) as well as the phrasing and forms of politeness of the verbal content.

***Assuming Identities***

Write down several elements of your own (or someone else’s) identity on the board, such as Starbucks junkie, former zookeeper, Kanye West fan, resident of Barcelona, avid hiker, and vegetarian. Do not tell students who the person is, but allow them to consider these elements as separate people. Invite them to jot down characteristics of these categories (e.g., a Starbucks junkie is wired on caffeine, young, and reasonably wealthy). Then have them jot down how these people might communicate. At the end of the activity, reveal to them that the categories represent you, that they can all be combined into one person, and that the “field of experience” that someone has is vast and not easy to identify without extensive knowledge of the person.

Discuss stereotypes, the impact of culture and context, and other relevant elements of the Synergetic Model. This is a useful way to introduce yourself to the class as well as a useful activity for a later discussion of stereotypes.

**EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES**

***Communication Careers***

Make a list of all of the careers that you believe require good communication skills. Then, go to the University of North Carolina Wilmington’s Career Services page located at:

<http://uncw.edu/career/communicationstudies.html>

Examine the list of careers for which a communication degree prepares students. What careers did you list that are not listed on the University of North Carolina Wilmington site? Why do you think the differences exist? Finally, create a list of careers you would post if you were responsible for creating such a site.

***Perception of Size***

Go to Hanover College Sensation and Perception Tutorials at:

<http://psych.hanover.edu/KRANTZ/sen_tut.html>

Click on the size constancy tutorial and complete the activity within it. Then write a brief paragraph summarizing what you have learned.

**WRITING EXERCISES**

**Journal Prompt 1.1: Studying Communication**

Consider the following question: How does the study of communication differ from other social science disciplines?

**Journal Prompt 1.2: Defining Communication**

Consider the following questions: How do the authors define human communication? What are the seven basic components of the communication process?

**Journal Prompt 1.3: The Synergetic Model**

Consider the following question: According to the Synergetic Model, what are the individual and social factors that influence the communication process?

**Journal Prompt 1.4: Code of Ethics**

Consider the following question: Why is developing one’s own code of communication ethics important?

**Journal Prompt 1.5: Competent Communication**

Consider the following question: What does it mean to be a competent communicator?

**Shared Writing: Defining Communication**

Watch television for one evening and observe the number of ethical dilemmas related to communication that people and characters confront. Note their response to each dilemma. How many people/characters make choices that you consider ethical? How many do not? What justifications or reasons do people/characters give for their choices? What consequences, if any, are portrayed? What conclusions can you draw about the portrayal of communication ethics on television?