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AUTHOR Camden, Carl T.
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ABSTRACT

Reviewing the definitions of interpersonal communication, this paper concludes that intentionality (the idea that a message transmitted by a speaker is based on a conscious plan) is often an important component of those definitions. It notes that the debate about the inclusion of intent in a definition of communication has focused on two theories of interaction: (1) that which is concerned with nonintended receivers of a communication, and (2) that which is concerned with nonverbal components of an interaction. The paper offers a theoretical perspective, focused on nonsymbolic communicative behaviors, that permits the resolution of the intentionality debate. It also challenges the traditional definition of intentionality and identifies the appropriate role of intentionality in communication definition and analysis. (FL)

# COMMUNICATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS: A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

CARL T. CAMDEN
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION
CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44115

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Intentionality is often a important component of definitions of interpersonal communication. Miller (1966) definition of communication explicitly notes the role of intentionality:

> In the main, communication has as its central interest those behavioral situations in which a source transmits a message to a receiver(s) with conscious intent to affect the latter's behaviors (p. 92).

Appendix A lists other definitions of communication thoerists which note the role of intentionality (1). A review of these definitions reveals intent to be commonly viewed as 'goals derived from conscious awareness'.

Controversy among the inclusion of consciously derived goals in a definition of communication has focused on two types of interaction scenarios. First, many theorists are concerned about nonintended receivers. Dance and Larson (1976) cogently present this viewpoint in the following passage:

> However, if we insist that all interpersonal speech communication involves interpersonal intent we are faced by too many life experiences that contradict this position. Almost all of us have overheard, at one time or another, conversations that not only were not intended for our ears but were probably specifically intended not to be heard by us---children overhearing parental conversations concerning discipline, students overhearing professorial undertones specifically directed away from the student, accidental reading of letters not intended for one's eyes, and on, and on, and on. In all of these instances we would be hard put to deny that some type of human communication has taken place, and yet in each of these instances the original intents of the senders were frustrated; these seem to be evidence directly contradicting the presence of conscious intent. . . . (p. 99).

Those theorists which advocate the inclusion of intentionality resolve this

controversy by claiming that it is the speaker's consciously derived plan and transmission of message that is the key to intentionality and a definition of communication. Reception of the message is required, but not necessarily by the intended receiver. Motley (1978) serves as an example of this position:

> Another possibility is that the letter will be received, read, and interpreted as intended, but by someone other than the friend for whom it was written. Our definition and discussion would consider that in this case communication indeed occurred. Although potentially embarrassing communication (suppose the letter were strictly confidential), this would simply be a matter of communicating with the wrong receiver (p. 2).

Thus, intentionality as it is commonly used in definitions of communication seems to imply that the message transmitted by the speaker is based on a consciously derived plan by the speaker.

A second type of interaction scenario that raises questions about the inclusion of intentionality in definitions of communication concerns nonverbal components of an interaction. Motley (1978) presents two such scenarios:

> Imagine, for example, a situation in which you and a friend are watching a movie together, your stomach growls, and your friend concludes that you are hungry. Assuming that your abdominal entreaty was unintended by you, our definition would not consider this to be an example of communication. . . As a more extreme example, suppose that while you are driving home you happen to see smoke billowing from the window of a neighbor's house, and you conclude correctly that the house is on fire. According to our definition, this is certainly not communication since there is no organism intentionally transmitting a message (pp. 2-3).

The communicative potency of these nonsymbolic components of interaction is definitely significant. Mehrabian (1968) notes:

> A great many forms of nonverbal behavior can communicate feelings: Touching, facial expression, tone of voice, spatial distance from the addressee, relaxation of posture, rate of speech,

number of errors in speech. Some of these are generally recognized as informative. Untrained adults and children easily infer that they are liked or disliked from certain facila expressions, from whether (and how) someone touches them, and a speaker's tone of voice (p. 195).

