

The Nexus Between Communication and Psychology Variables

Introduction

Many communication variables are also vital to psychology. This package of short essays discusses a series of variables useful to both disciplines. Because the author, Dr. Ken Petress, is a communication scholar, the tenor of and cited sources for these writings are based on communication literature. Should readers be interested in how scholars in the psychology field discuss these same variables, I suggest that you contact Mr. John Harrington on campus. John is a professional psychologist and he teaches the basic psychology course. He and I have shared many hours of conversation regarding the connections between our disciplines.

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Nexus Between Communication and Psychology Variables

Variable: Trust

Trust is both an emotional and social variable. Trust is multiply defined in the Communication discipline as; (a) "Faith in the behavior of another person that leads us to feel that whatever we risk will not be lost;"¹ (b) "Feeling of comfort that derives from ability to predict another's behavior. A belief that the other can be relied on;"² (c) "Trust is a key intimacy dimension; one where people who are trust-ing let others know how vulnerable they are and willingly place them-selves in positions where they may be hurt;"³ and (d) "Trust is the condition that exists when an individual or group takes a risk with others and the outcome of that risk is wholly or partially in the control of the other. Risks can be tangible, emotional, social, and/or affiliative."⁴

Tangible trust involves lending someone money, allowing others to borrow your car, or relinquishing to others objects of some extrinsic value; emotional trust includes sharing one's feelings without fear of ridicule or scorn; social trust involves risking individual or group rejection, criticizing others or being criticized, and testing relationships; and affiliative trust involves keeping secrets [personal, group, or state secrets], showing allegiance, or being supportive of the group.

Trust depends upon the predictability of others. Some people take inordinate risks due to a lack of bases to predict another's behavior. Also, some people are reticent to trust anyone unless they believe there exists certainty that matters will come out as they want. Neither of these situations are truly trusting. The ultra-high risk takers nor the certainty seekers are involved in other activities than trust. Trust involves reasonable risk taking for desired ends.

Children are born neither trusting nor distrusting; they learn trust or mistrust by observation, role modeling, and/or experience with the phenomenon. We learn to trust by being trusted. Violations of trust are rarely totally forgiven nor are they forgotten. Trust betrayals are among the most difficult barriers to relational repair. Violations of trust are termed betrayals. Betrayal seriously damages one's self image and typically deteriorates relationships.

Some individuals claim themselves to be or are declared by others to be "too trusting." This usually means that one fails to reasonably predict/assess others' trustworthiness. Overly trusting individuals commonly are those who are trustworthy themselves and do not or can not see life through the lens of an untrustworthy other.

¹ see Bobby R. Patton and Kim Griffin. (1974). *Interpersonal Communication*. New York: Harper & Row.

² see Gerald L. Wilson, Alan M. Hantz, and Michael S. Hanna. (1995). *Interpersonal Growth Through Communication*, 4th ed. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.

³ see Sara Trenholm and Arthur Jnsen. (2000). *Interpersonal Communication*, 4th ed. Wadsworth.

⁴ from Ken Petress. (1990). Roundtable discussion on the 1989 Tian-an-men uprising in Beijing, China; Southern States Communication Conference, Tampa, FL.

Trust is earned; it is not an entitlement. Trust is earned by being loyal to others, by adhering to one's promises and assurances, and by showing one can be counted on. A trustworthy relational partner makes many other relationship variables easier to work with and allows a greater comfort zone to be established in that relationship. Some of the relational variables that are complementary with and often enhanced by trust are: risk taking, disclosure, predictability, self confidence, teamwork, innovativeness, relational congruence, consistency, relational satisfaction, relational longevity, and relationship strength.

