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THEORIES
OF HUMAN
COMMUNICATION

THEORIES OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

NINTH EDITION

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Theories of Human Communication, Ninth Edition
Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss

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Theories Covered (continued)

PREFACE

Theories of Human Communication, which is now nearly 30 years old, has literally grown up with the field. Stephen started writing the book when he was an assistant professor back in 1974. At that time, there was only one communication theory text, which was a reader, and we had nothing like the landmark text on theories of personality produced in psychology by Hall and Lindsay. Stephen felt it was time for our field to move in that direction, which motivated the first edition of this text. At that time, communication theory was largely an amalgam of works borrowed from information theory, social psychology, and to a limited extent, linguistics. In those years, one could not have identified the rich array of traditions that has rightfully informed the field in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond.

The evolution of the field since those early years has included a movement from a preponderance of theories borrowed from other fields to theories created by communication scholars *and* informed by the broad work of many other fields. It has moved from a small cluster of neophytes to a huge corpus of well-developed and evolved ideas. Communication has also moved from a smattering of relatively unconnected theories to numerous traditions, or communities, of scholarship, each with coherence of its own.

Theories of Human Communication is not the only text available on this subject, but it is the most senior work in this area and occupies the privileged position of being able to reflect the many twists and turns, as well as continuing maturation, of this field over three decades. The book has changed over nine editions in many ways, but retains the features that readers most appreciate—a strong discussion of theory and the nature of inquiry, a high-level survey of theories across the communication discipline, the continued addition of new materials and sources, extensive citations, and a useful bibliography for further exploration of specific theories, and an accessible writing style.

This edition continues the framework developed in the previous edition. We have organized communication theory around two intersecting elements—contexts and theoretical traditions—and have shown, across the chapters of the book, how various theoretical traditions have added to our knowledge of eight communication contexts. We believe that this framework accurately portrays the diversity and complexity of the communication discipline. We hope this framework provides a useful organizing scheme for professors around which they can develop the course and for students seeking to understand connections, trajectories, and relationships among the theories. We have added a feature that we think students will appreciate—boxed quotations from various theorists reflecting what they would like students to know about their work.

We have many people to thank. First, we offer our deep appreciation to our adopters, who have kept the project alive, and to students from around the world, who have told us over the years that the book was helpful in their education. The staff and project team at Thomson Wadsworth have also been extremely helpful. Special thanks go to Jaime Perkins, John Gahbauer, Kim Gengler, Maria Epes, Cheri Palmer, Roberta Broyer, Lucinda Bingham, and Erin Mitchell. We would especially like to thank Laura Houston and everyone at Pre-Press, Inc., who worked on the production of this book.

Stephen W. Littlejohn and
Karen A. Foss

FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNICATION THEORY AND SCHOLARSHIP

As long as people have wondered about the world, they have been intrigued by the mysteries of human nature. The most commonplace activities of our lives—the things we take for granted—can become quite puzzling when we try to understand them systematically. Communication is one of those everyday activities that is intertwined with all of human life so completely that we sometimes overlook its pervasiveness, importance, and complexity. In this book, we treat communication as central to human life. Every aspect of our daily lives is affected by our communication with others, as well as by messages from people we don't even know—people near and far, living and dead. This book is designed to help you better understand communication in all of its aspects—its complexities, its powers, its possibilities, and its limitations.

We could proceed with this book in several ways. We could provide a set of recipes for improving communication, but such an approach would ignore the complexities and ambiguities of the communication process. We could offer some basic models, but this too offers a limited view of communication. Instead, we will focus on theories of communication, because theories provide explanations that help us understand the phenomenon we call communication. Our guiding question is how scholars from various traditions have described and explained this universal human experience. By developing an understanding of a variety of communication theories, you can be more discriminating in your interpretation of communication, can gain tools to improve your communication, and can better understand what the discipline of communication is about.[1]

Studying communication theory will help you to see things you never saw before, to see the unfamiliar in the everyday. This widening of perception, or unhitching of blinders, will enable you to transcend habitual thinking and to become increasingly adaptable, flexible, and sophisticated in terms of your approach to communication. The

philosopher Thomas Kuhn explains the different way of seeing that knowledge of a field provides: "Looking at a contour map, the student sees lines on paper, the cartographer a picture of a terrain. Looking at a bubble chamber photograph, the student sees confused and broken lines, the physicist a record of familiar subnuclear events."[2] Theories, then, provide a set of useful tools for seeing the everyday processes and experiences of communication through new lenses.

▐● DEFINING COMMUNICATION

To begin our study of communication theories, we turn first to the task of defining *communication*— and communication is not easy to define.[3] Theodore Clevenger Jr. noted that "the continuing problem in defining communication for scholarly or scientific purposes stems from the fact that the verb 'to communicate' is well established in the common lexicon and therefore is not easily captured for scientific use. Indeed, it is one of the most overworked terms in the English language."[4] Scholars have made many attempts to define *communication*, but establishing a single definition has proved impossible and may not be very fruitful.

Frank Dance took a major step toward clarifying this muddy concept by outlining a number of elements used to distinguish communication.[5] He found three points of "critical conceptual differentiation" that form the basic dimensions of communication. The first dimension is *level of observation*, or abstractness. Some definitions are broad and inclusive; others are restrictive. For example, the definition of communication as "the process that links discontinuous parts of the living world to one another" is general.[6] On the other hand, communication as "a system (as of telephones or telegraphs) for communicating information and orders (as in a naval service)," is restrictive.[7]

The second distinction is *intentionality*. Some definitions include only purposeful message sending and receiving; others do not impose this limitation. The following is an example of a definition that includes intention: "Those situations in which a source transmits a message to a receiver with conscious intent to affect the latter's behaviors."[8] A definition that does not require intent follows: "It is a process that makes common to two or several what was the monopoly of one or some."[9]

The third dimension used to distinguish among definitions of communication is normative *judgment*. Some definitions include a statement of success, effectiveness, or accuracy; other definitions do not contain such implicit judgments. The following definition, for example, presumes that communication is successful: "Communication is the verbal interchange of a thought or idea."[10] The assumption in this definition is that a thought or idea is successfully exchanged. Another definition, on the other hand, does not judge whether the outcome is successful or not: "Communication [is] the transmission of information."[11] Here information is *transmitted*, but it is not necessarily *received* or understood.

Debates over what communication is and the dimensions that characterize it will undoubtedly continue. Dance's conclusion is appropriate: "We are trying to make the concept of 'communication' do too much work for us."[12] He calls for a family of concepts, rather than a single theory or idea, that collectively defines communication. These definitional issues are important, as Peter Andersen reminds us: "While there is not a right or wrong perspective, choices regarding [definitions] are not trivial. These perspectives launch scholars down different theoretical trajectories, predispose them to ask distinct questions, and set them up to conduct different kinds of communication studies."[13] Different definitions have different functions and enable the theorist to do different things.

A definition should be evaluated on the basis of how well it helps scholars answer the questions they are investigating. Different sorts of investigations require separate, even contradictory, definitions of communication. Definitions, then, are tools that should be used flexibly. In

this book we do not offer a single definition of communication but instead look at a range of theories that defines communication in a variety of ways. We hope this range of definitions will help you determine what communication means to you as you begin to explore the many arenas of communication theory.

● THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF COMMUNICATION

Communication has been systematically studied since antiquity,[14] but it became an especially important topic in the twentieth century. W. Barnett Pearce describes this development as a "revolutionary discovery," largely caused by the rise of communication technologies (such as radio, television, telephone, satellites, and computer networking), along with industrialization, big business, and global politics.[15] Clearly, communication has assumed immense importance in our time.

Intense interest in the academic study of communication began after World War I, as advances in technology and literacy made communication a topic of concern.[16] The subject was further promoted by the popular twentieth-century philosophies of progress and pragmatism, which stimulated a desire to improve society through widespread social change. This trend is important because it grounds communication firmly in the intellectual history of the United States during the twentieth century. During this period, the nation was "on the move" in terms of efforts to advance technology, improve society, fight tyranny, and foster the spread of capitalism. Communication figured prominently in these movements and became central to such concerns as propaganda and public opinion; the rise of the social sciences; and the role of the media in commerce, marketing, and advertising.

After World War II, the social sciences became fully recognized as legitimate disciplines, and the interest in psychological and social processes became intense. Persuasion and decision making in groups were central concerns, not only among researchers but in society in general because of the

widespread use of propaganda during the war to disseminate oppressive ideological regimes. Communication studies developed considerably in the second half of the twentieth century because of pragmatic interests in what communication can accomplish and the outcomes it produces.

At first, university courses related to communication were found in many departments—the sciences, the arts, mathematics, literature, biology, business, and political science.[17] In fact, communication is still studied across the university curriculum. Psychologists study communication, for instance, as a particular kind of behavior motivated by different psychological processes. Sociologists focus on society and social processes and thus see communication as one of many social factors important in society. Anthropologists are interested primarily in culture, treating communication as a factor that helps develop, maintain, and change cultures. There has been considerable cross-fertilization between communication and other disciplines: "While many disciplines have undoubtedly benefited from adopting a communication model, it is equally true that they, in turn, have added greatly to our understanding of human interaction."[18]

Gradually, however, separate departments of speech, speech communication, communication, and mass communication developed. Today, most departments are called departments of communication or communication studies, but whatever the label, they share a focus on communication as central to human experience. In contrast, then, to researchers in other fields like psychology, sociology, anthropology, or business, who tend to consider communication a secondary process—something important for transmitting information once other structures are in place—scholars in the discipline of communication consider communication as the organizing element of human life.

