

An open metal padlock is shown on a textured, light-colored surface. The padlock is dark and appears to be made of cast iron or steel. It is open, with the shackle raised. The number '1014' is visible on the body of the padlock. The background of the slide is a gradient from yellow on the left to blue on the right.

Chapter 4

Communication in Our Lives, 5th Edition
by Julia T. Wood

Symbols and Meaning

- Symbols are representations of people, events, and other phenomena

- **Arbitrary**
- **Ambiguous**
- **Abstract**





Symbols Are Arbitrary

- Not intrinsically connected to what they represent

- **Language and meaning change over time**

- gay, pot, sick, apple

- **New words or phrases are coined in response to change**

- staycation, virtual offices, Facebook “friends”



Symbols Are Ambiguous

- Meanings aren't fixed in an absolute way
- Meanings vary based on one's values and experiences



What do the following words or phrases mean to you?

- Government regulation
- Terrorist
- Get to bed early

Symbols Are Abstract

- Not concrete or tangible
- Vary in abstractness
 - Review “Ladder of Abstraction” in Chapter 2



Principles of Verbal Communication

- Communication is rule guided
 - **Regulative rules**
 - specify when, how, where, and with whom to talk about certain things
 - **Constitutive rules**
 - tell us how to count certain kinds of communication



What counts as showing respect?

What counts as demonstrating affection?



Principles (cont'd)

- Interpretation creates meaning
- Punctuation affects meaning



**The Demand-
Withdraw
Pattern**

Symbols Define

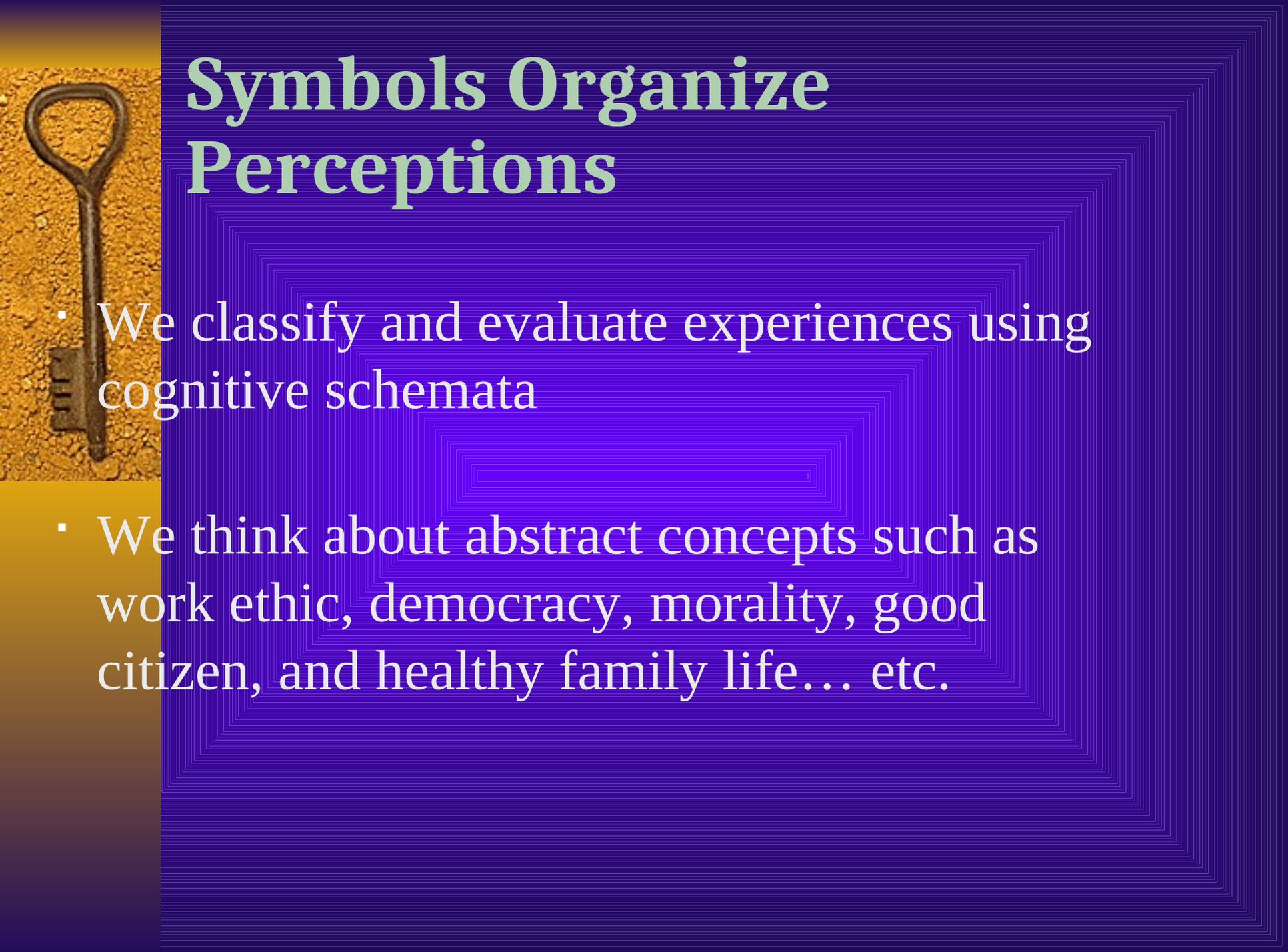
- Experiences, relationships, people, feelings, and thoughts
- Totalizing
 - using a single label to represent the totality of a person
 - “He’s a liberal.”
 - “She’s preppy.”