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Variable: Conflict

Conflict is multiply defined as; (a) An extreme form of competition in which a person attempts to bring his or her rival to surrender; a situation in which one person's behaviors are directed at preventing, interfering with, or harming another individual;⁵ (b) Interpersonal conflict occurs whenever goals are blocked ... [or] when the goals or actions of two people (or groups) are incompatible;⁶ (c) the anxiety, stress, and/or frustration that accompanies unnecessary competition; our own or others' impatience; scarce resources; incompatible goals, rules, directions, or procedures; insufficient time to complete tasks; more social, task, or emotional demands than one can handle; or information overload.⁷

Conflict is thought by many to be unhealthy and undesirable. Such is not the case. Conflict can be healthy and desirable if it is managed wisely. Anxiety, frustration, and stress that is repressed, denied, or stored up can be very harmful. Admitting to yourself and to others that matters are not in concert with your needs, expectations, or assumed entitlements is healthy as long as the locus of such statements, timing of such admissions, the tone of the statements, and the motive for such disclosure is to negotiate or to inform, not to coerce, to complain, or to make others feel guilty. Conflict is best dealt with when managed rather than ignored, denied, or manipulated.

Conflict is triggered, not spontaneous or natural. Frequent conflict triggers include: surprises due to lack of focus; a lack of preparation; unskilled or inept forecasting; unintended consequences of our own or others' actions/statements; impatience; incongruent use of terminology by conversants; and uncontrolled tempers. Unexpressed or over expressed conflict often spawn fights.

Conflict is resolved when each person understands the other's frustrations, anxieties, and stresses; acknowledges these; and works to minimize or mitigate them. Conflict is exacerbated when one's conflict is denied, ignored, or compounded by further or continued undesirable actions or statements.

⁵ see Joseph P. Folger and Marshall Scott Poole. (1984). *Working Through Conflict: A Communication Perspective*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

⁶ see Sara Trenholm and Arthur Jensen. (1996). *Interpersonal Communication*, 3rd ed., p. 344 Wadsworth.

⁷ see Ken Petress. (1988). *Class notes on interpersonal communication* -- since revised. University of Maine at Presque Isle.

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Variable: Intimacy

Intimacy, as that term is employed in communication literature, is defined as: (a) "Characterization of a close, familiar, and usually affectionate relationship that results from self-disclosure and mutual acceptance;"⁸ (b) "A unique bond created by two people through some combination of highly interdependent actions, individualized rules, and personal disclosures, viewed by both parties as relatively affectionate, intrinsically rewarding, and irreplaceable;"⁹ and (c) "A heightened degree of interpersonal bond whereby partners feel free to: share with their partner secrets, fears, aspirations and dreams; admit to personal flaws; ask for favors; request and provide comfort; provide and receive unvarnished personal feedback without sugar-coating or reservation; and, for appropriate relationships, engage in consensual sexual activity."¹⁰

All too frequently, the sexual connection takes prominence; most of our relationships [ie: parents, siblings, workmates, neighbors, other relatives, etc.] do not include an active sexual component. The sexual dimension **is** vital in those relationships where it is appropriate and present; but it is not present in all or even most relationships we engage in.

Intimacy occurs through time; it is not spontaneously achieved. Intimacy must be actively sought; it does not occur passively. It is related to trust, risk taking, interaction frequency and salience, and responsiveness. Intimacy needs to be nourished; stagnation deteriorates intimacy.

Intimacy is heightened and strengthened when it is reciprocal; one-sided relationships are seldom intimate ones. The rewards of intimacy are: a heightened self-worth, a greater bond with another, increased relational satisfaction, a feeling of oneness with another, what Kenneth Burke called *identification*¹¹ Burke sees identification as "being as one with another even when the actual substance of the relationship is divided between partners."

Intimacy fosters and facilitates identification. Intimacy draws partners close and helps create a social union that produces an image of singularity within and outside the relationship. Intimacy is both an end and a means to better relational stability, growth, and endurance. It is a goal to strive for in any relationship.

Intimacy is a negotiated state between relational partners. There is no one path or process to intimacy. Each relationship and each

⁸ see Gerald L. Wilson, Alan M. Hantz, and Michael S. Hanna. (1995). *Interpersonal Growth Through Communication*, 4th ed. Brown & Benchmark.