As communication became a discrete discipline, organizations such as the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association, as well as many regional and specialized associations, developed to assist in articulating the nature of the discipline. Journals in which scholars publish their work also have become prolific and also help

define what the field of communication is.[19] And despite its interdisciplinary origins and continued interdisciplinary flavor, communication is producing theories of its own rather than relying on sister disciplines for theoretical starting points, as was the case when the field first began. In fact, the evolution of this textbook offers evidence of this shift from reliance on other disciplines to disciplinary autonomy. In earlier editions of *Theories*, theories from other disciplines were featured heavily since that was where communication scholars directed their attention and drew their inspiration. Now, we try to include primarily theories developed within the discipline itself—theories that center communication in ways other disciplines do not.

The development of the discipline of communication took different forms and foci in different parts of the world. Communication theory has had a different history in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa than in the United States, for example.[20] In the United States, researchers began by studying communication quantitatively, seeking to establish communication as a social science. Although these researchers were never in complete agreement on this objective ideal, quantitative methods were the standard for many years. European investigations of communication, on the other hand, were influenced more by Marxist perspectives and came to rely on critical/cultural methods. Within the contemporary discipline of communication, however, there is considerable interaction both ways, with scientific procedures developing a toehold in Europe and critical and other qualitative perspectives gaining prominence in North America.

Communication scholars have also begun to attend to distinctions between Western and other forms of communication theory.[21] Eastern theories tend to focus on wholeness and unity, whereas Western perspectives sometimes measure parts without necessarily being concerned about an ultimate integration or unification of those parts. In addition, much Western theory is dominated by a vision of individualism: people are considered to be deliberate and active in achieving personal aims. Most Eastern theories, on the other hand, tend to view communication

outcomes as largely unplanned and natural consequences of events. Even the many Western theories that share the Asian preoccupation with unintended events tend to be individualistic and highly cognitive, whereas most Eastern traditions stress emotional and spiritual convergence as communication outcomes.

Eastern and Western views of communication also differ because of their perspectives on language. In the East, verbal symbols, especially speech, are downplayed and even viewed with skepticism. Western-style thinking, which values the rational and logical, is also mistrusted in the Eastern tradition. What counts in many Asian philosophies is intuitive insight gained from direct experience. Such insight can be acquired by not intervening in natural events, which explains why silence is so important in Eastern communication. Relationships, too, are conceptualized differently in the two traditions. In Western thought, relationships exist between two or more individuals. In many Eastern traditions, relationships are more complicated and contextualized, evolving out of differences in the social positions of role, status, and power.

Some scholars seek to develop larger (or meta) theories that are specific to a certain culture or region. Molefi Asante's work on Afrocentricity and Yoshitaka Miike's efforts to describe an Asiacentric theory of communication are two examples. By outlining theoretical concepts and constructs, research materials, and methodologies from such perspectives, scholars like Miike and Asante seek to introduce alternatives to the Eurocentric paradigm in the field of communication.[22]

Like all distinctions, however, the cultural, racial, or regional distinctions among communication theories should be viewed with caution. Although general differences can be noted, what is important to remember is that similarities abound. We could take each of the aforementioned characteristics of Eastern thought and show how each is manifest in Western thinking and vice versa. And no members of a cultural group all communicate in the same way, no matter how much they share a common background. Communication is so broad that it cannot be essentialized or confined within a single paradigm.

In this text, we focus on communication theories as they have emerged in the Western discipline called communication or communication studies. We are interested in presenting (1) the theories that have been formative in the discipline; and (2) the contemporary evolutions of those theories. This is not to say that the perspectives developed in other areas of the world are not important; we simply cannot cover all of the traditions in one book. Increasingly, however, the theories in the discipline are cognizant of cultural and contextual factors of all kinds, suggesting a greater integration of diverse theories from many communication perspectives.

In a landmark article, Robert T. Craig proposes a vision for communication theory that takes a huge step toward unifying this rather disparate field and addressing its complexities.[23] Craig argues that communication will never be united by a single theory or group of theories. Theories will always reflect the diversity of practical ideas about communication in ordinary life, so we will always be presented with a multiplicity of approaches. Our goal cannot and should not be to seek a standard model that applies universally to any communication situation. If this impossible state of affairs were to happen, communication would become "a static field, a dead field."[24]

Instead, Craig argues, we must seek a different kind of coherence based on (1) a common understanding of the similarities and differences, or tension points, among theories; and (2) a commitment to manage these tensions through dialogue. Craig writes, "The goal should not be a state in which we have nothing to argue about, but one in which we better understand that we all have something very important to argue about."[25]

The first requirement for the field, according to Craig, is a common understanding of similarities and differences among theories. More than a list of similarities and differences, we must have a common idea of where and how theories coalesce and clash. We need a *metamodel*. The term *meta* means "higher" or "above," so a *metamodel* is a "model of models." The second requirement for coherence in the field is a definition of *theory*.

Rather than viewing a theory as an explanation of a process, it should be seen as a statement or argument in favor of a particular approach. In other words, theories are a form of *discourse*. More precisely, theories are discourses about discourse, or *metadiscourse*.

As a student of communication theory, you will find these twin concepts useful in sorting out what this theory-making enterprise is all about. If you can find a useful metamodel, you will be able to make connections among theories, and if you see communication theory as metadiscourse, you will begin to understand the value of multiple perspectives in the field. In other words, communication theories will look less like a bunch of rocks laid out on tables in a geology laboratory and more like a dynamic computer model of the way the earth was formed.

As a basic premise for a metamodel, Craig says that communication is the primary process by which human life is experienced; communication *constitutes* reality. How we communicate about our experience itself forms or makes our experience. The many forms of experience are made in many forms of communication. People's meanings change from one group to another, from one setting to another, and from one time period to another because communication itself is dynamic across situations. Craig describes the importance of this thought to communication as a field: "Communication . . . is not a secondary phenomenon that can be explained by antecedent psychological, sociological, cultural, or economic factors; rather, communication itself is the primary, constitutive social process that explains all these other factors."[26]

Craig suggests that we move the same principle to another level. Theories are special forms of communication, so theories constitute, or make, an experience of communication. Theories communicate about communication, which is exactly what Craig means by metadiscourse. Different theories are different ways of "talking about" communication, each of which has its powers and limits. We need to acknowledge the constitutive power of theories and find a shared way to understand what various theories are designed

to address and how they differ in their forms of address. Because every communication theory ultimately is a response to some aspect of communication encountered in everyday life, the dialogue within the field can focus on *what* and *how* various theories address the social world in which people live.

Craig describes seven traditional standpoints that provide different ways of talking about communication: (1) the rhetorical; (2) the semiotic; (3) the phenomenological; (4) the cybernetic; (5) the sociopsychological; (6) the sociocultural; and (7) the critical. These traditions are described in greater detail in Chapter 3 and constitute the frame we use to organize this book.

■● THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY IN COMMUNICATION

A Basic Model of Inquiry

A starting point for understanding communication as a field and its theories is the basic process of inquiry itself. Inquiry is the systematic study of experience that leads to understanding, knowledge, and theory. People engage in inquiry when they attempt to find out about something in an orderly way. The process of systematic inquiry involves three stages.[27] The first stage is asking questions. Gerald Miller and Henry Nicholson believe that inquiry is "nothing more . . . than the process of asking interesting, significant questions . . . and providing disciplined, systematic answers to them."[28] Questions can be of various types. Questions of *definition* call for concepts as answers, seeking to clarify what is observed or inferred: What is it? What will we call it? Questions of *fact* ask about properties and relationships in what is observed: What does it consist of? How does it relate to other things? Questions of *value* probe aesthetic, pragmatic, and ethical qualities of the observed: Is it beautiful? Is it effective? Is it good?

The second stage of inquiry is *observation*. Here, the scholar looks for answers by observing the phenomenon under investigation. Methods of observation vary significantly from one tradition

to another. Some scholars observe by examining records and artifacts, others by personal involvement, others by using instruments and controlled experimentation, and others by interviewing people. Whatever method is used, the investigator employs some planned method for answering the questions posed about communication.

The third stage of inquiry is *constructing answers*. Here, the scholar attempts to define, describe, and explain—to make judgments and interpretations about what was observed. This stage is usually referred to as *theory*, and this stage is the focus of this book.

People often think of the stages of inquiry as linear, occurring one step at a time—first questions, then observations, and finally answers. But inquiry does not proceed in this fashion. Each stage affects and is affected by the others. Observations often stimulate new questions, and theories are challenged by both observations and questions. Theories lead to new questions, and observations are determined in part by theories. Inquiry, then, is more like running around a circle and back and forth between different points on it than walking in a straight line. Figure 1.1 illustrates the interaction among the stages of inquiry.

