Family Communication
Nurturing and Control in a Changing World

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1 Introduction: Families, Communication, and Family Communication

Families are primarily composed of involuntary relationships that are often rife with emotional intensity, subtle innuendo, and histories of both great pleasure and intense grievances. The reason families are so interesting to most of us is that we all come from some sort of family (our **family of origin**), and most of us are moving toward some sort of family (our newly formed family or, potentially, our **family of procreation**). Many of us came from family situations that were highly satisfying, and we report feeling nurtured, loved, and supported. Some of us were less fortunate and came from families where we experienced high levels of control with less nurturing, and we were dissatisfied with our experiences. Almost all of us want to know how to "do" family communication in the future so that we can have the most satisfying family lives and communicative experiences. In addition, many groups or agencies (governmental and religious) attempt to weigh in on issues relevant to family life, and debates abound regarding what type of family form is best (for children and adults) and what types of families should be recognized legally (or not).

To lay the groundwork for understanding family communication, it is first necessary to come to a common understanding of notions of *family*, *communication*, and *family communication*. The danger in defining such terms is that as you read each term just now, you quickly referenced your understanding of each. This is wonderful for learning because you already have the cognitive foundation (i.e., basic idea), but it's also potentially problematic for learning in that you might feel you understand family, communication, and family communication so well that you might be less receptive to new ways of thinking about them.

Ideas of family, communication, and family communication are not as straightforward as they first appear. For instance, families have become so diverse that any definition is likely to be found wanting in that it might be so narrow as to exclude certain types of families. Many definitions, for instance, include biological or legal ties that exclude both cohabiting couples and gay couples with children. To compensate, authors on the topic frequently define families so broadly that they potentially include other types of relationships that are not familial in nature. Thus, definitions of perceived kinship can include best friends and individuals who "feel" like your brother or sister. This is problematic in that many of the communicative processes that operate in your family are in evidence *because* of the involuntary nature of most familial relationships (besides your spouse or partner, all other familial relationships are inherited). You didn't get to *choose* your dad, for instance, but your best friend was definitely a choice.

In an attempt to grapple with these thorny issues, this text not only defines families in terms of **relatedness** (biological, legal, or marriage-like commitment) but also in terms of how family members *function* for one another (in line with a task performance definition of families). Family members are often strong socializing agents for one another, and thus **nurture** (i.e., encourage, provide the foundations for) the development of the various family members

in differing ways (physical, socioemotional, and intellectual development, for instance). In addition, the very nature of the involuntary relationships in families places powerful constraints on each individual member's behavior. Thus, family members tend to **control** each other's behavior through discipline, guidance, teaching, complex patterns of psychopolitical negotiation (struggles of competing wills and needs), interpersonal influence, conflict, dominance, and sometimes violence. This text proposes a definition of family that includes relatedness, nurturing, and control.

To further complicate the issue, many individuals classify any type of information transmission as **communication**. This leaves communicators responsible for sending messages that were purely unintentional behavior. For instance, eating, sleeping, and walking might be considered communicative even though the person was just behaving and did not want to send any message at all. Many of my students would make the claim that if I were to sleep in the front of the classroom, I would be communicating that I am tired. As a nonverbal scholar, I'd prefer to be more exact about which nonverbal behaviors should count as communication and which behaviors should not. In this text, we will differentiate between behaviors that are truly *communicative* and those that are purely *informational*. The main way we will differentiate communication and information is through intent.

Finally, family communication is the most complex notion of all; families serve as the cornerstone for our lives and provide a rich forum for every type of communication, from affection to conflict. Because families are primarily composed of involuntary relationships, they can be characterized by greater levels of emotional intensity, subtle relational messages, and histories that range from warm and affectionate times to periods of intense conflicts. This rich context promotes the tendency to hold family members responsible for their behavior—even when they did not intend to communicate at all. For instance, I tend to be grumpy (subtle understatement!) if I'm forced to wake up too early in the morning. This is not a sign of how I'm feeling about my spouse that day. Regardless, my behavior can often have unfortunate communicative consequences. In this text we will try to distinguish between true communication (where both the sender intended to send a message and the receiver perceived the intention of the communication), communication attempts (where the sender intended to send a message but it was not received), attributed communication (where the receiver attributed communicative intent where there was none), and behavior (actions that were not intended to communicate and no intention was perceived). While all the categorizations can provide **information**, only the first three include some level of **communicative intent**. In my example, my grumpiness would be an example of attributed communication in that my husband perceived lack of affection from my behavior, even though I did not intend to communicate disaffection. **Family communication,** then, is defined as messages that are typically sent with intent, that are typically perceived as intentional, and that have consensually shared meaning among individuals who are related

biologically, legally, or through marriage-like commitments and who nurture and control each other.

Families

All of us come from families, and therefore most of us feel we understand fully what a family is. For some of us, our families were **nuclear** (with two parents, who may or may not be working outside the home, and children residing together) and included our mother, our father, and our siblings. Although experience (and a show of hands in the classroom) demonstrates that a number of us in the classroom will have come from this situation, only about a quarter (24%) of the total U.S. population will have grown up in nuclear families (see Figure 1.1). Alternatively, many of us were raised in **single-parent homes** (about 28% of children) by our mothers (about 84% of those raised in single-parent homes were raised by single mothers), or in **stepfamilies** that included stepparents, stepsiblings, half-siblings (about 14%). Many of us had parents who divorced when we were young (about 31% of early baby boomers report being divorced), and we now live in **binuclear families**—sharing our time relatively equally between our mother

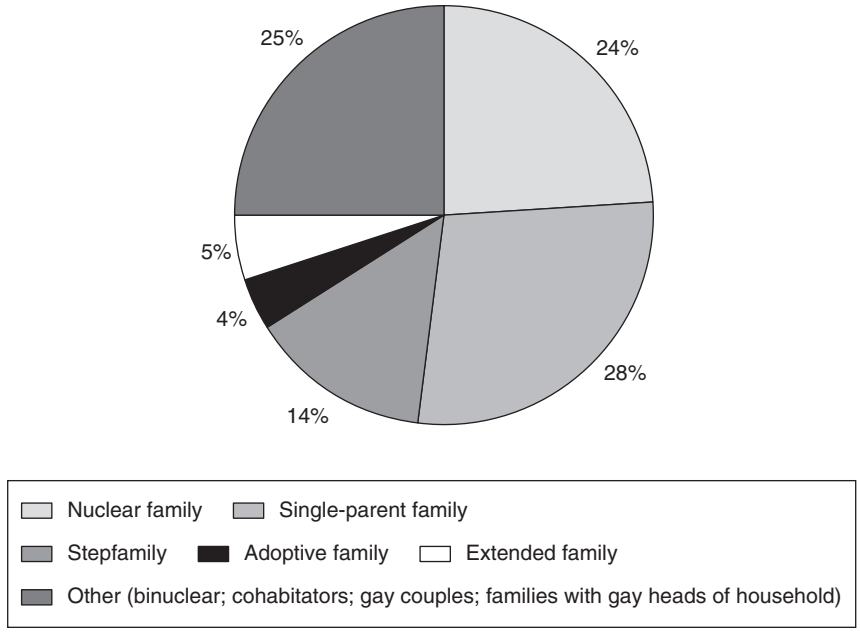


Figure 1.1 Family Type (in % of U.S. population)

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2003).

and stepfather's and father and stepmother's houses. Some of us live with a **cohabiting parent** (with one parent who is now cohabiting but not married—about 40% of cohabitants report living with children)—and that parent might be gay as well. Some of us were **adopted** (about 4% of us), and some of us live in **extended families** (about 5% live with grandparents). All these types of families illustrate the complex network of relationships that might constitute a family. Finding a definition to include all these **family forms** is challenging.