⁹ see Sarah Trenholm and Arthur Jensen. (1996). *Interpersonal Communication*, 3rd ed. Wadsworth.

¹⁰ see Ken Petress. (1989). Class notes for interpersonal communication --since revised; University of Maine at Presque Isle.

¹¹ see Kenneth Burke. (1945). *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press for a thorough discussion of internalization.

pair of relational partners need to find what is comfortable, allowable, and workable in their relationships to achieve intimacy.

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Variable: Stages of Relationship Development/Deterioration

Mark Knapp, a noted contributor to communication's developmental theory, has posited a model illustrating how typical relationships develop and how many such relationships deteriorate.¹² Knapp's model consists of five stages for relational development and five stages for relational deterioration.

Not all relationships develop fully; therefore, some relationships fail to go through all possible developmental stages. Many relationships reach a certain stage and achieve comfort and utility for all partners and therefore advance no further. Other relationships reach a certain point in development and are assessed by one or both partners as too expensive to advance further or become incongruous to partners, one partner desiring advancement and the other partner not eager to work for relational furtherance.

Not all relational development or deterioration advances rigidly to form; frequently, stages are incompletely passed through, are leapfrogged, or vacillate back and forth. Knapp's stages are representative of typical relational growth or decay keeping in mind that most of our relationships vary in the course of development or deterioration.

Stages of Relationship Development:

1. **Initiating Stage:** At this relationship stage, first impressions of physical, social, and task attractiveness are assessed and noticed. Tentative interactions take place with non intrusive, safe topics. While much literature suggests that similarity enhances attraction, certain types of, degrees of, and manifestations of diversity can enhance initial attraction. Decisions regarding further interaction with the other person are rendered at this stage. Many would-be relationships go no further than this stage. It must be noted that both potential relational partners need to decide to or need to pursue the relationship further for development to continue.

Some individuals are persistent when other potential relational partners decide not to pursue an ongoing relationship. Some success in this regard is noted; however, the odds are not good when rejection occurs or when apathy toward pursuing a relationship is confronted early on.

2. **Experimenting Stage:** Once initial interaction(s) offer prospects for an ongoing relationship, partners begin to experiment with strategies designed to enhance relational prospects. Experimentation begins with the sharing/collecting of fairly safe information (ie: names, ages, occupations, hometowns, hobbies, etc.). In addition to receiving raw data, relational partners seek and interpret patterns, evaluate commonalities, and further evaluate relational attraction.

¹² see Mark L. Knapp. (1984). *Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

In our daily lives, we have many acquaintance relationships that go no further than this stage. There are two acquaintance types: (a) the chance acquaintance, persons who randomly appear in our lives (ie: ticket tellers, hotel desk clerks, delivery persons, etc.) and (b) repetitive acquaintances (ie: store sales persons, newspaper carrier, restaurant waiting personnel, etc.).

Acquaintances offer us some stability/predictability in our lives. These relationships also offer us opportunities to try out our social skills, receive feedback about our relational strategies, and construct a tentative social network.

3. **Intensifying Stage:** The intensifying stage is typically reserved for closer relationships (ie: friends, close work colleagues, valued neighbors, etc.). Reciprocal trust, disclosure, risk taking, and the beginning levels of intimacy increase. Further signs of relationship intensifying include the following:
 - a. Forms of address become more informal; relational terms of endearment emerge.
 - b. Use of "we," "our," and "us" replace "I," "me," and "my."
 - c. Private symbols emerge, understood meanings come forth.
 - d. Expressions of commitment appear.

The intensifying stage is the testing ground for deep, long-lasting, intimate relationships. Most of our friendships and rewarding context related relationships go no further than this stage.