Types of Scholarship

The preceding section outlines the basic elements of inquiry, but it ignores important differences. Different types of inquiry ask different questions,
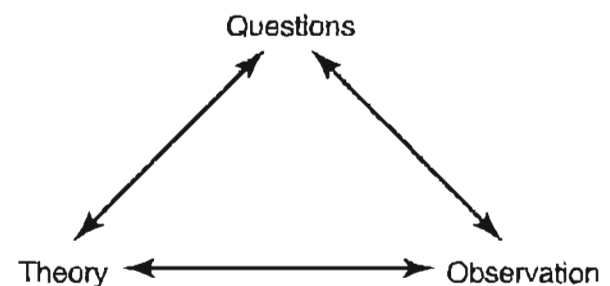
FIGURE **1.1**

The Stages of Inquiry

use different methods of observation, and lead to different kinds of theory. Methods of inquiry can be grouped into three broad forms of scholarship—scientific, humanistic, and social scientific.[29] Although these forms of scholarship share the common elements discussed in the previous section, they also have major differences.[30]

Scientific Scholarship.   Science is often associated with objectivity, standardization, and generalizability. The scientist attempts to look at the world in such a way that all other observers, trained the same way and using the same methods, will see the same thing. Replications of a study should yield identical results. Standardization and replication are important in science because scientists assume that the world has observable form, and they view their task as discovering the world as it is. The world sits in wait of discovery, and the goal of science is to observe and explain the world as accurately as possible.

Because there is no absolute way to know how accurate observations are, the scientist must rely on agreement among observers. If all trained observers using the same method report the same results, the object is presumed to have been accurately observed. Because of the emphasis on discovering a knowable world, scientific methods are especially well suited to problems of nature.

In its focus on standardization and objectivity, science sometimes appears to be value free. Yet, this appearance may belie reality, as science is based on many implicit values. Humanistic scholarship is a tradition that more deliberately acknowledges the place of values in research.

Humanistic Scholarship.   Whereas science is associated with objectivity, the humanities are associated with subjectivity. Science aims to standardize observation; the humanities seek creative interpretation. If the aim of science is to reduce human differences in what is observed, the aim of the humanities is to understand individual subjective response.[31] Most humanists are more interested in individual cases than generalized theory.

Science focuses on the discovered world, and the humanities focus on the discovering person. Science seeks consensus while the humanities seek alternative interpretations. Humanists often are suspicious of the claim that there is an immutable world to be discovered, and they tend not to separate the knower from the known. The classical humanistic position is that what one sees is largely determined by who one is. Because of its emphasis on the subjective response, humanistic scholarship is especially well suited to problems of art, personal experience, and values.

Science and the humanities are not so far apart that they never come together. Almost any program of research and theory building includes some aspects of both scientific and humanistic scholarship. At times the scientist is a humanist, using intuition, creativity, interpretation, and insight to understand the data collected or to take research in entirely new directions. Many of the great scientific discoveries were in fact the result of creative insight. Archimedes discovered how to measure the volume of liquid using displacement when he stepped into his bathtub; Alexander Fleming used, rather than threw away, the mold in the Petri dish—which, in fact, produced penicillin. Ironically, the scientist must be subjective in creating the methods that will eventually lead to objective observation, making research design a creative process. In turn, at times the humanist must be scientific, seeking facts that enable experience to be understood. As we will see in the next section, the point where science leaves off and the humanities begin is not always clear.

Social-Scientific Scholarship.   A third form of scholarship is the social sciences. Although many social scientists see this kind of research as an extension of the natural sciences in that it uses methods borrowed from the sciences, social science is actually a very different kind of inquiry.[32] Paradoxically, it includes elements of both science and the humanities but is different from both.[33]

In seeking to observe and interpret patterns of human behavior, social-science scholars make human beings the object of study. If human

behavior patterns do, in fact, exist, then observation must be as objective as possible. In other words, the social scientist, like the natural scientist, must establish consensus on the basis of what is observed. Once behavioral phenomena are accurately observed, they must be explained or interpreted—and here's where the humanistic part comes in. Interpreting is complicated by the fact that the object of observation—the human subject—is an active, knowing being, unlike objects in the natural world. The question becomes, Can "scientific" explanations of human behavior take place without consideration of the "humanistic" knowledge of the observed person? This question is the central philosophical issue of social science and has provoked considerable concern and debate across disciplines.[34] In the past, social scientists believed that scientific methods alone would suffice to uncover the mysteries of human experience, but today many realize that a strong humanistic element is needed as well.

Communication involves understanding how people behave in creating, exchanging, and interpreting messages. Consequently, communication inquiry makes use of the range of methods, from scientific to humanistic.[35] The theories covered in this book vary significantly in the extent to which they use scientific, social-scientific, or humanistic elements.

◖ HOW SCHOLARS WORK

Although standards vary from one academic community to another, scholars follow a fairly predictable pattern of inquiry and theory development. First, a scholar or group of scholars becomes curious about a topic. Sometimes the topic relates to something personal in the scholar's own life. Sometimes it is an extension of what the individual has been reading in the literature. Often a conversation with mentors or colleagues provokes an interest in a particular subject. Sometimes professors are challenged by questions that come up in class.

Because they genuinely care about communication, communication scholars are motivated to investigate subjects of interest to them; their professional advancement may depend on such

investigations as well. These scholars must develop their curiosity into research topics of their choice for their doctoral dissertations. They often cannot get pay raises, tenure, or promotion without engaging in research and theory building. Many other incentives exist as well, including the ability to get grant money, travel, be recognized as leaders in the field, earn awards, and so forth.

Thus, while the theory-making process begins with curiosity about a topic, it does not end there. The results of reading, observing, and thinking— of scholarly investigation—must be shared with others. On the most informal level, scholars share their work with students. They may bring some of their latest work into the classroom as a lecture or basis for discussion, which can be helpful in refining ideas. Graduate students are aware of this, but undergraduates often do not realize that their professors "test" their theoretical ideas in classes. In the process of preparing a lecture on a topic, the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the argument become apparent.

Ultimately, a scholar's work must go out for peer review. One of the first formal theory "tests" a scholar uses is the convention paper. The researcher writes a paper and submits it to a professional association, so the paper can be presented at a regional or national meeting. Most of these convention submissions are reviewed by a panel of peers. This peer review can help scholars determine if they are on the right track. Universities usually encourage professors to submit papers by agreeing to pay their travel expenses if they have a paper accepted.

When a paper is given at a convention, the presentation permits at least two other forms of peer assessment. Often a designated critic delivers comments about several papers to the audience right after the papers are presented; this is the most formal kind of critique. Less formal feedback consists of the comments that colleagues make after hearing the presentation— during the question-and-answer session following the paper presentation, in the hallway after the session, later that evening in the hotel bar, or at the airport. Colleagues may even enjoy a phone call or e-mail exchange about their work after the convention is over.

Conventions are very valuable for scholars as an initial testing ground for ideas. Not only do convention attendees have the opportunity to hear the most recent research but the presenters can refine their work based on the reactions they receive. Often a group of researchers will present various iterations of their work several times at conventions before they submit the work for publication.

Two forms of publication are most valued in the academic community. The first is a journal article, and the second is a monograph, or book. Literally thousands of academic journals are published around the world, and every field, no matter how small, has at least one (and usually several) journals. A glance through the bibliography of this book will reveal several of the most important journals in the communication field. One of the most important publications for introducing communication theories is a journal *Communication Theory*. Indeed, if you scan the notes of each chapter of this book, you will see just how important this journal has become. But many other journals are also highly recognized, including, for example, *Human Communication Research, Critical Studies in Media Communication,* and *Communication Monographs*.

Members of the communication field subscribe to these journals, use their contents as background for their own research, and learn about the latest and best developments in the field. Usually, the articles in a journal are refereed, meaning that they are formally reviewed and judged by a panel of peers for quality. Since only the best articles are published, the majority of papers submitted to journals do not appear in print. This rigorous form of review is the primary force establishing what is taken seriously within an academic community.[36]

Since no universal, objective scale can be found, peers must judge potential publications subjectively. Evaluation is always a matter of judgment, and consensus about the value of a piece of scholarship is rare. Just as a group of students might disagree about whether their professor is a good or bad teacher, scholars also disagree about the merits of particular research and theory. The references and footnotes in essays show the history of research and theory in that area. These notes are an excellent place to start researching a topic; they show the work that is valued in that area of the discipline.

Through this process of convention presentation and journal publication, the scholarship considered most interesting, profound, useful, or progressive "bubbles up" and forms the body of recognized work within the community of scholars. As this work develops, various scholars begin to develop more formal explanations that tie the work together. Initially, these explanations may be mere interpretations of research findings, but as theorists give more convention papers and publish more articles on their work, the explanations offered by the other scholars involved in this line of research become more formal and codified.

Many scholarly projects find their way to another level of publication—the scholarly book. After a group of scholars develops a line of research and theory in some detail by presenting numerous convention presentations and publishing journal articles, they may publish a book that provides the theory and its various permutations in one volume. In contrast to textbooks written primarily to help students learn the content of certain courses, scholarly treatises are published for the benefit of other scholars; such volumes serve as a convenient way to make available the results of a major research program. And once a theory—or emerging theory—is identified and codified, other scholars may use it to guide additional research, which adds, in turn, to the body of research and theory accepted as standard within the community.