All these families also help illustrate that no definition of family incorporating biological or legal ties includes *all* types of families, because not all families include individuals with blood or legal connections. To add to the complexity, not all individuals include all family members with biological or legal ties in their *self-defined* family configurations. Many individuals consider their stepfathers to be their "Dads," whereas they consider their biological fathers to be their "sperm-donors." Thus, families also include complex levels of emotional ties and self-definition that include some family members and exclude others. In this first section of the book, we will explore these thorny issues in detail as we attempt to come up with a definition of family that includes complex patterns of procreation, legal ties that bind, and self-defined commitments for some family forms that are not socially sanctioned by the laws of the state.

Biological Definitions

Many of us, when asked who is in our family, describe those to whom we are biologically related. For instance, 5- to 7-year-olds asked to draw family trees drew representations with biological mothers and fathers even when they co-resided with parents and stepparents across households (Dunn, O'Connor, & Levy, 2002). For these children, **biological ties** defined family more than **legal ties** did. This biological relatedness criterion is central to many definitions of the family based on bloodlines, genetics, or biological connectedness. This is also consistent with court-approved definitions of families, which frequently rely on biological blood tests to determine paternity in contentious child support cases. In addition, children who are adopted often refer to their "birth mother and father" as separate from their adoptive parents—the first delineation referring to their bloodline and the second referring to the legal relationship. Many adopted children, even though their adoptive family relationship experience was highly successful in that it nurtured them fully and provided for them, still feel driven to establish their "roots" through a greater understanding of their biological connections. Even though their adoptive mothers functioned legally and within the family as their nurturing and controlling "mother," they still refer to their biological mother as their "birth mother." This distinction is important to them because it recognizes the complexity and the strength of the biological connectedness.

This is consistent with many definitions of family that place procreation and all related behaviors as central to the definition of family. Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and John Caughlin (2004), both prominent researchers in the family communication arena, argue that many definitions of family are "thinly veiled political or ideological statements rather than scientifically neutral views" (p. 727). They review three classes of definitions in the extant literature on family—the first of which is family structure definitions. **Family structure** definitions presuppose clear criteria for family membership in that the family of origin "is the extended family or any group of individuals who have established biological or sociolegal legitimacy by virtue of shared genetics, marriage, or adoption," whereas the family of procreation, "usually called a 'nuclear family,' is further restricted to those living in the same house" (p. 727). Fitzpatrick and Caughlin note the limitation of these definitions in the failure to incorporate the social changes of high divorce rates and new birthing technologies. For instance, these definitions exclude children who split their time between two households and children who were physically carried by a mother who did not provide the genetic materials for these conceptions. This perspective assumes that the primary motivation for marriage is to produce offspring. This is obviously not the case for 29% of all family forms, including those who are married with no children and cohabitants without children, but regardless, it is a societal expectation that families revolve around producing and rearing children.

This perspective is central to the religious and governmental hotbed of debate surrounding the recognition and legalization of gay marriages. Many religious conservatives vehemently oppose the legalization of gay marriages. The evidence for their convictions lies in biblical citations indicating that sexual intercourse should be for the purposes of procreation only. They thus oppose all nontraditional familial practices of premarital sex, cohabitation, married couples with no children, recreational sex within marriage, and "married" gays. For these conservatives, definitions of the family revolve around regulating sexual practices. We will discuss the nature of these policy reforms and laws in Chapter 2 in the sections on governmental and religious influences on the family.

Legal Definitions

The legal system is another governmental agency that plays a large role in helping us to define the family. Individuals allow the courts to make familially defining decisions, such as where their child will reside and who will get visitation rights, how long those visits should be, and whether those visits should be supervised or unsupervised. The courts also make judgments (frequently based on tests of biological connectedness) as to who will and will not have to pay child support. In addition, the courts can decide who is and who is not a "fit" parent. Courts frequently make decisions with regard to

living arrangements of the children who are born with drugs or alcohol in their systems. In many states (California, for instance), mothers are legally obligated to fulfill sobriety requirements before custody is resumed. There are also clear laws about the legal obligations of stepparents to their children even though they have very few legal rights. Even though I am obligated to provide adequately for my stepsons, if anything were to happen to my husband, I would have no legal rights to custody or visitation with them (Mason, Harrison-Jay, Svare, & Wolfinger, 2002; Mason & Zayac, 2002). However, some stepparents have been given visitation rights after the dissolution of the family due to third-party visitation laws.

Sociological Definitions

Sociological definitions of the family typically place reproduction as central to the definition of family, yet also include self-definition as a type of a loophole for including all types of family forms that don't fit neatly within the two dimensions of biological (birth) or legal connectedness (marriage/adoption).

Self-Definition. One commonly accepted definition of family within the discipline of communication is this:

> Networks of people who share their lives over long periods of time bound by ties of marriage, blood, or commitment, legal or otherwise, who consider themselves as family and who share a significant history and anticipated future of functioning in a family relationship. (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2003, p. 5)

Although this definition does well to include many diverse family forms that do not fit neatly within biological or legal lines, it does not do well to exclude other types of relationships that do not include "relatedness." One can imagine many friends who "feel" like family in that you have known them "donkey's years" (since kindergarten, grad school, or the like) and you anticipate their acting as an auntie to your children (a sustained lifelong relationship), yet legally, this person would not be recognized as your family member by any legal court. To further complicate the issue, in emergency situations, many hospitals and school systems do not recognize these relationships either.

One can also imagine several problems with the importance of "anticipated future functioning of a family relationship" as defining the family. Given the frequency of divorce, it is likely that divorcing parents (or parents considering divorce) might not anticipate future functioning of a family relationship. Regardless, they *will* continue to coparent the children long after the ink has dried on the divorce papers. The lack of anticipation of future

family functioning, in and of itself, does not guarantee that the members will discontinue family membership, as will be evident at their children's weddings and their grandchildren's graduations. For example, the introduction I usually use for my husband's ex-wife is, "This is my stepsons' mother." While I'm not genetically or legally related to her in any way, the familial relationship is evident in that she is the *biological* mother and I am the *stepmother* of the same sons. We are in essence part of the same family and anticipate being related through the communicative actions of our children well into the future.

Other family definitions include the notion of shared living arrangements. For instance, one governmental agency that continually struggles with defining families for purposes of counting them is the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2002, it defined family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002, p. 4). Their primary criteria for inclusion are biological *or* legal ties plus common residence. According to the definition, parents not residing with their children are not considered a family. This is problematic for several reasons. First, not sharing residences does not ensure that one is no longer a member of a particular family. Although some family members vehemently wish that moving out would ensure that they had cut all familial ties, unfortunately, the involuntary nature of biological and legal ties ensures that your mother is still your mother even while you are away at college and that the dad who owes child support but lives three states west still has to pay your college tuition. Second, not all of us live with both parents simultaneously. This does not mean that neither parent is in your "family" when you are in the custody of the other family. Third, many families are extended, and because your grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins don't live with you, this does not mean they are not biologically related to you.