This undeniable fact that considerable information is transmitted and understood in a nonsymbolic and often nonintentional manner has led some communication theorists to explicitly exclude intentionality from definitions of communication:

> Communication does not refer to verbal explicit and intentional transmission of messages alone. . . The concept of communication would include all those processes by which people influence one another. . . This definition is based on the premise that all actions and events have communicative aspects, as soon as they are perceived by a human being; it implies, furthermore, that such perceptions change the information which an individual possesses and therefore influences him (Ruesch & Bateson, 1961; pp.5-6).

This area of disagreement has not been as easy to resolve. Indeed, Motley (1978) states "The question of intentionality in communication usually makes for fascinating but unresolveable debate" (p. 3).

The intention of this paper is threefold: (1) To provide a theoretical perspective that allows the resolution of the intentionality debate that is focused on nonsymbolic communicative behaviors; (2) To challenge the traditional definition of intentionality; and (3) To identify the appropriate role of intentionality in communication definition and analysis.

One of the primary theoretical perspectives in shaping the viewing of human behavior has been psychoanalysis as initially advanced by Sigmund Freud (e.g., Freud & Breur, 1893). While the broad scope of the psychoanalytic theory has vacillated in and out of popularity, certain key concepts seem to have become a permanent part of both the lay person and professional vocabulary (e.g., repression, defense mechanisms, neurosis, id, ego, etc.).

Perhaps the most vital of these concepts is repression. Repression is defined as a 'mental mechanism which keeps certain impulses and feelings from becoming conscious' (Corsini, 1977; p. 28). This concept is critical to the psychoanalytic perspective because it provides the theoretical framework by which the mind can be conceived of as having multiple loci of impulses, feelings, thoughts, etc. which are accessible to each other only with great difficulty. Thus, the model would claim that there are centers of high cognitive associative ability that can rarely be consciously accessed. A critical empirical question for psychoanalytic theory has been the experimental demonstration of this repression.

Because repression is such a central concept to the psychoanalytic personality model, there have been many studies in this area from 1948 to the present (Maddi, 1980). A series of three studies (Bruner & Postman, 1947a, 1947b; Postman, Bruner & McGinnies, 1948) provided the initial research foundation for studies of repression. These studies revealed the psycholinguistic mechanisms of perceptual defense and perceptual vigilance. In essence, these studies demonstrated that there are perceptual advantages or disadvantages for verbal stimuli depending upon their relection of the psychological anxieties, values or emotional disturbances of individuals. Word recognition time seemed to vary due to the idiosyncratic semantic meanings held for the stimuli words.

McGinnies' (1949) study utilizing the perceptual defense/vigilance paradigm provided the first evidence for the existence of repression. McGinnies selected a group of taboo words (by 1949 norms; e.g., whore, bitch, belly, Kotex) and a matched group of neutral words. Besides measuring word recognition time, he also measured Galvanic Skin Response (GSR). GSR mea-

sures the electrical conductivity of the skin (as an outcome of changes in the individual's perspiration rate.) These changes in GSR rate have been used as an index of various emotional states and arousal.

McGinnies found three interesting research results from this study: (1) The taboo words required longer tachistoscopic exposure time in order for correct word recognition to occur than did the neutral words. (2) Subjects showed increased in GSR (i.e., increased sweating) when viewing the taboo words even during pre-recognition exposures. (3) There was no comparable change in the subjects' GSR rates when viewing the neutral words. These results seem highly supportive of the existence of repression. Differences in exposure time needed to achieve word recognition (between the taboo and neutral words) indicate a cognitive mechanism acting to block certain types of verbal stimuli from being consciously perceived. That this blocking is accomplished by a complex cognitive center capable of processing symbolic stimuli (and that is distinct from typical conscious symbolic activity) is indicated by the emotional reaction to the taboo stimuli before the words were consciously recognized. This initial study still remains valid today. Howes and Solomon (Howes & Solomon, 1950, 1951; Solomon & Howes, 1951) raised two criticisms of the study. They claimed that the results could be attributed to differences in relative word frequency between taboo and nuetral words and/or an embarassment factor of having to say taboo words in the presence of an experimenter. Later studies indicated that both criticisms were not valid. Ericksen (1963) found the word frequency effect to be irrelevant to McGinnies' study and McCleary and Lazarus (1949) demonstrated the repression effect in a nonembarassing context. Other studies confirming the McGinnies' study include Blum (1955); Bootzin and Natsoulas

(1965); and Natsoulas (1965).

