Chapter 2
Perception of Self and Others

**Goal:** To understand the perception process and learn to create accurate perceptions of self and others.

**Overview:** This chapter defines perception as the process of gathering sensory information and assigning meaning to it. It looks at various states of perception, the different types of perception, and ways to increase the accuracy level of our perceptions of ourselves and others.

**Chapter Outline**

I. The perception process: the process of selectively attending to sensory information and assigning meaning to it. Your brain selects information, organizes the information, and interprets and evaluates it.

   A. Attention and selection depend upon
      1. Needs
      2. Interests
      3. Expectation

   B. Organization of stimuli takes place within the brain and may follow these principles:
      1. Simplicity: we simplify verbal messages and nonverbal behaviors
      2. Pattern: a set of characteristics used to differentiate some things from others

   C. Interpretation of stimuli: assigning meaning to information gathered


   A. Forming and maintaining self-concept
      1. Self-perception: unique interpretations about ourselves that we have made based on experience
      2. Reactions and responses of others: our self-concept is formed and maintained by how others react and respond to us.

III. Developing and maintaining self-esteem

   A. The influence of culture and gender on perception: background and gender will affect your view of self, expectations, roles, and self-esteem
      1. Individualistic versus collectivist cultures: individualist cultures focus more on the individual, whereas collectivist cultures will emphasize the interdependent nature of groups.
      3. Although cultural expectations for gender are becoming less rigid, they still have a strong influence.
B. Changing self-perceptions
   1. Changing how you see yourself may be challenging, but it is not impossible.
   2. A drastic change in environment or another aspect of one’s life can help facilitate change in perceptions.
   3. Consciously working to change perceptions (e.g. through therapy, self-help techniques) can also help.

C. Accuracy of self-concept and self-esteem dependent on accuracy of our own perceptions and how we process others’ perceptions of us
   1. Incongruence: gap between our inaccurate self-perceptions and reality
   2. Self-fulfilling prophecy: events that happen as the result of being foretold, expected, or talked about
   3. Filtering messages: we are prone to pay attention to messages that reinforce our current self-image and ignore messages that contradict this image
   4. Media images: visual and verbal messages we see through television, the internet, and other media affect our perceptions. Body image is one aspect of perception that is often negatively affected by media.

D. The effects of self-perceptions on communication
   1. Self-talk: the internal conversations we have with ourselves
   2. How we communicate with others: how we perceive ourselves affects how we communicate to other people. People with better self-esteem are more likely to defend their points and stand up for themselves than those with low self-esteem and negative self-concepts.
   3. Communication apprehension: people with poor self-concepts and low self-esteem are more likely to have higher levels of communication apprehension than those with positive self-concepts and high self-esteem.

E. Self-monitoring
   1. Self-monitoring is the internal process of observing and regulating your own behavior based on your analysis of the situation and others responses to you.
   2. Some people self-monitor more than others and/or more effectively than others. Still others seem unable to monitor at all.
   3. We are more likely to self-monitor when we are in new situations.

F. Social construction of self
   1. Role: A pattern of learned behaviors that people use to meet the perceived demands of a particular context
   2. We all enact numerous roles in different contexts. Our sense of self is the total of all the selves we play and how others react to those selves.

IV. Perception of others

   A. Uncertainty reduction theory: the process of monitoring the social environment to learn more
about self and others.

B. Observing others: physical characteristics and social behaviors often are the basis of first impressions and social perceptions
   1. Implicit personality theories: assumptions people have developed about which physical characteristics and personality traits or behaviors are associated with another
   2. Halo effects: to generalize and perceive that a person has a whole set of characteristics when you have actually observed only one characteristic, trait, or behavior

C. Stereotypes: attributes that cover up individual differences and ascribe certain characteristics to an entire group of people
   1. Prejudice: a rigid attitude that is based on group membership and predisposes an individual to feel, think, or act in a negative way toward another person or group
   2. Discrimination: a negative action toward a social group or its members on account of group membership

D. Emotional states
   1. Our emotions affect how accurately we perceive others and the time of interaction
   2. Attributions: reasons we give for others’ behavior

E. Perceiving others’ messages
   1. Context is the most important factor in determining how a message will be understood. Content and intend are interpreted based on the context of the message
   2. Shared language: both the actual language as well as a shared understanding of the meaning of a particular word or phrase.
   3. Skillfulness in encoding and decoding messages: the ability to choose specific, concrete, and precise words as we form our messages.

V. Improving the accuracy of social perceptions

A. A perception check is a message that reflects your understanding of the meaning of another person’s nonverbal behavior.

B. To assess the accuracy of your perceptions, do the following:
   1. Question the accuracy of your perceptions; don’t just assume you’re correct.
   2. Seek out more information to verify perceptions
   3. Realize that perceptions change over time
   4. Follow the steps of perception-checking:
      a. Watch the other person
      b. Ask yourself “What does that behavior mean to me?”
      c. Describe the behavior and put your interpretation into words to verify your perception.