One final level of publication further elaborates a theory. After a group of scholars has established a name for itself, the scholars are often invited to write about and summarize their work in edited volumes—books of essays written by a group of scholars about a particular subject. This form of publication is very useful because it helps students and professors access the current state of theory in a particular area of the field.

In the end, then, theories are made. Scholars label the concepts in the theory, decide what

connections or relationships to feature, determine how to organize the theory, and give the theory a name. They then use the theory to talk about what they experience. The creation and development of a theory is a human social activity: people create it, test it, and evaluate it. As a social activity, theory making is done within scholarly communities that share a way of knowing and a set of common practices. Ultimately, the community of scholars or practitioners decides what works for them and what theories prevail. Because the communities vary tremendously, they differ in what they consider to be valid and valuable. A theory widely adopted by one community may be rejected entirely by another. So creating a theory is largely a question of persuading some community that the theory fits and has utility for its purposes.

A body of theory is really just a snapshot in time. It provides a brief glance at a moment in the evolving history of ideas within a community of scholars. The body of theory helps members of the community identify their primary areas of interest and work; it brings them together as a community and provides a set of standards for how scholarly work should proceed. The "body" metaphor is good because it captures the qualities of growth, change, development, aging, and renewal that characterize theory. The theories scholars come to respect and use in graduate school, for example, will not be the same set of theories they use in mid-career, and probably will not resemble very closely what is valued later in their careers. In Chapter 2, we will define *theory* more specifically and discuss the particular processes at the heart of theory construction.

▐◦ NOTES

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2. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 111.
3. There are 126 definitions of communication listed in Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, *The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976), Appendix A.
4. Theodore Clevenger, Jr., "Can One Not Communicate?: A Conflict of Models," *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 351.
5. Frank E. X. Dance, "The 'Concept' of Communication," *Journal of Communication* 20 (1970): 201–10.
6. Jürgen Ruesch, "Technology and Social Communication," in *Communication Theory and Research*, ed. L. Thayer (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1957), 462.
7. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1986), 460.
8. Gerald R. Miller, "On Defining Communication: Another Stab," *Journal of Communication* 16 (1966): 92.
9. F. A. Cartier, "The President's Letter," *Journal of Communication* 9 (1959): 5.
10. John B. Hoben, "English Communication at Colgate Re-examined," *Journal of Communication* 4 (1954): 77.
11. Bernard Berelson and Gary Steiner, *Human Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1964), 254.
12. Dance, "The 'Concept' of Communication," 210.
13. Peter A. Andersen, "When One Cannot Not Communicate: A Challenge to Motley's Traditional Communication Postulates," *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 309.
14. See, for example, John Stewart, *Language as Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 33–101; W. Barnett Pearce and Karen A. Foss, "The Historical Context of Communication as a Science," in *Human Communication: Theory and Research*, ed. Gordon L. Dahnke and Glen W. Clatterbuck (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990), 1–20; Nancy Harper, *Human Communication Theory: The History of a Paradigm* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden, 1979).
15. W. Barnett Pearce, *Communication and the Human Condition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).
16. This brief history is based on Jesse G. Delia, "Communication Research: A History," in *Handbook of Communication Science*, ed. Charles R. Berger and Steven H. Chaffee (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987), 20–98. See also Donald G. Ellis, *Crafting Society: Ethnicity, Class, and*

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17. The multidisciplinary nature of the study of communication is examined by Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field"; see also Stephen W. Littlejohn, "An Overview of the Contributions to Human Communication Theory from Other Disciplines," in *Human Communication Theory: Comparative Essays*, ed. Frank E. X. Dance (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 243–85; and W. Barnett Pearce, "Scientific Research Methods in Communication Studies and Their Implications for Theory and Research," in *Speech Communication in the 20th Century*, ed. Thomas W. Benson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 255–81.

18. Dean Barnlund, *Interpersonal Communication: Survey and Studies* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), v.

19. Regional associations include the Western States Communication Association, the Central States Communication Association, the Southern States Communication Association, and the Eastern States Communication Association. The Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender and the Organization for Research on Women and Communication are two specialized organizations focused on issues of gender. The journals published by the National Communication Association include the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Communication Monographs*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, and *Communication Education*. The journals of the International Communication Association include *Human Communication Research*, *Communication Theory*, *Journal of Communication*, and *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*.

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21. See D. Lawrence Kincaid, *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives* (San Diego: Academic, 1987); Peter R. Monge, "Communication Theory for a Globalizing World," in *Communication: Views from the Helm for the 21st Century*, ed. Judith S. Trent (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), 3–7; Wimal Dissanayake, *Communication Theory: The Asian Perspective* (Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Center, 1988); Wimal Dissanayake, "The Need for the Study of Asian Approaches to Communication," *Media Asia* 13 (1986): 6–13; Guo-Ming Chen, "Toward Transcultural Understanding: A Harmony Theory of Chinese Communication," in *Transcultural Realities: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Relations*, ed. V. H. Milhouse, M. K. Asante, and P. O. Nwosu (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 55–70.

22. For summaries of Asante's work, see Molefi K. Asante, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988); and Molefi K. Asante, "An Afrocentric Communication Theory," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, ed. John L. Lucaites, Celeste M. Condit, and Sally Caudill (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 552–62. For Miike's theory of Asiacentricity, see Yoshitaka Miike, "Toward an Alternative Metatheory of Human Communication: An Asiacentric Vision," in *Intercultural Communication Studies* 12 (2003): 39–63; "Rethinking Humanity, Culture, and Communication: Asiacentric Critiques and Contributions," *Human Communication* 7 (2004): 69–82; "Theorizing Culture and Communication in the Asian Context: An Assumptive Foundation," *Intercultural Communication Studies* 11 (2002): 1–21; and "Asian Approaches to Human Communication: A Selected Bibliography," *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 12 (2003): 209–18.

23. Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field." A similar effort is offered by James A. Anderson, *Communication Theory: Epistemological Foundations* (New York: Guilford, 1996).

24. Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," 123.

25. Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," 124.

26. Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," 126.

27. The process of inquiry is described in Gerald R. Miller and Henry Nicholson, *Communication Inquiry* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976).

28. Miller and Nicholson, *Communication Inquiry*, ix. See also Don W. Stacks and Michael B. Salwen, "Integrating Theory and Research: Starting with Questions," in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, ed. Michael B. Salwen and Don W. Stacks (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 3–14.

29. An excellent discussion of scholarship can be found in Ernest G. Bormann, *Theory and Research in the Communicative Arts* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965). See also Nathan Glazer, "The Social Sciences in Liberal Education," in *The Philosophy of the Curriculum*, ed. Sidney Hook (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1975), 145–58; James L. Jarrett, *The Humanities and Humanistic Education* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1973); Gerald Holton, "Science, Science Teaching, and Rationality," in *The Philosophy of the Curriculum*, ed. Sidney Hook (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1975), 101–108.

30. See, for example, C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and a Second Look* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

31. James A. Diefenbeck, *A Celebration of Subjective Thought* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

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35. This position is developed in Thomas B. Farrell, "Beyond Science: Humanities Contributions to Communication Theory," in *Handbook of Communication Science*, ed. Charles R. Berger and Steven H. Chaffee (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987), 123–39.

36. Publishing in journals is not an unbiased process. Based on the peer review process, the editor's overall judgment, disciplinary trends and interests, and the like, sometimes very good essays are overlooked and some of lesser quality are accepted. For an interesting discussion of this process, see Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter, "Disciplining the Feminine," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80 (1994): 383–409.
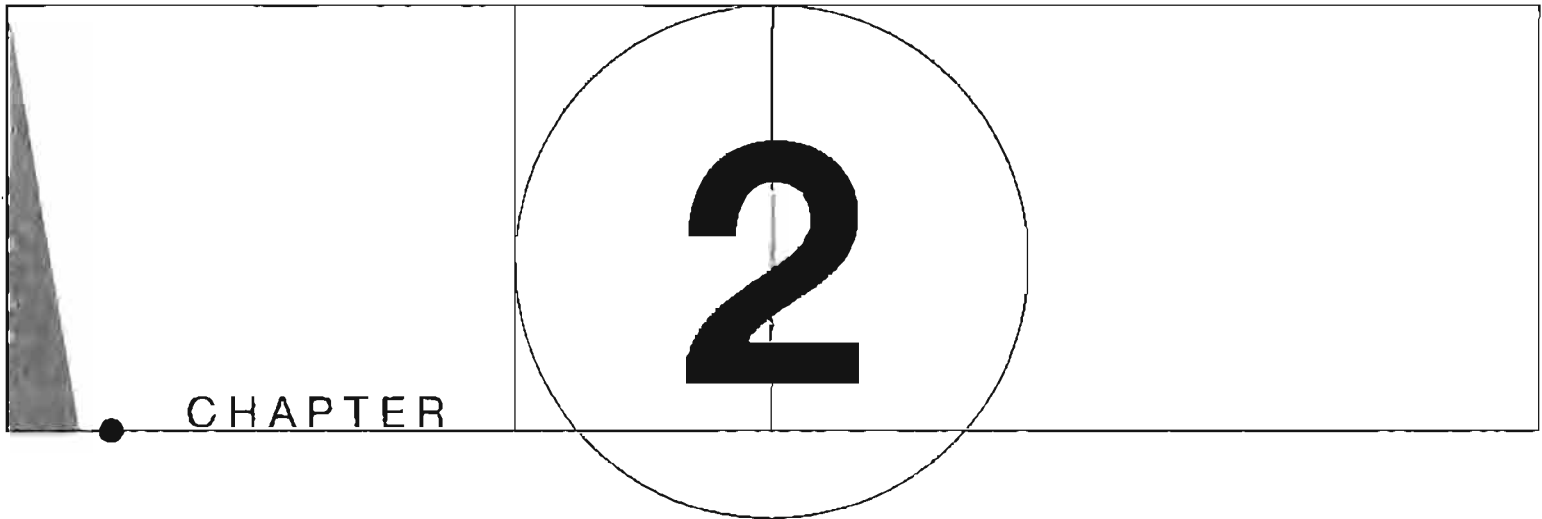
THE IDEA OF THEORY

Because theories arrange and synthesize existing knowledge, we do not need to start over again with each investigation. The theories or organized knowledge of a field, developed by generations of previous scholars, provide a starting point for understanding any field. The term *communication theory* can refer to a single theory, or it can be used to designate the collective wisdom found in the entire body of theories related to communication.