Beyond these studies of perception processes, additional research provides evidence of repression in memory processes. Zeller (1950) provided some of the initial research. Zeller identified a group of subjects that had equivalent memory abilities on neutral verbal stimuli. These subjects were randomly divided into two groups, a control and experimental group. The two groups were then administered a psychomotor test deliberately manipulated so that the control subjects performed well and had a pleasant experience. The manipulation also insured that the experimental group would perform poorly and have an unpleasant experience. Memory tests afterwards revealed significant recall inhibition after the psychomotor test by the experimental group, as would be expected if negative or anxiety-inducing stimuli invoked repression of the stimuli. More importantly, repression theory indicates that when the reason for the inhibition (i.e., the negative valence or anxiety relation) is removed, the repression should end. And indeed, when subjects were debriefed, and informed of the study's purpose (thereby removing the need for repression), the memory inhibition in the experimental group disappeared, without any change in the control group. Other studies confirming this presence of repression in memory processes are Flavell (1955) and Penn (1964).

Additionally, evidence of repression (and resultant differentiated spheres of consciousness) have also been revealed in speech encoding mechanisms. Freud (1923) believed that verbal slips (i.e., Freudian slips, spoonerisms, etc.) are examples of repressed intentionality in communication and are the best indication available of the existence of the unconscious. In fact, Freud (1938) believed that the differentiation of the

of cognitive functions is so complete that the individual can often only become aware of the meaning of his verbal slips through the intervention of another person (trained in psychoanalysis). Empirical studies have demonstrated the presence of repression in speech encoding. Recently Motley and Baars (1976) developed a methodology capable of generating verbal slips in a laboratory setting. Initial support was provided by a study (Motley & Baars, 1979) which found that an individual's cognitive set was reflected in the content of their verbal slips. For example, given the opportunity to make an equal number of sexually-oriented verbal slips and electric shock oriented verbal slips, subjects facing the threat of electrical shock made more electricity verbal slips, while subjects in the presence os sexual stimuli made more sex than electricity errors. A follow-up study (Motley, Camden & Baars, 1979) provided the direct evidence of repression being manifested in verbal slips. Repression (and nonconscious intentionality) is greatest in the presence of the repression invoking stimuli. Thus, for example, in the presence of sexual stimuli, repression should be greatest in those with the greatest anxiety about sex. This greater repression should be evidenced in greater amount of sexually-oriented verbal slips. And indeed Motley, Camden and Baars (1979) found a significant positive relationship between sexual anxiety and sexually-oriented verbal slips.

In spite of evidence indicating the presence of repression (and differentiating in cognitive control centers) in the areas of perception, memory and speech encoding, many individuals are reluctant to accept a theoretical perspective that seems to posit the notion of a 'person within a person'. However, psychophysiological studies provide a basis to explain this blocking behavior in terms of human biological characteristics. Adrian