Fitzpatrick and Caughlin (2002) also review two other types of definitions that guide social science research in communication. These definitions highlight goals within families and the unique role that communication plays in fulfilling these functions within the family. They deserve special mention here because they underscore the approach to defining families used throughout this book. *Psychosocial task definitions* focus on the performance of certain tasks of family life. Task definitions typically describe the functions of family where the family is a psychosocial group made up of one adult member and one or more others, where fulfillment, nurturance, and development are the central goals of the group. They provide an example of a task definition of family as the "social unit that accepts responsibility for the socialization and nurturance of children" (p. 727). As they point out, this definition, while doing a fair job of including stepparents and even cohabitants with children, excludes families without children and therefore excludes cohabiting couples and married and gay couples with no children.

However, this definition does a nice job of highlighting the importance of family members' fulfilling certain functions for each other within the family. Finally, *transactional process definitions* define family as "a group of intimates who generate a sense of home and group identity, complete with strong ties of loyalty and emotion, and an experience of a history and a future" (Fitzpatrick & Caughlin, 2002, p. 728). Although these definitions highlight the importance and centrality of communication to the definition of family, they suffer from the problems of self-definition that we referred to earlier. However, they highlight the two processes of interdependence and commitment inherent in families—characteristics that serve us well to distinguish friendship and nonkinship relations from family relationships.

All Family Forms Include Nurturing and Control Functions

It is clear at this point that not all families include birth or regulation of procreative activities (biological relatedness). It is also clear that legal definitions of the family do not recognize all family forms as political and that religious debates abound surrounding many familial issues and definitions. Also, self-definitions are faulty as well, because they frequently fail to recognize biological relations as familial members. We are therefore forced to consider a broad range of relatedness among family members along with the functions that all family members fulfill for one another in order to qualify as a family.

As the above delineation of biological, legal, and self-definitions demonstrates, the criteria of relatedness in a family is complex; not all family members fulfill all the relatedness criterion. It is therefore possible to create a logical inclusion string that includes all types of relatedness that might be evidenced across family types. We can therefore determine membership in a family to necessarily include the following:

1. Relatedness (biological relatedness *or* legal ties *or* commitment similar to marriage). Relatedness refers to the involuntary nature of families in all their various forms of connectedness. This includes biological families where genetic ties are evidenced (families including a biological father, a biological mother, and their offspring). This also includes families with legal relatedness (marriages with no children present, adopted children, and stepparents). Finally, this includes heterosexual and homosexual cohabitation where the partners see this relationship as similar in commitment level to marriage. This commitment is thus limited to romantic pairing units (married couples, cohabiting couples, gay couples) and does not extend to close friends and the like. We will exclude the concept of self-definition here because many individuals might include close friends and others who provide warmth and joy in their lives but who are not objectively recognized as "related" or as family

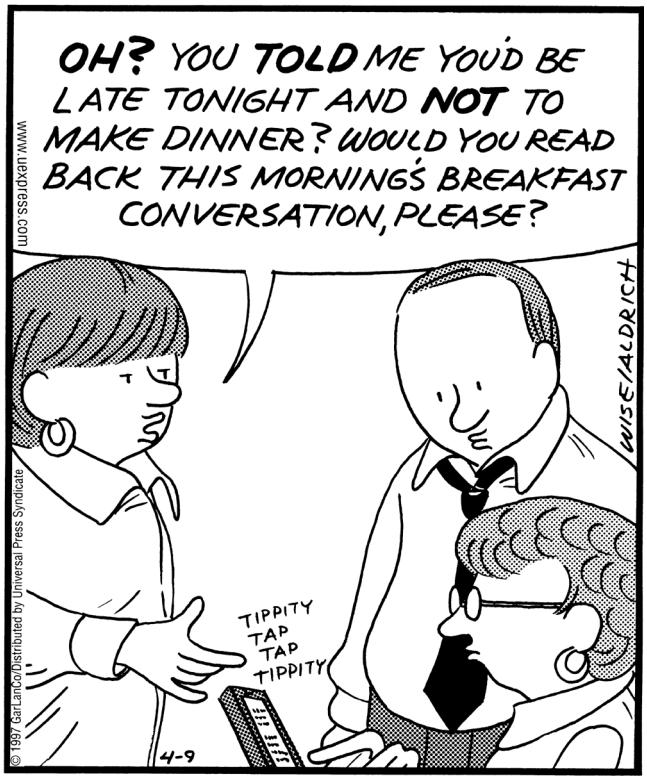
by organizations with resources. These friends are not related in biological, legal, or marriage-like-commitment ways.

2. Nurturing. Although not all family forms include procreation or even attempts at procreation, all family forms (biological, legal, or marriage-like commitment) include some forms of nurturing behaviors. Nurturing behaviors include all attempts to encourage the development (e.g., physical, socioemotional, intellectual) of the other family members. In other words, growth is encouraged (and sometimes discouraged) within the family. This recognizes that not all family members are equally nurturing. In fact, some family members fail to nurture altogether (e.g., abandoning parents), but in general, a family is composed of members who have an influence on one another's personal development. It is therefore possible for this nurturing function to cut across all family forms and family relationships in that spouses nurture each other, parents nurture children, siblings nurture each other, and gay couples nurture each other's and sometimes their children's development as well. Therefore, this perspective can include "sperm-donor" fathers (they contributed to your physical and, potentially, to your psychological development) and stepfathers (they contributed to your intellectual, educational, and socioemotional development). This perspective can also include married couples and cohabitants with no children (they encourage each other's growth as individuals across the various dimensions of development). In addition, members of your extended family can also be seen to be contributing to your physical development through your biological connections to them (e.g., you may have the same sociological and psychological tendencies as your fifth cousin in Idaho even though you have never met him and were socialized in dramatically different ways). Thus, nurturing cuts across all family forms and all family relationships.

3. Control. Finally, while assisting your development as human beings in general (*nurturing*), members of your family will also try to influence or control your behavior in ways that promote your competence across the aforementioned domains of development. *Control* in the family begins as children grow (when you began crawling and walking, your caregivers had to begin to control your behavior to protect your safety). It can be argued that control began even before children were added to families in that the struggles that couples experience during their transition to living together include many struggles over control. Decisions abound in families and therefore so do opportunities for control struggles. Seemingly simple decisions regarding when to eat dinner, which social engagements to attend, and how much sexual activity to engage in can be fertile ground for control struggles among couples. Larger decisions are even more compelling in this regard as couples struggle with where to live, whether both spouses or partners will work, and how many children to have. Many issues of control couples face in their struggle to get the other primary partners' desires to match their own. Issues of control play out within families as family members try to negotiate joint outcomes. Control can be seen through discipline, intimacy negotiation,

conflict, violence, and interpersonal influence attempts at changing undesirable behavior in the family (e.g., to get the alcoholic to stop drinking or the eating disordered daughter to eat).

