

Messages and Meanings

The term *communication* refers to the exchange of messages and the creation of meaning (e.g., assigning significance to messages). Meanings cannot be transmitted from one person to another. Only messages can be transmitted. When we send a message we attach a certain meaning to that message and choose the symbols and channel of communication accordingly. We rely on more than the behavior that strangers display (e.g., they may laugh) when we construct our messages. We also rely on our interpretation of strangers' behavior (e.g., they assume we are funny or they are laughing at us). The way we construct and interpret messages is a function of our perceptions of ourselves, the strangers involved, their behavior, and the way they send their messages to us. The strangers who interpret our messages, however, attach their own meanings to the message. The meanings attached to the message are a function of the actual message transmitted, the channel used, the environment in which the message is transmitted, the people who receive it, the relationship between the people, and the way the message is transmitted.

From Gudykunst, W.B. *Bridging Differences. Effective Intergroup Communication*. 4th edition, London: Sage Publications, 2004, p. 9.