Much disagreement exists about what constitutes an adequate theory of communication. The theories included here vary in terms of how they were generated, the kind of research used, the style in which they are presented, and the aspect of communication they address. This diversity serves as a rich resource for developing a more thorough and complex understanding of the communication experience. Each theory looks at the process from a different angle, inviting you to consider what communication means and how it functions from that vantage point. We encourage

you, then, to appreciate the multitheoretical orientation that is the nature of communication theory.[1]

What is theory? We have been talking around the term without really defining it. Uses of the term range from Farmer Jones's theory about when his chickens will start laying eggs to Einstein's theory of relativity. Even scientists, writers, and philosophers use the term in a variety of ways. The purpose of this book is to represent a wide range of thought—or theories—about the communication process. Therefore, we use the term *theory* in its broadest sense, as any organized set of concepts, explanations, and principles of some aspect of human experience.[2]

All theories are abstractions. They always reduce experience to a set of categories and as a result always leave something out. A theory focuses our attention on certain things—patterns, relationships, variables—and ignores others. This truism is important because it reveals the basic inadequacy of any one theory. No single theory will

ever reveal the whole "truth" or be able to totally address the subject of investigation. Theories function as guidebooks that help us understand, explain, interpret, judge, and communicate.

Theories are also constructions. Theories are created by people, not ordained by God. When scholars examine something in the world, they make choices—about how to categorize what they are observing, what to name the concepts upon which they have focused, how broad or narrow their focus will be, and so on. Thus, theories represent various ways observers see their environments more than they capture reality itself.[3] They are less a record of reality than a record of scholars' conceptualizations about that reality. Abraham Kaplan writes, "The formation of a theory is not just the discovery of a hidden fact; the theory is a way of looking at the facts, of organizing and representing them."[4] Stanley Deetz adds that "a theory is a way of seeing and thinking about the world. As such it is better seen as the 'lens' one uses in observation than as a 'mirror' of nature."[5]

Two observers using microscopes may see different things in an amoeba, depending on each observer's theoretical point of view. One observer sees a one-celled animal; the other sees an organism without cells. The first viewer stresses the properties of an amoeba that resemble all other cells—the wall, the nucleus, the cytoplasm. The second observer compares activities of the amoeba to those of other whole animals, including ingestion, excretion, reproduction, and mobility. Neither observer is wrong. Their theoretical frameworks simply stress different aspects of the observed object.[6]

Because theories are constructions, questioning a theory's usefulness is wiser than questioning its truthfulness. Any given truth can be represented in a variety of ways, depending on the theorist's orientation.[7] Here is a simple example:

> The teacher presents four boxes. In each there is a picture—of a tree, cat, dog, and squirrel, respectively. The child is asked which one is different. A child worthy of second grade immediately picks the tree. The child knows not only how to divide plants from animals, but also that the plant/animal

distinction is the preferred one to apply . . . [but] the choice is arbitrary and hardly a very interesting way to think about the problem. The squirrel as easily could have been picked if the child had distinguished on the basis of domesticity or things we bought at the store. Or the dog could have been picked because the cat, squirrel, and tree relate in a playful, interactive way. Or the child could have picked the cat since the other three are in the yard.[8]

A theory offers one way to capture the "truth" of a phenomenon; it is never the only way to view it.

Finally, theories are intimately tied to action. How we think—our theories—guide how we act; and how we act—our practices—guide how we think. In the world of scholarship, formal theories and intellectual practices are inseparable.[9] James Anderson says that, "Theory . . . contains a set of instructions for reading the world and acting in it."[10] A theory governs how we approach our worlds.

◪ DIMENSIONS OF THEORY

In this section, we describe four dimensions of theory: (1) *philosophical assumptions*, or basic beliefs that underlie the theory; (2) *concepts*, or building blocks; (3) *explanations*, or dynamic connections made by the theory; and (4) *principles*, or guidelines for action. Although some theories—usually referred to as quasi-theories—include only the first two, most scholars believe that a theory worthy of the name must have at least the first three dimensions—assumptions, concepts, and explanations. However, not all theories include the final piece, and, in fact, as we will see later, the inclusion of principles is somewhat controversial.

Philosophical Assumptions

The starting point for any theory is the philosophical assumptions that underlie it. The assumptions to which a theorist subscribes determine how a particular theory will play out. Knowing the assumptions behind a theory, then, is the first step to understanding that theory.

Philosophical assumptions are often divided into three major types: assumptions about *epistemology*, or questions of knowledge; assumptions about *ontology*, or questions of existence; and assumptions about *axiology*, or questions of value. Every theory, explicitly or implicitly, includes assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it is obtained, what constitutes existence, and what is valuable. Looking for these assumptions provides a foundation for understanding how a given theory positions itself in relation to other theories.

Epistemology.   Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge, or how people know what they claim to know. Any good discussion of theory will inevitably come back to epistemological issues. The following questions are among the most common questions of epistemological concern to communication scholars.[11]

To what extent can knowledge exist before experience? Many believe that all knowledge arises from experience. We observe the world and thereby come to know about it. But perhaps there is something in our basic nature that provides a kind of knowledge even before we experience the world. The capacities to think and to perceive are often cited as evidence for such inherent mechanisms. For example, strong evidence exists that children do not learn language entirely from hearing it spoken. Rather, they may acquire language by using innate models to test what they hear. In other words, a capacity or structure for language exists in the brain *a priori*, even before a child begins to know the world through experiencing it.

To what extent can knowledge be certain? Does knowledge exist in the world as an absolute, there for the taking by whoever can discover it? Or is knowledge relative and changing? The debate over this issue has persisted for hundreds of years among philosophers, and communication theorists position themselves in various places on this continuum as well. Those who take a universal stance—who believe they are seeking absolute and unchangeable knowledge—will admit to errors in their theories, but they believe

that these errors are merely a result of not yet having discovered the complete truth. Relativists believe that knowledge will never be certain because universal reality simply does not exist. Instead, what we can know is filtered through our experiences and perceptions, and thus the theories built on these are evolving and changing as well.

To this point, Anatol Rapoport presents the following amusing anecdote about three baseball umpires: "The first umpire, who was a 'realist,' remarked, 'Some is strikes and some is balls, and I calls them as they is.' Another, with less faith in the infallibility of reality, countered with, 'Some is strikes and some is balls, and I calls them as I sees them.' But the wisest umpire said, 'Some is strikes and some is balls, but they ain't nothing till I calls them.'"[12]

The first case represents knowledge as certain or absolute that exists to be discovered. The third umpire suggests the relativist position—nothing is certain until it is labeled; the label plays a large part in determining what that something is. The middle umpire represents a kind of middle ground in terms of the nature of knowledge, a position that acknowledges the role of perception and the human element in the discovery of knowledge.

By what process does knowledge arise? This question is at the heart of epistemology because the kind of process selected for discovering knowledge determines the kind of knowledge that can develop from that process. There are at least four positions on the issue. *Rationalism* suggests that knowledge arises out of the sheer power of the human mind to know the truth ("I calls them as they is"). This position places ultimate faith in human reasoning to ascertain truth. *Empiricism* states that knowledge arises in perception. We experience the world and literally "see" what is going on ("I calls them as I sees them"). *Constructivism* holds that people create knowledge in order to function pragmatically in the world—that phenomena can be fruitfully understood many different ways—and that knowledge is what the person has made of the world ("They ain't nothing till I calls them"). Finally, taking constructivism one step further, *social*

constructionism teaches that knowledge is a product of symbolic interaction within social groups. In other words, reality is socially constructed, a product of group and cultural life. In the case of the umpires, the knowledge of what a ball is and what a strike is can only be known within the framework of the game of baseball, and both terms, *ball* and *strike*, have many other meanings in English that are quite different from the meanings they have within the game of baseball.