Communication



Settle those spats in nothing flat with a Home Court Reporter!

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Communication is central to the family and to its functioning. This is especially true for the two primary functions of nurturing and control. Nurturing includes communication that is central to encouraging development, including both verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are encouraging and supportive. Control includes communication that is central to guiding, influencing, and limiting the types of behaviors evidenced by family members. Communication is central to the two primary functions of nurturing and control that occur within families.

At this stage, many of you may feel as though you have a more advanced understanding of what constitutes communication. If asked, most of you will list sender and receiver, intentionality, messages, encoding and decoding, and transmission as central to any definition of communication. You would be right to include all these elements, and we will explore them further here. Like families, however, definitions of communication are complex in that some definitions of communication include all types of behavior, even when no communicative intent was included. Thus, we will wrestle not only with the elemental parts of communication but also with the fundamental *nature* of messages that make them communicative—or not.

Let's begin with the elements of communication. John Bowers and James Bradac (1982), two of the pioneering researchers in communication, review the literature in communication with regard to which issues researchers in communication find important to include in communication definitions. First, and most important, they argue that communication is *the transmission and reception of information.* This includes notions of sender and receiver and the importance of including both in any communication transaction. Second, they also argue that *communication is the generation of meaning.* Thus, consensually shared meaning among members of a particular language community is also important. Third, although some argue that communication is situated within the individual, it is argued here that *communication is the relationship behaviors of interacting individuals.* Senders and receivers interact in ways that include simultaneous transmission of information so that both communicators are senders and receivers simultaneously. Fourth, although some would argue that animals can communicate, this text subscribes to the notion that *human communication is unique* in that humans are the only symbol-using creatures and thus are the only ones able to represent the nature of the universe in abstract concepts in their minds (through language use).

Fifth, the definition of communication offered here subscribes to the notion that communication is *ongoing and processual.* This implies that communication is dynamic and fluid and that communicators continually influence each other through their communication behavior. Sixth, some scholars find it important to recognize *communication as contextualized*—that is, communication within the family is different and distinct from other communication events *because* it is occurring within the family structure. While the arguments are a bit complex for an intro-level textbook, I believe that many of the communicative processes occurring outside the family also occur inside the family. This is not to say that father-daughter communication is not influenced by the unique processes operating in families; it simply means that many of the characteristics of this father-daughter communication will be similar to communication within other types of relationships. Finally, and most central to the following discussion, some scholars in communication like to assert that human beings cannot not communicate. In this text, however, it is argued that human beings can *not* communicate. In other words, it is possible to behave in ways that are not communicative.

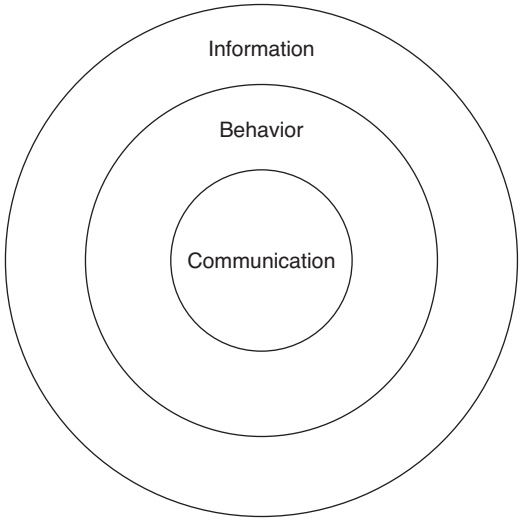

Figure 1.2 The Relationship Between Information, Behavior, and Communication

Information, Behavior, and Communication

Those who espouse this last premise that human beings cannot *not* communicate make the argument that all behavior is informational and thus communicational in nature. This ignores the most important element of communication—the communicators' intent or desire to communicate. It is clear that some behaviors have no communicative intent. For instance, as mentioned earlier, eating, walking, and sleeping are all behaviors with potential information value but that have no communicative intent. Thus, while many students of communication might argue that my eating in front of the classroom is communicative because it informed them that I was hungry, I would contend that it *informed* them of my hunger without any intention on my part to *communicate* that information. Consider the model shown in Figure 1.2.

All behaviors are informative in that they reduce one's uncertainty by half. As illustrated in Figure 1.2, information, behavior, and communication can be conceptualized as three concentric circles with information being the largest and most subsumptive, behavior being the next largest circle within information, and communication fitting neatly within behavior, which fits within information (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). Thus, communication is always behavioral and behavior is always informational. Therefore, all behavior is informational, but not all behavior is communicational. It is therefore possible to not communicate. To most fully consider this debate, consider issues surrounding intentionality to communicate.

Source Versus Receiver Versus Message-Centered Orientations

The earliest conceptualizations of communicator intent assumed that it was most relevant to communication that the communicator (or sender) intended to communicate—the so-called **sender orientation**. This came from the "magic bullet" era, where it was assumed that communication was all-powerful and that all a source had to do was to "put a message out there" and it would have strong and clear impact. However, as became clear from the media studies of the 1950s and 1960s, many messages indeed did *not* have the effect they intended. In fact, they sometimes had the opposite effect.

Along with these findings, and the advent of the "me" generation of the 1960s, communication transitioned into more of a **receiver orientation** in that what became more important than the sources' intent to communicate was the receivers' perception of intent. Therefore, if individuals as senders were preoccupied, tired, or distracted, other individuals perceiving the messages as intentional communication of disregard were given precedence over the actual sender of the message. Messages that were perceived as intentional were classified as communication. This is problematic in that many behaviors that were not intended to communicate at all were perceived as communication. Individuals as senders became responsible for a large number of behaviors that might have been rude or inconsiderate but that definitely did not fit within the realm of communication. Therefore, scholars moved toward a more complex model of intentionality (see Table 1.1) that considered both the sender's intent and the receiver's perception of intent (Burgoon & Ruffner, 1978).

True communication occurs only when both the receiver and the sender perceive an intention to communicate. A **communication attempt** occurs when a sender intends to send a message but the receiver does not perceive the intention. On the other hand, when the sender does not intend to communicate, but the receiver perceives the intention to communicate, this is an example of **attributed communication**. Finally, when neither the sender intends nor the receiver perceives an intention to communicate, **behavior** has occurred.

For example, suppose that I am getting ready for class and walking at a jogging pace through the halls of the communication department as I scurry to

Table 1.1 The Role of Sender and Receiver Intention in Defining Communication

	Receiver Perceives Intent to Communicate	*Receiver Does not Perceive Intention to Communicate*
Sender Intends to Communicate	**Communication**	**Communication Attempt**
Sender Does Not Intend to Communicate	**Attributed Communication**	**Behavior**

get the last-minute details of my lecture prepared. You see me, but I absentmindedly fail to see you and therefore do not acknowledge your head tilt, eyebrow flash, and smile. Generously attributing my lack of social graces to absentminded professorism, you correctly interpret my actions as behavior and do not take offense. However, as often is the case in power-differential situations, you might perceive that I am blowing you off on purpose given some long-ago-forgotten-on-my-part comment or other you made in class. In this case, your perception of my intent combined with my own lack of intent would qualify this interaction as fitting within attributed communication, because you attributed intention to communicate to my behavior even though there was none. It might also be possible in this case that I was blowing you off because I was really busy and thus "acted" busy to communicate that I could not talk right now. If you still perceived my actions as unintentional and actual busyness, then this communication behavior would be classified as a communication attempt. Finally, if I *did* intend to blow you off, and you perceived my actions as blowing you off, then true communication would have occurred.