4. **Integrating Stage:** At this relationship stage, relational partners have personally identified themselves as being sufficiently congruent that they associate with each other more frequently, intensely, and satisfactorily than with other individuals. Their congruence is noticed by others and they are seen as a 'unit' [ie: a dating couple, business partners/ associates, etc.). At the integrating stage, selflessness, cooperation, sacrifice, non-contentious negotiating increases. Further signs of integrating include the following:
 - a. Partner attitudes, values, interests, and practices are cultivated distinguishing the pair from others.
 - b. Partner's friends, acquaintances, and networks merge.
 - c. Intimacy trophies are exchanged (ie: rings, pins, etc.) -- This applies to only some relationship types.
 - d. Behavioral, expressive, and dress are accentuated.
 - e. Common property is designated.

Intimate relationships are characterized by relationships reaching this stage. Most relationships do not reach this stage, including most marriages. To achieve this stage, relational vigilance, sacrifice, focus effort, dedication, and commitment are required.

5. **Bonding Stage:** Bonding is the ritualistic, symbolic, public, and institutionalized announcement of a relationship. Such events as a marriage, a business incorporation, the swearing in of political office holders, or the vestment of a clergy member are bonding examples.

Bonding goes beyond the relational participants; it is a public announcement of commitment and intentions.

6. **Renegotiating Stage:** While not actually a development stage per se, there are frequent renegotiations within and between stages. Some relationships experience retrograde motion through stages, where one or more stage may be entered, motion made backward, and the same stage(s) revisited again. This is where relationship repair occurs, places where changes are made to make the relationship grow or sustain itself.

Stages of Relationship Deterioration

Just as relationships develop and grow in stages, so do relationships decay and disintegrate. Like developing relationships, failing ones typically, but not always, follow a series of stages in their demise. Also, like developing relationships, some deteriorating bonds experience retrograde movement through declining stages.

Not all decaying relationships terminate outright; some relationships alter their form, intensity, and salience after experiencing a downward spiral. Relationship repair is easiest and most frequent in the earlier stages of deterioration and more difficult and infrequent during latter deterioration stages.

At times, people hold on to relational bonds not for the relationship itself, but for ego-driven, security-related, and image-saving reasons. These relationships are most likely to suffer decline and repeated attempts to resurrect a nurturing relationship; these attempts, usually for ignoble motives, often fail.

Another reason many relationships fail is due to incongruity, the condition resulting when partners in relationships define the relationship differently (ie: one partner sees a relationship as a routine friendship while the other partner wants or identifies the current relationship as a deep intimacy). Significant incongruity is seldom reconciled, although sometimes, negotiated redefinition is possible.

1. **Differentiating Stage:** This first deterioration stage is often slow to develop and appears subtle. Unified pronouns such as "we," "us," and "our" become replaced by "me," "my," "I," and "you." Single person activities and interests increase in frequency and importance.

Signs of relational decay are detectable to partners only if they are aware enough and take personal care to diagnose relational difficulty. If the signs are attended to, relational repair is potentially easy to achieve.

Outsiders who are familiar with the partners' baseline behavior might have clues to some fraying of the relationship by carefully listening to the pronoun changes and topic selections made by partners.

2. **Circumscribing Stage:** In this deterioration stage, relational tentativeness increases; topics that might stimulate conflict or instigate fights are avoided. Interactions between partners decrease in frequency; these interactions decline in positive intensity; and they begin to be shorter interactions as well. Reciprocity in such relationships decreases; a more individualized agenda emerges.

Relational partners are painfully aware of relational problems and some partners may develop elaborate and skillful masks to their troubles; however, outsiders who know the partners soon can detect troubling changes in partner behaviors.

3. **Stagnating Stage:** A stagnant relationship is one that has become stale or uninteresting, or boring; one that is characterized by a lack of personal or reciprocal commitment; one that typically has embedded within its dialogue periods of silence; and one that is motionless.

A stagnant relationship is in serious jeopardy of dying if genuine reciprocal measures are not taken to resurrect the relationship. A stagnated relationship is frequently an excuse for blaming the other partner when stagnation typically is mutually caused.