Is knowledge best conceived in parts or wholes? Those who take a holistic approach believe that phenomena are highly interrelated and operate as a system. True knowledge, in other words, cannot be divided into parts but consists of general, indivisible, gestalt understandings. Analysts, on the other hand, believe that knowledge consists of understanding how parts operate separately. They are interested in isolating, categorizing, and analyzing the various components that together comprise what can be considered knowledge.

To what extent is knowledge explicit? Many philosophers and scholars believe that you cannot know something unless you can state it. Within this view, knowledge is that which can be articulated explicitly. Others claim that much of knowledge is hidden—that people operate on the basis of sensibilities that are not conscious and that they may be unable to express. Such knowledge is said to be tacit.[13]

The way scholars conduct inquiry and construct theories depends largely on their epistemological assumptions because what they think knowledge is and how they think it is obtained determines what they find. The same holds for the next type of philosophical assumptions—assumptions of ontology.

Ontology. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of being.[14] Epistemology and ontology go hand in hand because our ideas about knowledge depend in large part on our ideas about who is doing the knowing. In the social sciences, ontology deals largely with the nature of human existence; in communication, ontology centers on the nature of human

social interaction because the way a theorist conceptualizes interaction depends in large measure on how the communicator is viewed.[15] At least four issues are important.

First, *to what extent do humans make real choices?* Although all investigators probably would agree that people perceive choice, there is a longstanding philosophical debate on whether real choice is possible. On one side of the issue are the *determinists*, who state that behavior is caused by a multitude of prior conditions that largely determine human behavior. Humans, according to this view, are basically reactive and passive. On the other side of the debate are the *pragmatists*, who claim that people plan their behavior to meet future goals. This group sees people as active, decision-making beings who affect their own destinies. Middle positions also exist, suggesting either that people make choices within a restricted range or that some behaviors are determined whereas others are a matter of free will.

A second ontological issue is *whether human behavior is best understood in terms of states or traits.*[16] This question deals with whether there are fairly stable dimensions—*traits*—or more temporary conditions affecting people, called *states*. The *state view* argues that humans are dynamic and go through numerous states in the course of a day, year, and lifetime. The *trait view* believes that people are mostly predictable because they display more or less consistent characteristics across time. Traits, then, do not change easily, and in this view, humans are seen as basically static. There is, of course, an in-between position, and many theorists believe that both traits and states characterize human behavior.

Is human experience primarily individual or social? This ontological question deals with whether the individual or the group carries the most weight in terms of determining human action. Those scholars who attend to the individual understand behavior in individualistic terms, and their unit of analysis is the individual human psyche. Other social scientists, however, focus on social life as the primary unit of analysis. These scholars believe that humans cannot be understood apart from their relationships with others

in groups and cultures. This ontological question is especially important to communication scholars because of their focus on interaction.[17]

To what extent is communication contextual? The focus of this question is whether behavior is governed by universal principles or whether it depends on situational factors. Some philosophers believe that human life and action are best understood by looking at universal factors; others believe that behavior is richly contextual and cannot be generalized beyond the immediate situation. In communication, the middle ground has many supporters, with scholars believing that behavior is affected by both general and situational factors.

Axiology.   Axiology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of values. What values guide research and what are the implications of those values for the outcome of the research process?[18] For the communication scholar, three axiological issues are especially important.

Can theory be value free? Classical science answers this first axiological concern in the affirmative—that theories and research are value free, that scholarship is neutral, and that what scholars attempt to do is to uncover the facts as they are. According to this view, when scientists' values impinge on their work, the result is bad science.[19] But there is a different position on this issue: that science is not value free because research is always guided by preferences about what to study, how to conduct inquiry, and the like.[20] Scientists' choices, then, are affected by personal as well as institutional values. Government and private organizational values determine what research is funded; political and economic ideologies both feed and are fed by particular ways of viewing the world, embodied by different forms of theory and research.[21] From this position, then, any lens, of necessity, colors what is seen, making value-free inquiry impossible.

A second value issue centers on the question of whether scholars intrude on and thereby affect the process being studied. In other words, *to what extent does the process of inquiry itself affect what is being seen?* To what degree does the researcher become part of the system under examination and thus affect that system? The traditional scientific viewpoint is that scientists must observe carefully without interference so that accuracy can be achieved. Critics doubt this is possible, believing that no method of observation is completely free of distortion. Even when you look at planets through a telescope, you are automatically distorting distance because of the properties of lenses. When the doctor puts a stethoscope on your chest, your nervous system reacts, and sometimes your heart rate is affected. If you bring participants into a laboratory and ask them to talk to one another as part of an experiment—as communication researchers often do—they do not respond exactly the same way they would outside the laboratory.

Not only does inquiry potentially affect what is observed, it also can affect life outside of the study itself.[22] This means the scholar, by virtue of scholarly work, becomes an agent of change because studying human life changes that life.[23] For example, if you interview a married couple about their relationship, the interview itself will affect some aspects of that relationship. This is a role that scholars must actively understand and take into consideration, at the very least, considering the ethical issues raised by their research.

A third issue of axiology concerns the ends for which scholarship is conducted. *Should scholarship be designed to achieve change, or is its function simply to generate knowledge?* Traditional scientists claim that they are not responsible for the ways scientific knowledge is used—that it can be used for good or ill. The discovery of nuclear fission was in and of itself an important scientific discovery; that it was used to make atomic bombs is not the scientist's concern. Critics object, saying that scientific knowledge by its very nature is instrumentalist. It is control oriented and necessarily reinforces certain power arrangements in society. Therefore, scholars have a responsibility to make conscious efforts to help society change in positive ways.[24]

Overall then, two general positions reside in these axiological issues. On the one hand, some scholars seek objectivity and knowledge that they believe is largely *value free*. On the other

side is *value-conscious* scholarship, in which researchers recognize the importance of values to research and theory, are careful to acknowledge their particular standpoints, and make concerted efforts to direct those values in positive ways.

Concepts

The first dimension of a theory is its concepts or categories.[25] Things are grouped into conceptual categories according to observed qualities. In our everyday world, some things are considered to be trees, some houses, some cars. Humans are by nature conceptual beings. Thomas Kuhn writes that we do not "learn to see the world piecemeal or item by item"; we "sort out whole areas together from the flux of experience."[26]

Concepts—terms and definitions—tell us what the theorist is looking at and what is considered important.[27] To determine concepts, the communication theorist observes many variables in human interaction and classifies and labels them according to perceived patterns. The result—and a goal of theory—is to formulate and articulate a set of labeled concepts. The set of conceptual terms identified becomes an integral part of the theory, and often these terms are unique to that theory. What functions as a set of conceptual terms for one theory may not be applicable to another.

Those theories that stop at the conceptual level—theories in which the goal is to provide a list of categories for something without explaining how they relate to one another—are known as *taxonomies*. Because taxonomies do not provide an understanding of how things work, many theorists are reluctant to even label them theories. The best theories, then, go beyond taxonomies to provide *explanations*—statements about how the variables relate to one another—to show how concepts are connected.

Explanations

An explanation is the next dimension of a theory, and here the theorist identifies regularities or patterns in the relationships among variables. Put simply, explanation answers the question: Why? An explanation identifies a "logical force" among variables that connects them in some way. A theorist might hypothesize, for example, that if children see a lot of television violence, they will develop violent tendencies. In the social sciences, the connection is rarely taken as absolute. Instead, we can say that one thing is often or usually associated with another and that there is a probable relationship: if children see a lot of television violence, they probably will develop violent tendencies.

There are many types of explanations, but two of the most common are causal and practical.[28] In *causal explanation*, events are connected as causal relationships, with one variable seen as an outcome or result of the other. *Practical explanation*, on the other hand, explains actions as goal related, with the action designed to achieve a future state. In causal explanation, the consequent event is determined by some antecedent event. In practical explanation, outcomes are made to happen by actions that are chosen.[29] To clarify this distinction, consider how you might explain to a friend why you failed a test. If you said that you just aren't very good at this subject and had bad teachers in high school, you would be using causal explanation: "my bad grade was caused by things I can't control." On the other hand, if you did well on the test, you would probably use practical explanation: "I needed to increase my grade-point average and so I studied hard."

The distinction between causal and practical explanation is important in the debate about what a theory should do. Many traditional theorists say that theories should stop at the level of explanation. These scholars believe that theories depict things as they are by identifying and explaining the causal mechanisms of events. Other scholars maintain that theories should go beyond depiction and should guide practical action, an approach that makes practical explanation central. For these theorists, practical explanation leads to a third element of theory—the element of principle.

Principles

Principles are the final dimension of theories. A *principle* is a guideline that enables you to interpret an event, make judgments about what is

happening, and then decide how to act in the situation. A principle has three parts: (1) it identifies a situation or event; (2) it includes a set of norms or values; and (3) it asserts a connection between a range of actions and possible consequences. For example, you might say: (1) when giving a public speech (situation); (2) your audience is very important (value); and (3) you should make an attempt to adapt to the knowledge, attitudes, and actions of the audience. Notice that you might not state each of these parts, but they are at least implicit and may be inferred. Principles permit a researcher to reflect on the quality of actions observed and to provide guidelines for practice as well, not unlike the use of principles in everyday life. For example, you may see grades as an important indicator of success (your principle), and, because you value success, you study hard to improve your grade (your action).