As a nonverbal scholar, however, I would be remiss to fail to consider the often messy messages that we send nonverbally. Consider the case of depression. Depressed individuals rarely have the motivation to get out of bed let alone communicate their depression to others. Regardless, they nevertheless communicate in ways that do give rise to the conclusion that they are depressed. Their dejected nature communicated through lack of facial affect, slumped posturing, and flat vocalic affect clearly communicates that they are feeling depressed. It might be argued that although they don't have a conscious intent to communicate their depression, they might have an unconscious intent to communicate this depression in order to receive much-needed social support. Therefore, their behavior might still be classified as communication if the receiver perceives their intent to communicate. It is important to consider the nature of the message along with intentionality when defining behavior as communication. Thus, it is possible to include a *message-centered* definition of intentionality, such that communication is defined as messages "that (a) are typically sent with intent, (b) are used with regularity among members of a given social community, society, or culture, (c) are typically interpreted as intentional, and (d) have consensually recognized meaning" (Burgoon et al., 1996, pp. 13–14).

This definition allows us to include nonverbal messages such as nonverbal accommodation (which are not intentional at a conscious level) to be included in our definition of communication.

Family Communication

All these definitions allow us to define family communication. Combining the earlier definition of family with our current definition of communication allows us to define family communication in the following way:

Messages that are typically sent with intent, that are typically perceived as intentional, and that have consensually shared meaning among individuals who are related biologically, legally, or through marriage-like commitments and who nurture and control each other.

Why Communication Is Central to Families

Because families are primarily composed of involuntary relationships (besides the primary couple unit), family communication can be fairly intense. Power struggles frequently occur as members struggle to attain different goals. Spouses argue over how to spend money, the best way to discipline the children, and whether to switch jobs or move to another house. Adolescents struggle against their parents' conceptions of them as children as they strive to develop their own unique sense of self as separate from their parents. The warmth and affection experienced in families can also be a source of great sustenance as individual family members go out into the world to do the business of their daily lives. Furthermore, the push and pull between warm nurturing behaviors and disciplinary or controlling behaviors can put communicators in complex dilemmas regarding the best way to communicate with their family members.

On a day-to-day basis, and to facilitate task completion, family communication can be quite mundane. Much of the morning communication between parents or marital partners often revolves around coordination of child care, transportation of the children to and from school and to various activities, preparation of the evening meal, and organizing necessary activities around the house (who will call the "bug man" or the apartment supervisor?). At the same time, communication can be affectionate to hostile (verbally or nonverbally). Each message contains both content (the verbal "stuff" of the interaction) and relational (implied messages about the nature of the relationship) dimensions (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1969). I can discuss the daily tasks with warmth and good humor or with coolness and seriousness and communicate very different messages regarding how I am feeling about my spouse and the relationship on any particular day.

Both Nurturing and Control Require Communication

Nurturing communication includes communication that encourages the social, emotional, and intellectual development of family members. Through nurturing and supportive communication, children can be encouraged to grow, learn, and integrate well with their friends. Nurturing and supportive communication between spouses can provide a "safe haven" from the demands of the external working world and can cement the intimate bonds between the primary marital or couple unit. Quizzing your child in the car

on the way to school in final preparation for his or her spelling test can encourage intellectual achievement, for instance. Alternatively, talking with your child about the importance of including all his friends in the morning "pickup" game of football can encourage social development. Inquiries regarding the final stages of your husband's cold can encourage his health maintenance and simultaneously function to nurture him. Thus, communication within families can be very nurturing.

Nurturing communication can be the source of much satisfaction with family life. When asked what made their families "happy," most of my students replied that they knew their parents loved them, they continually felt encouraged by their parents, their parents were affectionate, and they really enjoyed talking with and "hanging out with" their parents. In addition to the communication of nurturing, children also experienced satisfaction with their families because of what their parents *did*. Many children reported that their parents always attended their games, recitals, or school plays and that they were involved in their lives. This type of nurturing is central to the physical, socioemotional, and intellectual development of children. Nurturing communication is central to this experience.

Controlling communication can also be positive in that it can function to encourage the development of family members (e.g., parents might see grounding errant children as a way to ensure that they are not too tired to learn in school the next day), but control may also be the source of conflict, influence attempts, and sometimes violence. Controlling communication is in evidence when family members limit the options of other family members. My stepsons continually fight over the satellite remote. They both have TVs in their rooms, but there is only one satellite remote that they must share in order to watch the premium channels. Each feels controlled by the other's choices and thus (often intense) conflict results.

While parents attempt to control their children, spouses simultaneously and frequently control each other. Some of the earliest (and most uncomfortable) stages of relationship integration are when each spouse attempts to control the other's behavior in an attempt to integrate behavioral routines (e.g., Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). They also try to control each other through interpersonal influence attempts to sway them to their point of view, through conflict over competing goals, and sometimes through violence.

Changing Family Forms Require Communication for Coordination

As noted earlier, the forms the family can take are widely diverse. Many of the treatments of family communication assume that the family includes one father figure, one mother figure, and children. Thus, communication is assumed to surround the traditional nuclear roles of nurturer (mother) and resource provider (father). However, we know that mothers are now

reentering the workforce, with many mothers working within the first year after giving birth (51%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), so many families are considered "dual-earner" households. Communication in these families is more complicated as parents try to negotiate both breadwinner and nurturing roles simultaneously. Such simultaneous role holding requires more communication for coordination of household tasks and child care (e.g., Ehrenberg, Gearing-Small, Hunter, & Small, 2001).

Such nontraditional nuclear families are not the only change on the family landscape. Nuclear families are rapidly being matched by single-parent homes (28% of children are raised in single-parent homes), especially within the black community (45% of black children are raised in single-parent homes). Most of these families are headed by mothers (84%), and thus women are fulfilling the roles of both parents simultaneously within these families. They must both provide communication that *nurtures* (facilitates growth) and *controls* (e.g., disciplines) their children. Thus, these families are likely to experience more stress. Of single-parent homes headed by mothers, 39% live below the poverty line (Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2002). Living below the poverty line simultaneously provides fewer amenities to the children with growing needs for resources over the life span of school attendance and provides the single mother or father with fewer opportunities for support (e.g., day care for children, help with household maintenance). These greater burdens on the single parent result in less time for communication with children and greater reliance on children for household assistance and emotional support. As a result, children may grow up faster in single-parent homes.

