**The Nature of Interpersonal Communication**

1. **Two views of communication:**
2. **Interpersonal:** occurs when people treat each other as unique individuals, regardless of the context in which the interaction occurs or the number of people involved.
3. **Impersonal:** we seek pay offs that have little to do with the people involved; you interact with them in order to reach goals ie. Talking to someone you met online who might buy your phone from you.
4. Even within a single relationship, communication can vary from ritualistic to unique. Sometimes your relationship with friends, family, neighbours, or co-workers might fit the standard cultural pattern; but, on occasion, you might behave in quite different ways that reflect your feelings at that moment.
5. Several features distinguish **interpersonal versus impersonal communication**:
6. **Uniqueness**: Impersonal relies on roles and rules ie. Politely laughing; interpersonal is characterized by unique roles ie. In one relationship you can lightheartedly exchange good natured insults, while in another, you are careful never to offend.
7. **Irreplaceability**: Interpersonal relationships are unique and therefore cannot be replaced; impersonal can be with anyone ie. The person who makes your coffee.
8. **Interdependence**: ie. You may be able to brush off the negativity of someone you’re not involved with, whereas someone you are close to can really affect you with their depression, anger, excitement, or affection. Interdependence means our very identity is at stake: reflect back to self concept and how it is formed. Ie. One cannot be “attractive” without those who are drawn to them; one cannot be a “leader” without followers.
9. **Disclosure**: The amount of personal information disclosed. In impersonal relationships, not much is shared. This doesn’t mean that all interpersonal relationships are warm and caring, or that all self-disclosure is positive: I’m really mad at you…
10. The **scarcity** of interpersonal communication contributes to its value.
11. Most relationships aren’t either interpersonal or impersonal; they fall somewhere in between. Think of examples.
12. Exercise: page 22. How personal are your relationships?
13. What kind of messages do we send? Virtually all messages we send include content (the subject being discussed) and relational (which conveys how the parties feel about each other).
14. **Content messages**
15. **Relational messages**

**Partner exercise #1:** With a partner, try saying these messages:

*It’s your turn to do the dishes.* Try it once in a demanding tone; once in a matter of fact tone.

*I’m busy Saturday night.* Try once with affection and once with sarcasm or disdain.

We can see that the **content** can stay the same, but *how* we say it conveys the **relational message:** could be, “I’m just reminding you of your job” but could also be “ I have a right to tell you what to do!”

Sometimes we are unaware of the relational messages we are sending or receiving because they match our ideas around the amount of respect, control and affection that is appropriate. We don’t even notice them. But if they don’t match, they can stick out and really irritate or confuse us.

**Partner exercise #2:**

One of you is the boss, the other is the employee.

Try saying this sentence with each of the following **relational messages** attached:

*“Can you help me for a minute?”*

**Superiority friendliness helplessness aloofness irritation**

1. **Metacommunication: communication about communication.**

This is an important tool for solving conflicts in a constructive manner. It provides a way to shift discussion from the **content** level to the **relational** questions. For example, “Look, I know you are upset, but I think we need to talk about *how* we are going to talk about it before we talk about it.”

**Read “Macon and Muriel” on page 27.**