There is no consensus, at least in the social sciences, about whether theories should include principles for judgment and action. Some theorists are content to simply offer concepts and explanations without making recommendations on the basis of their theorizing. For other theorists, generating principles that can be used as the basis of action in the world is the whole purpose for engaging the theoretical enterprise.

The various dimensions of theory just described—assumptions, concepts, explanations, and principles—combine in different ways to construct different kinds of theories. To further clarify how different combinations of theoretical elements produce different kinds of theories, we will use two paradigm theories as examples—nomothetic theory and practical theory.[30] These two types represent endpoints of a theory and research continuum that, while not always as tidy in reality as we will present them here, usefully demonstrate how the different dimensions of theory help construct different research perspectives and approaches.[31]

◖ NOMOTHETIC THEORY

Nomothetic theory is defined as that which seeks universal or general laws. This approach, dominant in the experimental natural sciences, has

been the model for much of the research in the social sciences as well.[32] The goal of such theory is to depict accurately how social life works. Theories in the nomothetic tradition do not make judgments or offer advice about these states of affairs. Scientists simply wish to paint a picture of how something is and leave it up to others to decide how to use this knowledge.

Traditional science is based on four processes: (1) developing questions; (2) forming hypotheses; (3) testing the hypotheses; and (4) formulating theory. This approach is known as the *hypothetico-deductive method*, and it is based on the assumption that we can best understand complex things by analyzing the various parts or elements that comprise them. Thus, this approach is also sometimes called the *variable-analytic tradition*.[33]

The research process in this tradition is well codified. First, the researcher forms a hypothesis, or well-formed guess, about a relationship between variables. Ideally, the hypothesis emerges from previous research. The researcher undertakes an inductive process of generalizing from numerous observations. A hypothesis must be testable and framed in such a way that potential rejection is possible—it must be *falsifiable*. If it is not, any test will yield either a positive result or an equivocal one, and it will be impossible to discover whether the hypothesis is wrong. Hypothesis testing, then, is really a process of looking for exceptions. Hypothesis testing is a painstakingly slow procedure in which theories are fine-tuned by numerous tests. The four steps—questioning, hypothesizing, testing, and theorizing—are repeated in incremental building blocks. Figure 2.1 illustrates the hypothetico-deductive method.[34]

Suppose, for example, that you think that people do things they find personally rewarding, suggesting the following hypothesis: *people are more likely to do what they find rewarding than what they do not find rewarding*. While you could certainly find instances of people doing things because they like to do them, you also could find instances of people doing things they do not like. Some people may even do certain things because, in some perverse way, they find punishment itself
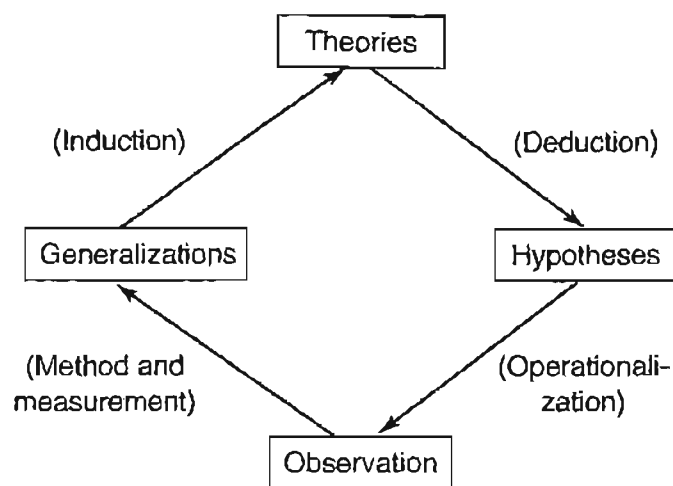
The Classical Ideal of Science

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rewarding. Because virtually anything could be intrinsically rewarding to someone, no action could be ruled out. This hypothesis, then, is poorly stated because you could never disprove it—it is not falsifiable.

Only through *control* and *manipulation* in research can causality be tested. If one set of variables is held constant (controlled) and another set systematically varied (manipulated), the researcher can detect the effect of the manipulated variables without worrying about whether other variables had hidden effects. Control and manipulation can be exercised directly, as in experiments, or through certain kinds of statistics.

Let's return to the intrinsic-rewards hypothesis. Assume that you have refined your rewards scale and found it valid and reliable. How would you then test your hypothesis? Would you give a list of activities to a group of subjects and have them rate each in terms of intrinsic rewards? That would tell you how rewarding the subjects found each activity, but it would not tell you whether they would actually do the things they say are rewarding. You might consider having the subjects rate each item twice—once on reward value and once on how frequently they actually do it. That would give you an idea of

the correlation between reward and activity, but it would not be sufficient to say that one caused the other.

To really test your hypothesis, you would need to set up an experiment in which you actually tested rewarding activities against unrewarding ones, to see if the former are repeated and the latter not. You might do this by having one group of people do a rewarding set of tasks, such as watching a movie, and another an unrewarding set of tasks, such as studying for an exam, to see if the people in the first group spend more time at their task than the people in the second group do.

As we look at this theoretical type in terms of scientific theory, we will focus on philosophical assumptions, concepts, and explanations. Notice that we do not include the fourth aspect—principles—in our discussion of scientific theory. As we will see, possessing principles is one of the important distinctions between nomothetic and practical theories.

Philosophical Assumptions

Nomothetic theories take a particular position on questions of epistemology, ontology, and axiology. In epistemology, these theories tend to espouse empiricist and rationalist ideas, treating reality as distinct from the human being. Reality, in other words, is something that people discover outside themselves. Researchers in this tradition assume a physical, knowable reality that is self-evident to the trained observer.[35] Discovery is important in this position; the world is waiting for the scientist to find it. Because knowledge is viewed as something acquired from outside oneself, nomothetic theories seek to discover what is called the "received view." Objectivity is all-important, with investigators being required to define the exact operations to be used in observing events. In terms of axiology, such theories take a value-neutral stance, assuming that science is above value issues; they do not play a role in science. In terms of ontology, scientific theories tend to assume that behavior is basically determined by, and responsive to, biology and the environment.

Nomothetic theories, then, aim to make lawful statements about phenomena, developing generalizations that hold true across situations and over time. Scholars in this tradition try to reveal how things appear and work. In so doing, the scholar is highly analytical, attempting to define each part and subpart of the object of interest.

Concepts

Because of the need in scientific research to be precise in observation, concepts are typically operationalized in the nomothetic tradition. This means that all variables in a hypothesis should be stated in ways that explain exactly how to observe them. One operational definition of *intelligence*, for example, is the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. An operational definition of *dominance* might be a particular set of observer ratings on dominant-versus-submissive messages.

Let's take the example of the intrinsic-rewards hypothesis again. You could improve this hypothesis by specifying more precisely what you mean by *highly rewarding* and what you mean by *an intrinsic reward*. Thus, you could hypothesize that a person will repeat an action rated as highly rewarding on an intrinsic-rewards test. Here, *intrinsic reward* is operationally defined as a rating on an intrinsic-rewards scale. Notice that this wording makes the hypothesis falsifiable.

As you can see from this example, operationism relies on measurement, or the use of precise, usually numerical, indications. Measurement enables the detection of differences that might otherwise be hard to specify. For example, you might have individuals rate their activities on a 7-point scale, from highly unrewarding to highly rewarding. With this scale you could measure the difference between an activity that is moderately rewarding and one that is only mildly rewarding. You could also measure the difference between one person who found a particular activity highly rewarding and another who found the same activity unrewarding.

Measurement is evaluated in terms of two criteria—validity and reliability. *Validity* is the degree to which an observation measures what it is supposed to measure. How do we know, for example, that the subject's rating really measures reward? Perhaps the rating is influenced by some other hidden factor, or perhaps it reflects nothing in particular. Researchers have methods for estimating whether their measures are valid.

Reliability is the degree to which the construct is measured accurately, and it is most often estimated by consistency. If your bathroom scale gives you a different weight each day, even though you have not gained or lost weight, it is unreliable, just as an intelligence test giving a different result on separate occasions is also unreliable. If all items on a test are designed to measure the same thing—intelligence—and they prove to be very inconsistent with one another, the test is said to be unreliable.

Returning to your intrinsic-rewards study, you must now determine whether your scale actually measures rewards—whether it is valid. You might do this, for example, by making sure that it is consistent with other known measures of rewards. If you can show this, you can argue that the scale you have devised for measuring reward is valid. But you would still need to establish its reliability. You might do this by administering the test to the same group of people on two occasions to see if the responses are nearly the same.

Concepts in theories in the nomothetic tradition are operationalized, highly precise, and measurable. Concepts expressed in this way lead to particular kinds of explanations.

Explanations

Explanations are almost exclusively *causal* in nomothetic theories. In other words, they posit and carefully test a linear relationship between cause and effect. Causal explanations lead to covering laws—theoretical statements of cause and effect relevant to a particular set of variables across situations. The statement, "Rewarded behaviors are repeated," is an example of a covering law. In the nomothetic tradition, the covering law is believed to be significant because of its power in explaining events.