Cohabiting single parents are also more common now, especially fathers (33% of single fathers are cohabiting) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003a). Communication is even more complicated as single parents communicate with both children and significant others in their home. In addition, cohabiting adults try to take on "stepparent" roles without the legal bonds of marriage. Stepparenting is difficult enough, but stepparenting without the legal institution of marriage complicates things further. The biological parent and the cohabiting adult use communication to try to negotiate nurturing and controlling roles with children who may be confused about their relationship to the cohabiting adult. Stepfamilies—families that include some legal and some biological connectedness—and **blended families**—families that include legal-only (e.g., stepparents) and some biological-legal (e.g., half-siblings) relationships—are equally complex, even with the legal bonds of family. To add more to the communication complexity, new stepparents may bring their own children with them. Biological parents may nurture and control their biological and stepchildren in diverse ways, leading to competition and conflictual communication between the stepsiblings and their new stepparent.

Gay couples and gay couples with children face their own communication difficulties. Not only are they not recognized by the legal system (see more in the governmental regulation section in Chapter 2), they also have difficult

decisions with regard to deciding to disclose their sexual identity to their children or to individuals external to the family. Families may lose custody of their children if external members find out they are gay. In addition, children may be embarrassed to communicate their parents' sexual orientation to outside family members because there are many assumptions made in general society about the children's own sexual orientation based on their parents and their upbringing. Thus, there may be a certain amount of closedness in families that include gay parents. Finally, although less represented in society at large, there may be additional difficulties in communicating within adoptive families and extended families. Adoptive children may feel less a part of the family than biological children, and children being raised by their grandparents may feel like this family structure is atypical and may refrain from talking about their family much at school. Issues surrounding family communication, therefore, are highly affected by the form the family takes.

Roles, Systems, and Rules Require Communication

All these changes in family form manifest themselves communicationally through the roles that various members hold. In addition, the entire family system is affected by the loss or addition of family members, and thus the form of the family may affect the balance within the family. Finally, rules for communication may be very different for those in nuclear families than they are in single-parent families or in families with gay parents.

This text explores the various roles that family members negotiate through communication with **roles theory**. Roles theory assumes that the roles one holds are powerful dictators of the behaviors one enacts. Mothers and fathers play roles of nurturer, provider, disciplinarian, health maintainer, financial adviser, and so on. Having parents who are dual earners can also complicate the traditional gender distribution of these roles and lead to quite complex communication as partners attempt to disperse family roles. As mentioned earlier, the diverse forms the family takes can also influence the roles family members take as they try to "play the role" of parent even when they are not (in the case of stepparent or cohabiting adult with a single parent). Single parents also take on a greater number of roles because there is no other residing parent to share role distribution. All these factors contribute greatly to the types of nurturing and controlling behavior that can occur in families.

Family systems theory attempts to explain the communication between family members as a function of the systems theory concepts of interdependence, balance, equifinality, and wholeness. These theories also try to explain communication behavior in families through a greater understanding of family system regulation in the pursuit of family goals. They assume that all members operate together in the pursuit of some larger goal (e.g., happiness, socioemotional development of children) and that family members

communicate in certain ways within the family in an attempt to self-regulate attainment of those goals. In other words, disciplining a child through "grounding" after he or she has been caught sneaking out in the night is an example of attempting to regulate the child toward the goal of physical, socioemotional, and intellectual development by ensuring his or her safety. Thus, communication activities within the family surround goal attainment.

Rules theory attempts to explain the rules in communication. All families have verbal and nonverbal rules about how to communicate. For some families, there are clear rules about who to talk to for what. My stepsons know, for instance, that if they have a question about all-things-technical, they communicate with my husband. Anything health related goes to their mom, the nurse. Anything school related comes to me. Although these rules are not spoken or written, through experience, it has become obvious who holds expertise in which areas. There are also clear rules about topic avoidance during the teenage years. Most teens, for instance, will not talk to their parents about sex or dangerous behaviors (e.g., Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). Thus, communication rules of appropriateness and desirability are clearly operating within families. There are also nonverbal rules for communicating. I know, for instance, that if I want to talk to my oldest stepson, Huw, about anything personal or intimate, it is best done in the car in the dark so that no eye contact can occur. This kind of compensatory insurance ensures that there is no "intimacy overload" and that comfort is achieved and maintained. In sum, communication rules operate within families on verbal and nonverbal levels.

Relationship Development Leading to Coupling Requires Communication

Although all of us came from families of origin, not all of us are in newly formed families (or potential families of procreation). Many of you in this class, however, will be dating, seriously dating, or engaged as you attempt to move into your own new family. This process of mate selection is quite complex and includes communication in several ways. First, the communication of attraction and courtship is rife with verbal and nonverbal indicators of interest. For instance, nonverbal cues to attraction include head tilt, downward glance, and shy smiles (and sometimes the hair flip) (Burgoon et al., 1996). In addition, many report sociological and psychological characteristics that attracted them to their mate (like similarity on attraction and values, physical appearance, physical proximity, etc.).

Psychoanalytic factors of relationship attachment may also come into play. We learned how to be loved and whether people were trustworthy from our parents. For those of us who learned we were lovable and others were trustworthy, we learn to attach in secure ways to others. We approach romantic relationships fearlessly. For those of us who were abandoned in some way or another (physically or emotionally), we learned that people were untrustworthy and we fear that we may be unlovable. We are therefore

cautious in our approach to relationships but seek fulfillment in being recognized as lovable individuals through our relationships with others. We thus become preoccupied with our partners and how they feel toward us. For those of us who were role reversed by our parents (they demanded our caregiving rather than vice versa), we learned that intimacy meant losing our own sense of self. We learned that others were untrustworthy but that we were responsible and trustworthy. We became dismissive-avoidant of relationships later in life as we keep ourselves busy to avoid too much intimacy in relationships. All these **attachment styles** have implications for the communication of approach and avoidance in relationships. We will explore these (as well as a potential interaction between parental attachment and partner attachment style) in Chapter 4.

Adding Children Requires Communication

A number of societal forces encourage married couples to have children. As you might surmise, adding children can wreak havoc on the communication between the original couple. Simply adding another individual to an already demanding communication structure changes the number of communication pathways from two to six. The communication demands have tripled simply by adding one child. The addition of children also adds new roles to the already demanding role of spouse. Furthermore, the work demands of child care add to the workload of relational and house maintenance that each individual member holds regardless of his or her external job requirements. Not surprisingly, marital satisfaction frequently diminishes after adding children because the domestic duties surrounding child care increase a typical parent's workload by sixfold (Huston & Holmes, 2004).

The demands of child rearing also vary depending on the age of the child. Infants and toddlers demand constant supervision, and school-age children require attention to homework and development of social and emotional skills. The adolescent years can be very demanding as the child attempts to develop a unique and separate identity from the parent. Such a withdrawal often involves more time spent in peer communication and a frequent amount of derogating communication aimed at parents (as their role of authority figure diminishes). In addition, parents frequently have to negotiate disciplinary action at this point. Disagreements can arise over the appropriate level of monitoring of adolescents (especially for female adolescents). Thus, communication within the family is highly affected by the addition of children.