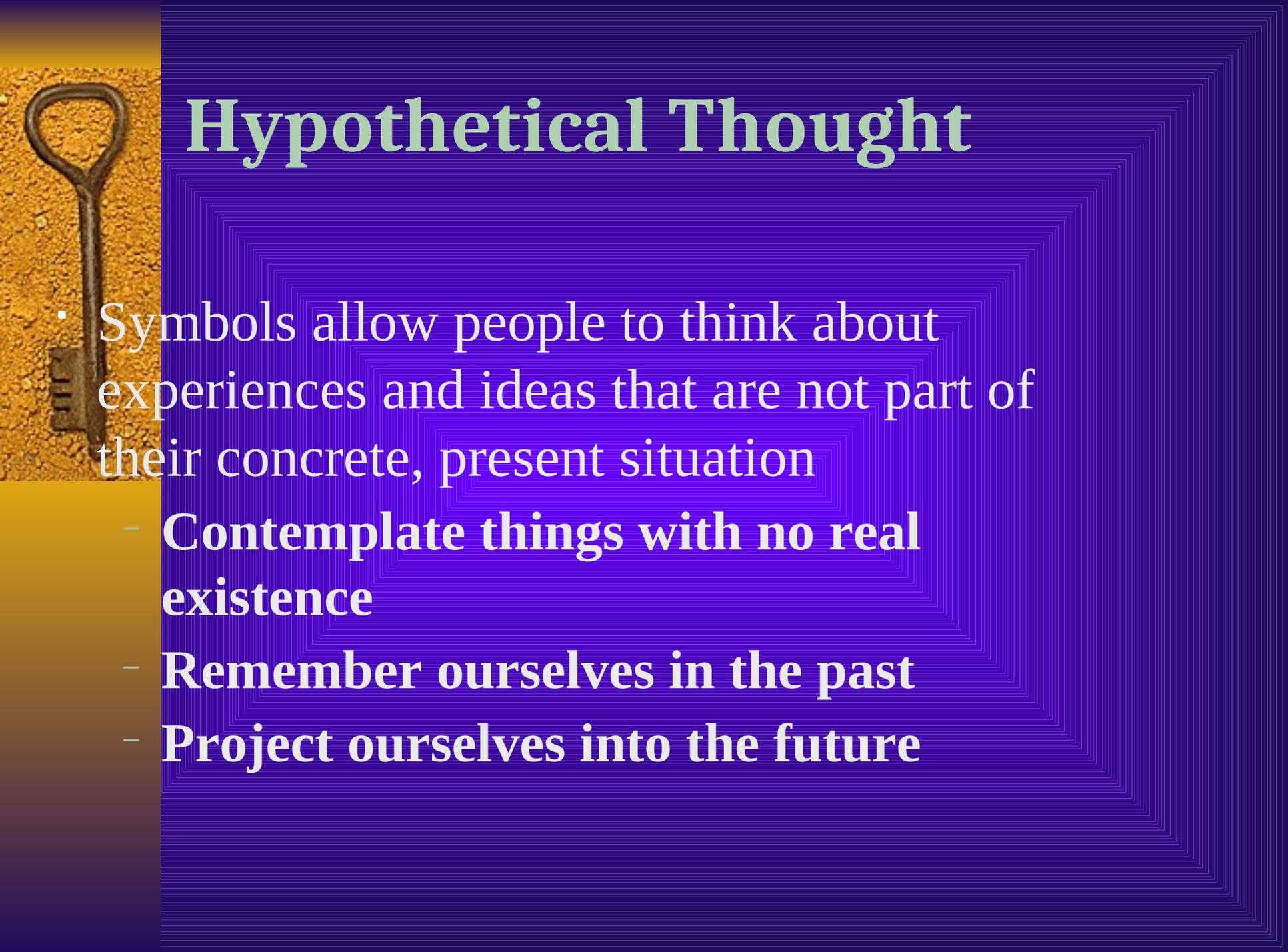
Symbols Evaluate

- Not neutral, laden with values
- Loaded language
 - **Words that strongly *slant* perceptions and thus meanings**
 - Would you enjoy a meal of “Tender lobster accented with drawn butter”
 - OR “Crustacean murdered by being boiled alive and then drenched in saturated fat”



Symbols Organize Perceptions

- We classify and evaluate experiences using cognitive schemata
- We think about abstract concepts such as work ethic, democracy, morality, good citizen, and healthy family life... etc.



Hypothetical Thought

- Symbols allow people to think about experiences and ideas that are not part of their concrete, present situation
 - **Contemplate things with no real existence**
 - **Remember ourselves in the past**
 - **Project ourselves into the future**

Symbols Allow Self-reflection

- We use symbols to reflect on ourselves

– *I*

- acts impulsively in response to inner needs and desires, regardless of social norms