(1954) and Bruner (1957) initiated the concept of 'gating', whereby the central nervous system (CNS) is capable of controlling the amount and type of information coming into the organism. This control of peripheral nervous stimulation by the CNS provides a psychophysiological explanation of psychoanalytic typic behavior. This gating potential of the CNS was demonstrated in a physiological experiment on cats by Hernandez-Peon, Scherrer, and Jouvet (1956). They obtained recordings of the electrical discharges in the nerve cells immediately past the auditory sense organs, the cochlear nucleus, towards the brain. They were thus able to measure the intensity and rate of electrical impulses whenever they sounded a click in the cat's ear. Once baseline response levels were established, the clicks were sounded in the presence of three different types of distractors (i.e., two mice in a jar, fish odors, and an electrical shock to the forepaw). In the presence of any of the distractors, electrical activity in the cochlear nucleus of the cats was significantly below baseline response rates, during the sounding of the click. In the presence of superior needs, peripheral nervous input was 'gated' away from the CNS. Supporting research in other sensory modalities has been provided by Galambos, Sheatz, and Vernier (1956); Granit (1955); Hess (1965); and Hutt and Anderson (1967). More importantly, other research has provided evidence of the specific gating mechanisms (i.e., (Galambos, 1956) for the superior olivary nucleus for auditory gating; and (Clark & Hunt, 1971; Melzack & Wall, 1968) for the mechanisms for gating away pain) used to block peripheral stimuli.

To briefly review the analysis to this point, the psychoanalytic perspective posits the necessity of independent cognitive control centers with variable linkage between them. These cognitive control centers are capable

of independent 'intentionality' of goals manifested in human behavior. These multiple intentions have different levels of self-awareness. Thus it is possible for almost any act of human behavior to be initiated by one or more intentions of which the individual may or may not be aware. The incorporation of awareness into definitions of intentionality seem to be artificially limiting.

When one further analyzes the psychoanalytic perspective on consciousness, the theoretical battleground between those who want to include or exclude intentionality in communication definitions is greatly reduced. When intentionality is intertwined with the concept of conscious awareness, there appears to be many events of high communicative value without apparent intention. However, when analyzed from a psychoanalytic perspective; many of these supposed non-intentional acts can now be seen as highly intentional, yet without conscious awareness. Aside from the previously identified verbal slips and other obvious errors of action or cognition, Freud (1901) identifies another class of human behavior symptomatic of repressed intentionality, chance or symptomatic actions.

These symptomatic actions are behaviors which do not appear to have or need intentionality, seemingly chance or random actions. However, psychoanalysts maintain that there are very few (if any) actions that are truly characterized by a chance nature. Freud (1901) in his early analyses of clients found that one woman's accidental cutting of her finger was expressive of her fears about her forthcoming marriage. Other similar actions, seemingly free of intention, that upon psychoanalysis proved highly meaningful are accidentally tearing a piece of paper currency, playing with a watch chain, fingering one's beard, jingling coins, placement of desk orna-

ments, dropping coins, etc. This rich psychoanalytic tradition, initiated during the earliest of Freud's case studies, is still continued by contemporary psychoanalysts. For example, recent case studies have yielded hidden intentions behind such acts as sighs, groans, laughter (Bollas, 1978), skin rashes, itching (Pines, 1980), and vocal tone (Pine, 1979). Thus according to psychoanalytic research it is highly probable that even the smallest seemingly nonintentional act may be actually highly intentional although not of a conscious awareness in origin.

While these psychoanalytic case studies over the last 80 years have revealed considerable evidence for this type of nonconscious (i.e., awareness) activity, empirical validation is currently absent. However, psychophysiological studies do provide evidence that it is highly plausible that even behaviors controlled by the autonomic nervous system (and thus under involuntary control) can be controlled by an individual's conscious intention. For example, utilizing hypnosis (Grahm, Stern & Winokur, 1958) or biofeedback (Surwit, Pilon, & Fenton, 1978) individuals have been able to increase or decrease their skin temperature. Additionally, practitioners of Transcedental Meditation have been able to dramatically lower their heart and respiration rates (Lindzey, Hall, & Thompson, 1975). In these and many other studies (e.g., Boudewyns, 1976) individuals have shown the capacity to control through conscious volition even the most involuntary of human behaviors. Considering both the psychoanalytic case studies and these psychophysiological studies in human competencies it is not inconceivable, indeed it is highly probable, that most aspects of human behavior, from an unbuttoned button to even a skin rash are simply the results of an intentional command from one of several independent cognitive control centers.