Stagnated relationships are painful for partners to experience and also difficult for familiar outsiders to witness. Although well meaning outsiders often try to stimulate relational partners, this often is fruitless. Any repair must come from relational partners themselves.

4. **Avoiding Stage:** When relationships deteriorate so far that no repair is thought to be possible or is not desired, avoidance of the partner typically occurs. Avoidance may include actual separation, fleeing from scenes where the partner may be present, major changes in lifestyle (ie: residential moves, changes in job, withdrawal from social circles).

The avoiding stage is sometimes mistakenly employed as a less formal terminating point in relationships. It is seen as less confrontational -- even though avoiding can, and does, lead to some awful confrontations and great blame and suspicion).

5. **Terminating Stage:** Like the bonding stage in relationship development, the terminating stage is more an event than a process. Like bonding stage events, many terminating events are ritualistic (ie: returning a key or a ring), institutional (ie: divorce or a partnership dissolution), and a matter of public record.

There are infrequent relationships that due to their unique motives, partners, and/or surrounding circumstances do not follow the developmental pattern discussed here. These stages are meant to serve as a guide to common trends in relationship development and deterioration. If you experience a relationship that does not follow these patterns, do not assume that you or the relationship is inadequate or incomplete. Successful relationship development and civil relationship change or loss can result from different paths being followed.

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Variables: Schemata

Schemata are multiply defines as (a) "A cognitive framework into which specific parts of an event or process are fit; an organized structure of information on a particular concept;"¹³ (b) "A schema is a cognitive structure that helps us process and organize information."¹⁴ (c) "It is a coherent set of expectations that enable us to comprehend and make sense of novel events."¹⁵ and (c) "Schemata are repeatable, routine, subconscious behavior patterns we engage in so as not to have to reinvent the wheel and to save time and energy in routine matters."¹⁶

Schemata are beyond our awareness and therefore are difficult to observe, measure, and control. In Communication studies, three schemata are typically employed; these three schemata are: (a) **person prototypes**, **personal constructs**, and **scripts**. There are many other schemata studied in psychology.

Person prototypes are the mental constructs we form of the ideal person in many situations. For example, people construct what they conceive [and sometimes search for] the ideal neighbor, the ideal girl/boy friend, the ideal mate, the ideal boss, etc. While these idealistic constructs are not typically operating at the conscious level, they do subconsciously influence choices we make [or do not make] in determining what relationships we seek, nurture, or neglect. Idealistic constructs are repairable; such repairs [revisions] are also conducted, for the most part, subconsciously.

Sometimes, we reject potential relationships because the other person fails to live up to the schema standards we have unconsciously set and enforce upon ourselves. Some schema theorists claim that person prototypic behavior explains why certain people are approached in a crowd at parties or other social events.

Person prototypes imbue us with innate evaluation strategies; and these evaluation strategies accompany our language which is replete with superlatives.

A second schema that interest Communication scholars, personal constructs, are schema that focus on certain traits, characteristics, or behaviors exhibited by others. We all tend to notice certain features in others that we subconsciously focus on more than we focus on other features. We are typically unaware, at the conscious level, that we pay particular attention to these features as the process is subconscious.

¹³ see Joseph A. Devito (Ed.). (1986). *The Communication Handbook: A Dictionary*. Harper & Row.

¹⁴ see R. Hastie. (1981). Schematic Principles in Human Memory. In *Social Cognition: The Ontario Symposium 1*, ed. E.T. Higgins, C.P. Herman, and M. P. Zanna. Hillsdale, NY: Erlbaum.

¹⁵ see F. I. M. Craik. (1979). Human Memory. *Annual Review of Psychology* (39): 30-102.

¹⁶ see Ken Petress. (1978). Class notes -- since revised; Northern Illinois University.

Personal constructs are subjective, for the most part. One person may see the Hell's Angels as a positive comraderie driven group while another person may see the Hell's Angels as a violent, negative role model. Both interpretations are examples of personal constructs. We all have private priorities in people, behavior, affiliations, antecedent and consequential importance, and personal style.