– *me*

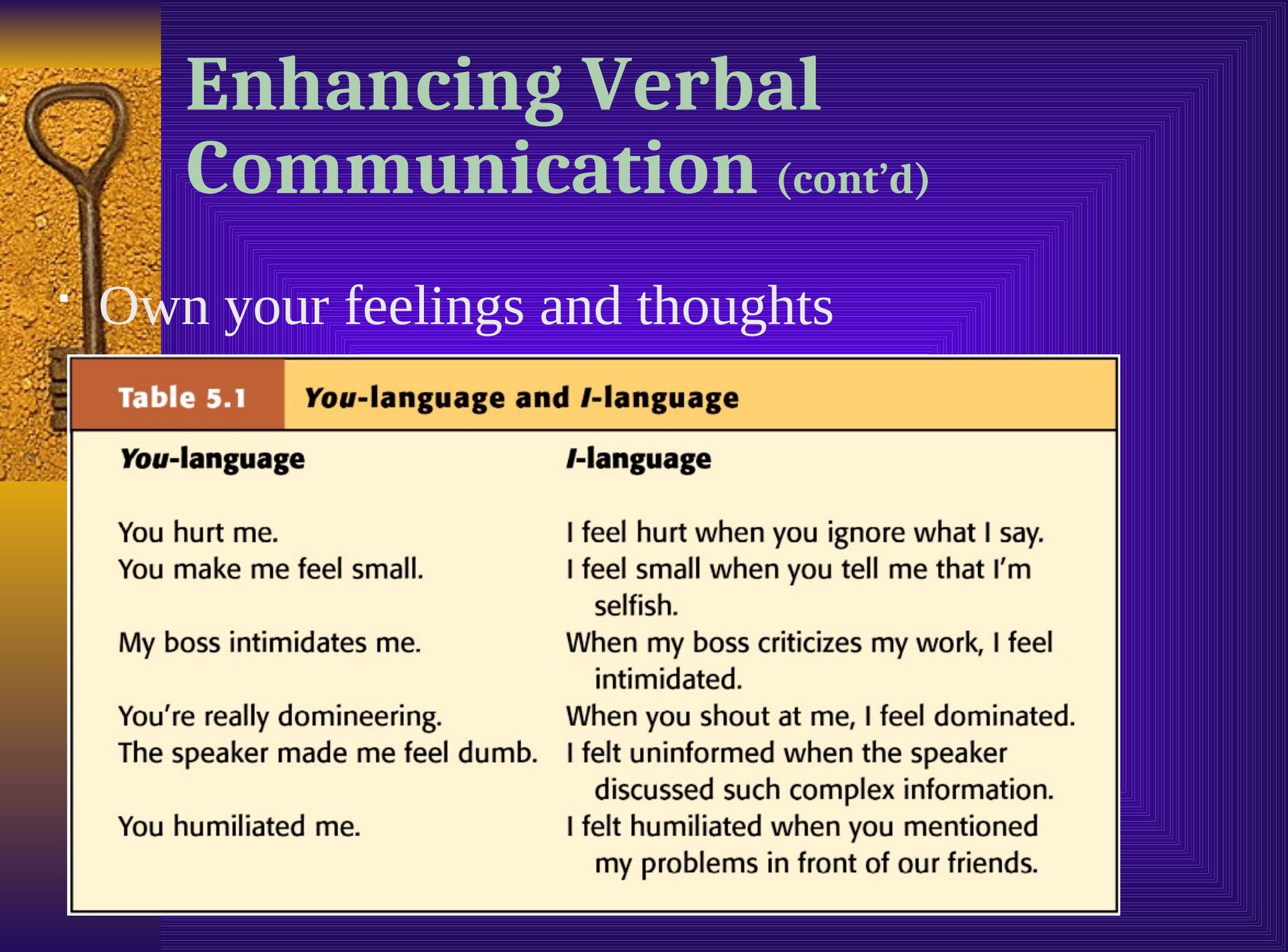
- The socially conscious part of the self that monitors and moderates the *I*'s impulses



Enhancing Effectiveness in Verbal Communication

- Dual perspective
 - recognizing another person's point of view and taking that into account as you communicate





Enhancing Verbal Communication (cont'd)

- Own your feelings and thoughts

Table 5.1

You-language and I-language

You-language

You hurt me.

You make me feel small.

My boss intimidates me.

You're really domineering.

The speaker made me feel dumb.

You humiliated me.

I-language

I feel hurt when you ignore what I say.

I feel small when you tell me that I'm selfish.

When my boss criticizes my work, I feel intimidated.

When you shout at me, I feel dominated.

I felt uninformed when the speaker discussed such complex information.

I felt humiliated when you mentioned my problems in front of our friends.



Enhancing Effectiveness (cont'd)

- Respect what others say about their feelings and ideas
- Strive for accuracy and clarity
 - **levels of abstraction**
 - **qualify language**
 - indexing



Textbook WebLinks

- 5.1:

[Navajo Code Talkers: World War II Fact Sheet](#)

- Prepared by the Navy & Marine Corps WWII Commemorative Committee



Websites

- What is hate speech?
- New Words Sampler from the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Ed.
- Dictionary.com
- The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis



More Websites

- The Language Construction Kit
 - Create artificial languages
- Netlingo.com Internet Dictionary