Raising Children Requires Communication

Much time is spent communicating with children to develop their socioemotional competence. Parents are frequently concerned with encouraging positive self-esteem and positive parental identification. Both of these can be

achieved through warmth and supportiveness, moderate control attempts, and consistency in control attempts (Broderick, 1993). Parents frequently control their children's behavior in an effort to provide them with the best grounds for development. Such efforts can be characterized through various parenting styles that include differing levels of control and nurturing, from high levels of control coupled with low warmth (e.g., so-called *authoritarian* parents), to high levels of control coupled with high warmth where parents negotiate with children but still provide the greatest percentage of the rules (e.g., so-called *authoritative* parents), and low levels of control and high levels of warmth (e.g., so-called *permissive* parents; Baumrind, 1966, 1996). Such varying levels of control (i.e., *demandingness*) and nurturing (*responsiveness*) are shown to be related to various outcomes for children, with authoritative parenting (or moderate levels of control) being related to what most determine to be the best outcomes (e.g., Hart, Newall, & Olsen, 2003).

In addition, parents often attempt to use learning theory to reinforce the behavior they would like to encourage and punish the behaviors they would like to discourage. Learning theory argues that following behaviors with positive consequences can encourage more long-term retention of the behavior. Positive and warm communication can be used as reinforcement for positive behavior. Communication can similarly be punishing or aversive to a child. Avoiding a scolding can be a strong motivation for a third grader. We see, then, that communication behavior can both reinforce and punish desired and undesirable behaviors in children.

Finally, parents can encourage mastery orientation or learned helplessness in their children by the way they respond to their children's successes or failures. Children who receive bad grades and are told by their parents that "It's okay—you couldn't have done better" learn that they are not very bright and acquire *learned helplessness,* or the tendency to want help in order to achieve. Children learn a *mastery orientation* by having their parents and significant others attribute their positive behavior to dispositional characteristics and their negative behavior to situational characteristics. Those with bad grades who are told they can do better when they study harder next time learn *mastery orientation.* In addition, letting the child take responsibility for achieving a clean room similarly supports a *mastery orientation.* How parents communicate about achievements can have a serious impact on the ways in which children attempt to achieve things in the future. Thus, communication is central to the socialization process.

Balancing Intimacy and Autonomy Requires Communication

Communication in families can also be rich with messages of intimacy. Family members frequently disclose (or fail to disclose) important information to each other. Disclosure is a way to increase intimacy, but too much

negative disclosure can actually be perceived negatively. Disclosure is also closely associated with nonverbal intimacy behaviors as partners display closeness through nonverbal involvement, pleasantness, expressiveness, and less social anxiety (e.g., Coker & Burgoon, 1987). These patterns of closeness and distance are likely to ebb and flow as partners experience differing needs for closeness and distance during the life span of the relationship. Such cycling in communication behavior is explained by dialectic models of communication and intimacy enhancement.

Family members can also have important conversations about sexuality and other important closeness-enhancing issues. In addition, even though very few parents discuss premarital sexuality with their children (some studies say as little as 10% of parents talk with their children about sex), those who do have children with later age of sexual initiation, consistent condom use, and less sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., Hutchinson, 2002). However, in general, teenagers avoid discussing sexuality with their parents, especially their opposite-sex parent (Guerroro & Afifi, 1995). So although communication regarding sexuality is uncommon among parents and adolescents, such communication can be associated with positive outcomes.

Managing Conflict Requires Communication

As stated throughout the earlier sections, the family environment is rich with opportunities for conflict. From a systems perspective, individual family members can have dramatically different desires for goal attainment. These goal conflicts often lead to the communication of interpersonal influence and conflict in the family. Children argue with their parents about negotiation of rules (Smetana, 1995), and couples frequently have conflict over topics ranging from finances to religious involvement of children (Newton & Burgoon, 1990). Such conversations provide a fertile environment for conflict communication.

How couples handle conflict can be highly predictive of the success of a relationship. John Gottman (1995), a social psychologist who researches communication in marital couples, argues in his book on marital success that couples who consistently exhibit criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling are at a higher risk for divorce. He also argues that couples who match conflict styles in one of three ways have a greater probability of success in their marriage. He argues that *validators, avoiders,* and *volatiles* all have a greater probability of success in their marriage. Validators are that rare breed of individuals who can listen and affirm what their partner is saying during a conflict, even if they don't agree with their partner. They validate the concern, and the couple is able to move past the conflict. Conflict avoiders generally believe in the sanctity of marriage and avoid conflict with their spouse altogether. Although some worry that this type of conflict style might suppress anger and thus build up dangerous levels of repression, this

conflict style matching seems to be functional for a good percentage of the population. Finally, volatiles love and fight intensely. These people yell, argue, and make up loudly. While many who know couples like these don't understand the tendency to stay in such a volatile relationship, this pattern of "blowing up" followed by loving works well for those who match on volatile styles. Thus, communication of conflict can have strong implications for the continuation of marriage.

Finally, although several communication models of conflict can be explored, the interpersonal model of conflict talks about distal and proximal factors promoting conflict and distal and proximal outcomes of conflict. Proximal factors promoting conflict include the eliciting event, as well as mood, current context, and the like. One student reported having a conflict with her boyfriend after he informed her that his ex-girlfriend had called and invited him to her graduation. At the same time, she had specifically *not* invited the current girlfriend. This eliciting event was the distal factor. The distal factors eliciting conflict include history surrounding the conflict. Had they had earlier conflict over this ex or had the boyfriend previously gone out with the ex during their relationship, this would constitute the proximal context. Proximal outcomes are the immediate consequences of the conflict, such as long drawn-out silences and immediate emotional hurt. More distal, or longer-term, consequences might include a lack of trust surrounding the ex-girlfriend in the future. Family communication can include conflict, which is influenced by the past and the present and which will result in outcomes in the present and the future.

Dealing With Violence Requires Communication

Violence can be interpreted as an extreme outcome of conflict. Violence can manifest itself in child abuse and neglect, partner-focused violence, and elder abuse. To further compound the issue, violence in the home can have a wide-ranging impact on the children exposed to such behavior, regardless of whether the violence is aimed at the children. Specifically, a range of children's developmental outcomes—including social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and general health functioning—are compromised by exposure to domestic violence (Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003). The communication of violence and the communication surrounding violence in the family are important issues to address in family communication.

In 1998, victims of violence varied by race. For every 1,000 individuals, 110 American Indians, 43 blacks, 38 whites, and 22 Asians were victims of violence (Rennison, 2001). Specific to the family, 19.6 of 1,000 women between 16 and 24 experience being a victim of intimate partner violence and the percentage of female homicide victims killed by intimate partners has remained about 30% since 1976 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Many communication models attempt to explain patterns of violence in the home.

Skills deficits models argue that violent partners lack the communication skills to deal with conflict, and thus, violence occurs. In a similar vein, the **frustration-aggression model** argues that when batterers become frustrated, this frustration gets channeled into violence. The **coercive communication model** argues that the batterer is attempting to coerce his or her partner and when attempts fail, violence occurs. The **interpersonal model** is perhaps the most contentious in that it argues that violence does not begin in all relationships with the batterer because the partner in this case provokes the violence. Regardless of one's explanation for violence, the communication surrounding the violent events and the consequences is likely to be intense. Chapter 8 explores the communication surrounding violence in the family.