Dr. Petress has analyzed some of his personal constructs with the assistance of collegial psychologists.¹⁷ He tends to notice and focus upon: others' punctuality, linguistic precision as opposed to using words like "things" and "stuff," and on linguistic Personalization rather than over formality. These constructs influence, to some degree, who he is more likely to gravitate to socially.

Personal experiences, biases, stereotypes, experience and observation interpretations, and personal salience all influence our personal constructs. Constructs change as our experiences, observations, social comparisons, and awarenesses of our constructs change. The more introspective we are, the greater our constructs tend to alter.

The third schema that interests Communication scholars is called scripts. Scripts are those subconsciously stored, routine, repetitive scenarios that we enter into and complete mindlessly. Initially, the activity which will eventually develop into a script is dealt with on the conscious, aware level; however, repetition converts such activity into a routine seldom thought about. Some examples include: answering the telephone, dressing for school, tying one's shoes, etc. Several students who have experimented with the issue by actively thinking about what they are doing with such tasks and even trying to explain them to someone else while the activity is under way have discovered that performance is lessened by elevating it to a conscious act.

Scripts are essential in allowing us to do repetitive activity without thinking about them. It frees our mind for other thoughts while performing routine tasks. Scripts are repairable; that is, they can be added to, truncated, or made more sophisticated. When new activities confront us, we typically inventory our script library to identify and use our available past experience repertoire. If the experience is only tangentially similar, we commonly add it to our present script for that behavior type. For example: when I was a little boy, I began my eating script with high chair process, etiquette, and rules. I then graduated to a table with breakable dinner ware and sharp utensils; I then moved on to eating at grandmother's house where some rules and restrictions varied; then I advanced to eating in public places where more rules and limitations existed. My script as fairly well complete until I was invited, at 17 years of age, to a formal State dinner at the White House where new rules, expectations, and norms prevailed. My eating script needed some serious amending. After several more State dinners while I worked at the State Department ensued, formal dining experiences were added to my subconscious script, retrievable upon need.

Scripts aid us in coping with minor nuance changes in experiences; they reduce the stress of having to start events from square one each time. Scripts help us reduce stressors related to others' expectations of us. Scripts can be problematic in that we seldom interrupt our mindless processing to self-monitor ourselves until something either goes terribly wrong or others point out problems in our script.

¹⁷ thanks to Dr. Dale Morris, Professor Emeritus at the University of Maine at Presque Isle (1993) and to Dr. Sandra Webster, former Assistant Professor at UMPI (1994).

Self monitoring is useful; however, it takes someone with a relatively solid self concept and someone aware enough and sufficiently focused enough to combine one's subconscious activity with others' reactions to our own behavior.

Schemata aid us daily in reducing stress, in making routine activity easier to accomplish, and in helping assure behavioral consistency. Each schema is repairable, so rigidity is not required. Introspection and feedback are the main methods of ascertaining whether schema repair is needed.

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Variable: Self-Concept

Communication Perspective

Self-concept is defined as the sum of (a) how we see ourselves as the result of personal experiences and observations; (b) feedback and reactions we receive from others; (c) self-, other-, and situation-assigned roles we play; and (d) our attitudes, beliefs, and values. These self-concept features work symbolically, each influencing and being influenced by each other.

Self-concept is important in establishing, maintaining, and improving mental health, social attraction, and relational harmony. One's self-concept is alterable. New experiences, wider feedback loops, incisive observations, improved and expanded role repertoires, and altered attitudes, beliefs, and values can all contribute to a revised self-concept. Not all self-concept changes are beneficial to the individual. Real or perceived poor performance, scorn from others [deserved or not], volunteering for or being assigned to roles one cannot cope with, being asked to conform to ideas or behaviors one is uncomfortable with and/or incompetent in, and having personal or social conflict with one's attitudes, beliefs, or values can cause lowered self-concept. Groups, too, can suffer from an individual's lowered self-concept. Useful risk-taking, an individual's motivation of others, an individual's ability to be motivated by peers, trust, and a group's salience can all be negatively influenced by someone's lowered self-concept.