We have a theoretical perspective that claims that the essential character of man is conflict. Caught between the conflicting demands of our basic needs and societal injunctions, life is a continual string of unsatisfactory compromises. Ability to function adequately in society is predicated by one's ability to repress the awareness of these conflicts. This absolute need for repression leads to fragmentation of conscious control centers. Each of these independent centers are capable of generating intentions and encoding messages (in a variety of mediums) to fulfill those intents.

Traditionally, communication research has focused on ego cognitive control centers (those equated with conscious awareness) and their primarily verbal operations. This emphasis has help create a confusion by predicating conscious awareness as a parameter of intention and thus communication. However, many scholars have recognized the communicative value of human generated behaviors that are not derived from consciously derived intentions. And therefore there has been much debate over whether intention is a vital component of definitions of interpersonal communication. I propose to answer that question by saying that yes intention is an intrinsic component of any such definition but that we have placed invalid parameters on the definition of intention.

Psychoanalytic theory and its resultant research base clearly indicates that intentions can be derived from many non-ego sources. For many acts that seem to be without intention but of high communicative value, the question is not the presence or absence of intentionality but the awareness or nonawareness of the intention behind the act. Orientations and research in communication must include the possiblity of multiple sources

of intention. With such inclusion, the number of behaviors in the gap of being communicative but not intentional (and human generated) becomes significantly reduced.

## APPENDIX A

## SOME DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNICATION[1]

1. Communication is the process by which we understand others and in turn endeavor to be understood by them.
Anderson, M. P. What is communication. The Journal of Communication, March, 1959, 9 (1), 5.

2. From a communication point of view, the event may be observed in the employment of symbols (act), under specific circumstances (scene), by an individual or individuals (agent), using selected media (agency), for defined ends (purposes).
Babcock, M. A. A dynamic theory of communication. The Journal of Communication, May, 1952, 2, 65.

3. . . . the communicative aspects of visual behavior, where 'communication' implies that the sender's visual signal is intentional and the receiver's interpretation assumes that intentionality.
Ellsworth, P. & Ludwig, L. M. Visual behavior in social interaction. The Journal of Communication, December, 1972, 22 (4), 376.

4. Communication: a process involving the selection, production, and transmission of signs in such a way as to help a receiver perceive a meaning similar to that in the mind of the communicator.
Fotheringham, W. C. Perspectives on Persuasion. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1966, p. 254.

5. Every communicative act involves at least four components: (1) something to be communicated, such as an idea or a thought; (2) a speaker's intention to transmit that idea or thought to someone else; . . .
Glucksberg, S. & Danks, J. H. Experimental Psycholinguistics: An Introduction. Hillsdale, NJ: LEA Publishers, 1975, p. 1.

6. Communication is the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal) to modify the behavior of the other individuals (the audience).
Hovland, C. I., Janis, I. L. & Kelly, H. H. Communication and Persuasion. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953, p. 12.

7. Communication consists in the communicator's selecting and arranging symbols that have a certain meaning to him and his audience's sensing those symbols and inferring their intended meaning.
Minnick, W. C. The Art of Persuasion. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957, p. 70.

8. We shall define communication as a process by which an organism intentionally transmits a message which is received by one or more organisms.
Motley, M. T. Orientations to Language and Communication. Chicago: SRA, 1978.

9. When we communicate we are trying to establish a 'commonness' with someone. That is, we are trying to share information, an idea, or an attitude.
Schramm, W. How communication works, in The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1954, p.3

10. Communication consists of manipulating symbols; if these symbols are to be understood as intended, rules must exist for their encoding and decoding.
Wiemann, J. M. & Knapp, M. L. Turn-taking in conversations. The Journal of Communication, 1975, 25, 76.

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