In addition, child abuse has been estimated to affect between 2.4 million (actual reports) and 6.9 million children (Wilson & Whipple, 1995). Because control is a central communicative function of family life, it is particularly troubling that much violence against children stems from disciplinary responses to perceived child misbehavior. The communication of nurturing is central to differences between abusive and nonabusive parents in that nonabusive parents consistently display more positive verbal and nonverbal behaviors than do abusive parents (see Wilson & Whipple, 1995, for review). Exploring communication differences between abusive and nonabusive parents is imperative for improving communication in abusive parental relationships.

Changing Undesirable Behavior in the Family Requires Communication

As alluded to earlier, many families include a member who has some out-of-control behavioral tendencies. These tendencies are generally self-destructive, but they can also have a devastating impact on the other family members as well. These family members may abuse substances, have an eating disorder, be depressed, or be physically abusive. To give you an idea of how many families are affected, substance abuse has become an alarming issue in this country with as many as one in four children being exposed to the effects of substance abuse. Besides the effects on children, the partner of the substance abuser also often experiences negative consequences as a result of the substance abuse. In fact, the substance abuser's partner is often put in the difficult position of nurturing the substance abuser through substance abuse episodes while simultaneously trying to control or stop the substance abuse. Inconsistent nurturing as control theory attempts to understand the paradoxes in this relationship that make it difficult for partners to assist their partners through substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, and violence.

Partners of those with behavioral compunctions such as substance abuse, eating disorders, or depression have competing needs for nurturing and control. In fact, before labeling the behavior as problematic, partners often communicate in ways that support the behavior—encouraging the substance

abuser to relax with a drink, encouraging the eating disordered individual's fixation on exercise and diet, empathizing with the symptoms of the depressed. This supportive behavior is understandable, especially in light of the research that shows that drinking has been found to facilitate marital functioning for steady drinkers (alcoholics who drink every day) in that they become better problem solvers and are simply more interactive with their partners (Le Poire & Cope, 1999). The motivation for maintaining the drinking is more obvious in this particular case. However, most partners of spouses with behavioral compulsions experience some critical incident that causes them to evaluate their partner as having a serious problem. For instance, substance abusers may be missing for several days in a row, may crash the car, or may exhibit violence. This usually promotes the partner to try to prevent future substance abuse. At this point, they begin to punish the behavior consistently by pouring out booze, calling the cops, or threatening to leave the relationship. Initially reinforcing behavior changes to punishing behavior. Eventually, however, partners of substance abusers realize that there is really very little that they can do to facilitate their partner's recovery as they come to terms with the "disease model" of addiction. This realization, combined with being tired of being a "nag" leads partners to sometimes nurture their substance-abusing partner and sometimes attempt to control the substance abuser. This mix of nurturing and controlling behavior approximates intermittent reinforcement and intermittent punishment and can actually serve to reinforce the actual behavior the substance abusers' partners want to diminish. Thus, the partners of the substance abusers find themselves in a conundrum with regard to how to communicate with their substance-abusive partner. In Chapter 9, we will consider the impacts of substance abuse, eating disorders, and depression on the family and will also consider the communicative ways in which partners can actually facilitate their partner's attempts at increased mental and physical health.

The Powerful Role of Communication of Expectations in Families

Finally, most of you will be concerned with how to communicate within your families most successfully. The family communication literature shows that there is a definite link between how you think and how you communicate within families. In other words, cognition and communication are linked in fundamental and important ways. With regard to cognition, your perceptions, attributions, and expectations provide the frame of reference within which communication episodes within the family occur. Powerful research is presented here showing that regardless of the "facts," if you perceive your family member positively, you will be more satisfied in that relationship and your relationship will be more stable. Conversely, if you see your family member negatively, you will be less satisfied and your relationship is likely to be less stable.

This is likely to translate into actual communication behavior as well. First, if you think of your family members positively, you will be more likely to communicate this expectation to them through the ways in which you communicate with them. If you expect positive communication behavior, you are more likely to be more positive, and this positivity will lead to greater reciprocation in the form of positive communication from your family members. Furthermore, this brings home the second rule of family communication: You get as good as you give. In other words, your own communication within your family is a powerful determinant of the type of communication behavior you receive. Much of the literature on family communication shows that behaviors from family members are generally matched. Heightened conflictual behavior is met with greater intensity of conflict behavior, whereas greater positivity is met with greater positivity. Conversely, greater negativity is also met with greater negativity, and unfortunately, this pattern is the hardest one to break out of.

In conclusion then, the family communication literature shows that how you think about your family members can have a powerful effect on how you communicate with them. Furthermore, how you communicate with your family members can have a powerful effect on the way your family members communicate with you. Ultimately, both thinking and communicating in more positive (or negative) ways result in greater positivity (or negativity) in family relationships. The strength of perceptions to influence actual communication behavior within the family will be explored more fully in Chapter 10.

Summary

In sum, this chapter attempts to define *family, communication,* and *family communication.* Whereas families have previously been defined in biological, legal, or self-defining ways, this text defines families through their *relatedness* (biological, legal, or marriage-like-commitment) and through their functions of *nurturing* (encouraging physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth) and *control* (limiting the behavioral options of family members through their inclusion in the family unit). Communication is defined as *messages that are typically sent with intent between two or more persons, messages that are typically seen as intentional, and messages that have consensually shared meaning.* In addition, this chapter distinguished between behaviors that can be informative (when no intent to communicate is evidenced) and behaviors that are clearly communicative in nature (when both the sender and the receiver perceive the intent to communicate on the part of the sender).

Furthermore, family communication is defined as messages that are typically sent with intent, messages that are typically perceived as intentional, and messages with consensually shared meaning among individuals who are related biologically, legally, or through marriage-like commitments and who nurture and control each other. Family communication is especially important because of changing family forms (e.g., nuclear, single-parent, gay

parent, blended families). These changes in forms result in highlighting communication as an important coping mechanism for dealing with changing family roles, rules, and systems. Furthermore, the importance of communication in the family is underscored by the all important function families have of socializing children. To further illustrate the importance of family communication, sometimes children are being socialized in families that include conflict, substance abuse, and violence. Moreover, all these issues point up the most important function that communication has in families: to simultaneously nurture and control family members. Family members facilitate individual member growth through nurturing and facilitate socialization through control. In fact, nurturing and control are the two central functions that communication serves within families.

KEY TERMS

behavior
biological family
communication
conflict
controlling
family forms
information
intimacy
legally defined family
nurturing
receiver orientation
relatedness
roles theory
rules theory
sociological definitions
source orientation
substance abuse
violence

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

1. Using ♂ & for men and ♀ & for women, draw your family tree. Show links of marriage, having children, divorces, and deaths. For further description of genograms, see www.genopro.com/genogram_rules/default.htm. What terms best describe your family form?
   a. What factors affected whom you included in your family tree? Did you draw members of your family who were related to you by biology, legal ties, self-definition, or commitment? What influenced your decisions about who to include in your family?
   b. If you were to include biological relatedness, legal ties, self-definition, and commitment, what members of your family had you inadvertently excluded? Describe your reaction.
   c. Did you include only family members you lived with over a significant period of time or did you also include your extended family? Why or Why not?
2. Describe your family in terms of (a) relatedness, (b) nurturing, and (c) controlling.
3. How did your family nurture and control you? How well do these concepts describe your family situation?