Roles play a vital part in constructing our self concept. Some roles we construct for ourselves; other roles are assigned to us from others [ie: parents, peers, job superiors, our religion]; and other roles are given to us by circumstance [ie: emergencies, wartime, the death of another]. Role success or failure affects our self-concept. Self-fulfilling prophecies also play a part in how well or poorly we perform in particular roles. How and if others help us in our role assignments also play a part and therefore influence our self-concept.

Conformity and peer pressure also influence how we negotiate roles we play. Some roles, to be effectively played, demand non-conforming strategies/tactics. People who are slaves to conformity, peer pressure, or to rigid adherence to past ways will likely not do well in such roles. Individuals who have not learned values in some conformity typically find themselves outcasts, individuals not commonly assigned to roles requiring conformity and ones that would enhance one's image.

Self concept is further influenced by four processes: (a) labeling dominant behavior patterns, (b) social comparisons, (c) reflected appraisals, and (d) identity aspirations.¹⁸

We typically see major patterns in our daily behaviors. For example: I notice that I commonly take initiative in beginning action on matters I see as important. Others have taken notice of this personal proclivity and have chosen me to serve on committees using that trait. This validates my dominant behavior pattern labeling and my self identity, thus adding to my self concept.

¹⁸ see K. Gergen. (1971). *The Concept of Self*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Reflected appraisal¹⁹ occurs as one observes, learns from, mimics, and identifies with roles taken by significant others. A child sees her mother keeping the family checkbook and hears her parents discussing the family's expenses. She then, in her play, assumes a role of financial control and adds this role to her life script.

We commonly find ourselves judging our own performance based on the comparison with others' performance. Our self-concept is influenced by such comparisons. An example occurred in 1992 when I sought tenure at UMPI. I was minimally apprehensive about how well my performance would stack up to my peers' performance until I saw their performance record and discovered I was doing as well as the best of my competition. This social comparison helped lessen the anxiety I had been feeling and added positively to my self-concept.

Identity aspirations in involve ways we wish to be seen as. For example, I see my self as a very organized individual and desire to have others see me the same way. I organize my time, my office, and my class preparations in ways that highlight this self perception partly so as to influence others' perceptions of me.

These four factors influence our own and others' perceptions of who we are. Sidney Jourard has written convincingly on self-concept and its vitality to a healthy life.²⁰

¹⁹ see the works of George Herbert Mead. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society*. University of Chicago Press, p. 173; and Charles H. Cooley. (1912). *Human Nature and Social Order*. New York: Scribners, pp. 150-152.

²⁰ see Sidney Jourard. (1971). *The Transparent Self*. New York: D. Van Nostrand.

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Variable: Perception

Communication Perspective

Perception is the interpretation of sensory data. Perception is an active process in which certain stimuli activate the perception process; selected data is organized in one or more of a variety of ways; and a decision is made whether to act on that data and/or to put it into memory. The process is triggered when data pass the sensory threshold. Most data encountered fails that threshold test and goes unnoticed. Examples include: the sound of a fan in a room, the touch of a light breeze, the smell of dandelions in the spring, the taste of celery, and the sight of buttons on a shirt. While any of these out of place, juxtaposed in unexpected ways, or presented accompanied with complementary highlighting cues may stimulate notice, without these, these sensory data would likely go unnoticed.

There are three axes of data organization; these include: physical characteristics, social pressures, and experiential variables. Physical characteristic that influence how sensory data is organized include: data color, size, shape; familiarity; newness/agedness; number/frequency of data; encounter frequency; pattern; utility; proximity; sequence; and category. Among the social pressures that may influence the organization of sensory data are: peer pressure, scripted conformity, personal and group biases, stereotypes, ideologies, personal and event priority suggested by the data. There are also experiential variables that can influence sensory data organization; these include: fears [real or not], aspirations, recalled past experiences, transferred memories from related or tangential experiences, and data salience.

Sensory data is organized for the following three major reasons: (a) retrieval from memory, (b) facilitating the formation of sequences and priorities, and (c) memory repair, the ability to amend, update, correct previous data stored in memory and converted into scripts.

Sensory data is not totally reliable. Illusions occur with all senses. Data proximity, environmental factors [ie: lighting, noise, temperature], and overly active anticipation can slant what is perceived in ways that may convince the observer that something not objectively present is being confronted. Every sense can be subject to illusion.

Perception is related to and affected by what is called cognitive complexity, that is, the number of options a perceiver has in his/her repertoire. The wider the interpretation range is, the more sophisticated, the more exacting, and the less predictable are the interpretations made when confronted with a new or familiar sensory experience. For example, if I know only the colors red and blue instead of recognizing lilac, mauve, purple, and maroon, I am unable to describe, differentiate, recall, or appreciate subtle and varied hues. Widening one's vocabulary and experience repertoire heighten one's perception range.

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Variable: Attribution

Communication Perspective

Attribution is multiply defined as: (a) "The process by which we attempt to understand the behaviors of others (as well as our own), particularly the reasons or motivations for these behaviors. Most of our inferences about a person's motivations -- a person's reasons for behaving in various ways -- come from our observations of the person's behaviors [baseline behavior]."²¹

There are three principles we employ in rendering causal judgments in interpersonal perception;²² these are; consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness.

The consensus principle asks whether or not other people react or behave in ways similar to the one we are focusing upon. If not, we tend to attribute the cause to some internal cause; if yes, we commonly attribute the cause to the environment or to social causes.

The consistency principle asks whether or not an individual acts in ways that are internally consistent; that is, are their actions [or words] consistent over time, circumstance, and/or place? If yes, we commonly attribute cause to some internal motivation; if not, we tend to attribute cause to some external factor(s). External consistency compares how one person acts compared to how esteemed, trusted others act.

The distinctiveness principle is related to cognitive complexity. We ask: does this person act in similar ways in different situations or does that individual adapt their behavior to different circumstances, needs, or antecedents? Considerations of distinctiveness degrees and appropriateness come into play when attributing cause or motive.

There are some common patterns people employ in attributing cause/motive in one's own and others' behavior. These common ploys are not always reliable and, in fact, are frequently fallacious. Ploy one suggests that if we act in ways that are noble, utilitarian, and well received, they must be due to our good character; while if we act in ignoble ways of little or no utility, in ways not well received, these must be due to others and/or environmental factors. These self-attribution strategies take credit for positive qualities and evade negative attributes for the self. If others act in ways that are noble, utilitarian, and well received, we commonly assume that others in that individual's midst and some environmental factors contributed to that successful behavior, while if the individual acts in ways that are

²¹ see Harold H. Kelley. (1979). *Personal Relationships: Their Structures and Processes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum; and E. E. Jones and K. E. Davis. (1965). From Acts to Dispositions: The Attribution Process in Person Perception, in *Advances in Experimental Psychology*, vol. 2, L. Berkowitz, ed., New York: Academic Press, pp. 219-266.

²² these principles and their paraphrased descriptions originate from Joseph A. Devito (Ed.). (1986). *The Communication Handbook: A Dictionary*. Harper & Row, pp. 31-33.

ignoble, non utilitarian, and poorly received, it must be personal character flaws that caused that behavior. These attributions of others' behaviors suggest that we are reluctant to give others full credit for their positive acts while being fully willing to blame them solely for their negative attributes.

Not all attributions are so self serving; we need the attribution process to aid us in understanding our world. We must, however, recall that attributions are guesses, inferences and, therefore, are subject to error. Checking our inferences is always a wise course.