Covering laws also enable researchers to make predictions about future events—to determine what will happen when a causal variable is in play. In the theory of gravity, for example, we can predict that an object that is not held in place will fall. Prediction is an important outcome of inquiry because it gives people power over their environment. If, for example, I can predict that certain behaviors will be repeated if they are rewarding, I may be able to control people's behavior by manipulating the reward value of the desired actions.

The nomothetic research tradition most closely approximates what Charles Pavitt now calls *scientific realism*, the philosophy that believes in a real world of real things with true characteristics and causal effects.[36] Theories may not completely and accurately reflect the order of things in the world, but well-worked theories can approximate this reality, and the concepts of a theory can, and ultimately should, accurately represent and explain objects in the world. Indeed, most investigators working in this tradition now seek statistical relationships among variables, and their "laws" are probabilistic.[37] Instead of saying that reward leads to action, you would say that reward usually leads to action.

According to Pavitt, if communication theorists are to adopt scientific realism, they must commit to the importance of their concepts, reducing these to an essential set of accurate categories. Theorists should avoid adding new and unnecessary concepts. Furthermore, theorists must use causal explanation and attempt to capture the true causal relations among variables in the real world. Finally, communication theorists must commit to the reliability of meaning and trust that readers will understand terms sufficiently for accurate communication to take place. As we will see in the following section, scholars in other traditions often reject this approach in favor of others they believe result in more valuable kinds of theorizing.

This approach to research and theory is firmly planted in the scientific tradition of "knowledge as discovery," but scholars in other traditions often reject this method in favor of other approaches to theorizing.[38]

PRACTICAL THEORY

Practical theory represents the opposite endpoint on the research and theory continuum from the nomothetic. Practical theory is designed to capture the rich differences among situations and to provide a set of understandings that lets researchers weigh alternative courses of action to achieve goals.[39] If you return to your study of rewards, you can begin to understand why some scholars prefer practical theory over nomothetic. Practical theorists would not appreciate your intrinsic-rewards hypothesis very much. They might find your idea interesting and even useful, but they would say that this is just one of many ways to understand the relationship between action and rewards. Furthermore, they would find reducing rewards to a check on a scale to be a very limited way to approach this issue. They might also say that your statement that rewards cause behavior is arbitrary and that the link could just as validly be stated in the opposite direction: action is undertaken purposely to create rewards.

Robyn Penman has outlined five tenets of a practical-action approach that suggest how different such theorizing is from that of traditional science.[40] First, action is voluntary. Humans are in large part self-motivating, and predicting behavior based on outside variables is impossible. If this is true, it would be hard, in terms of your study, to predict how people would behave based on rewards. For example, some people like watching movies more than studying, but they would study anyway because of long-term benefits and consequences. So you could never isolate a single, universal motivator that would work for all individuals.

Second, according to Penman and the practical-action tradition, knowledge is created socially. This means that communication theories themselves are created by the process of communication or interaction—the very process they are designed to explain. There is no one-to-one relationship between the ideas in a theory and objective reality. So your intrinsic-rewards hypothesis is a creation of the theorist; it is one of many ways of understanding behavior, not a

mirror of the "real" or "true" reason people do things.

Third, theories are historical. They reflect the settings and times in which they are created, and as times change, so too will theories. Stanley Deetz writes:

> All current theories will pass in time. It is not as if they are in error, at least little more or less so than those in the past. They were useful in handling different kinds of human problems, problems we might find ill-formed and even silly, as others will ours. What remains is the human attempt to produce theories that are useful in responding to our own issues. We are struggling to find interesting and useful ways of thinking and talking about our current situations and helping us build the future we want.[41]

Thus, while an intrinsic-rewards hypothesis might seem logical to you at this time, in another era or in another culture, such an idea might not even come up as a possible explanation for behavior.

A fourth element identified as part of the practical-action theoretical paradigm is that theories affect the reality they are covering. Theorists are not separate from the worlds they create but are part of those worlds. If your intrinsic-rewards hypothesis is believed, people will start treating others as reward driven. They will offer rewards when they want something done and withhold them when they do not. Soon, people will be operating in an environment created by the ideas of the theorist, and a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy may result.[42]

Finally, theories are value laden, never neutral, from this theoretical vantage point. Your hypothesis is rife with values, according to this standpoint, that should be acknowledged in your research. You chose to look at rewards because your attention was drawn to this particular variable above all other possible ones—perhaps because of some experience you had with rewards. You chose to look at individual behavior because you value the person over other possible units of analysis such as the group or culture. These priorities are not inherently bad, but they do point out how much your investigation rests on values. Researchers within the practical paradigm want underlying values acknowledged.

Philosophical Assumptions

In terms of epistemology, practical theories tend to assume that people take an active role in creating knowledge.[43] A world of things may exist outside the person, but observers can conceptualize these things in a variety of useful ways. Knowledge therefore arises not out of discovery but from interaction between knower and known. For this reason the perceptual and interpretive processes of individuals are important in research methods.[44] Further, these theories attempt not to seek universal or covering laws but to describe the rich context in which individuals operate.

In terms of ontology, practical theories tend to assume that individuals are goal-directed agents who create meanings, have intentions, make real choices, and act in situations in deliberate ways. These theorists are reluctant to seek universal laws because they assume that individual behavior is not governed entirely by prior events. Instead, they assume that people behave differently in different situations because rules and goals change.

Axiologically, most practical theories tend to be value conscious, although here is a dividing point among them. Many of these theories tend to be descriptive, showing *how* people interpret and act on their experience in various social and cultural situations, while others are more evaluative, making strong judgments about common cultural understandings and actions. In general, theories that resist or criticize normal forms of life are called *critical theories*, a tradition we explore in much more detail later in the book.

Concepts

Concepts in most practical approaches to theory tend not to be represented as universal. Instead, such theories acknowledge that people respond differently in different situations and that the words and actions that people use to express their understandings will change over time. Important concepts, then, cannot be measured operationally. Theoretical concepts, therefore, are used as a kind of organizing framework to classify the dynamic interpretations and actions of people in actual situations.

Explanations

Practical theories tend to use practical necessity as a basis for explanation. In other words, communicators are guided to achieve future goals by following certain social rules or norms that enable them to think through a situation and select from a range of options. These rules are practical because they empower the communicator to understand what is happening and to make strategic choices in the face of problems and dilemmas.

Principles

We wrote earlier in this chapter that theories consist of four aspects—assumptions, concepts, explanations, and principles—but not all types of theories have all four. Indeed, practical theories differ from nomothetic ones in featuring the fourth dimension of principles. Principles are guidelines for reflection and action. When a theory includes principles, we can say that it is a practical theory.[45]

Robert Craig and Karen Tracy write that practical theories provide a set of principles that enable communicators to "construct a tentative, revisable, but still rationally warranted normative model that is relevant to a broad range of practical situations."[46] Such theories can address any combination of three levels: level one is the technical level, where specific strategies or actions are available to communicators; level two is the problem level—problems and obstacles that might be encountered are addressed; and level three is the philosophical level, consisting of ideals, values, and general principles that communicators can use. Practical theory is most powerful when it enables communicators to make their way through a difficult situation (level two) by using general principles (level three) to reflect on actual practice (level one).

Let's return to our example of your emerging theory of intrinsic rewards. Within the scientific tradition, your theory would hypothesize a clear, operationalized statement of the relationship between reward and action—that rewarded behavior is repeated. As you continue to look at a variety of situations, you begin to conclude that the situation is not so simple. People do

seek rewards, but they have many ways of doing so, and they understand rewards very differently. Some think of rewards as personal achievements, some as building relationships, and others as fulfilling traditional roles. You notice that individuals actually think through what they want and gear their actions to achieve their hopes. Now your theory has started to migrate from a behavior-reward hypothesis to a practical theory of goal seeking.

As you study goal-seeking behavior, you come to realize that achieving goals is often complicated. Sometimes one goal contradicts another goal, and people puzzle over how to communicate in such situations where contradictory goals are present. For example, you find that sometimes people want to build a relationship, but doing so would prevent them from achieving personal goals, and they really have to think through how to do both. Your effort to think through this situation leads you to generate a principle: a meaningful relationship in European-American culture requires the parties to integrate their respective interests and individual desires. Perhaps it would be different in other cultures, so your emerging principle of goal integration will probably specify a cultural context.

Now you have the three parts of a practical theory according to Craig and Tracy. On level one, you have an idea of the kinds of goals that people can seek and how they might achieve these. On level two, you recognize at least one kind of dilemma communicators may face in achieving their goals, and on level three, you have a principle that communicators can use to reflect on and make decisions about how to proceed.

This example of a theory of goal seeking is consistent with Vernon Cronen's idea that practical theory "offers principles informed by engagement in the details of lived experience that facilitate joining with others to produce change."[47] For Cronen, practical theory is a system of connected ideas that allows individuals to reason their way through actual situations and make informed decisions about what to do. A practical theory does not prescribe the action you should take, but enables you to act in a coherent way that leads to understanding how

you might improve the situation. A good practical theory enables you to (1) focus on a real situation you are facing; (2) explore what is unique about this situation; (3) consider both the powers and limits of each action you could take; (4) take actions that enhance your life and achieve positive outcomes as well; and (5) learn from experience in the actual situations you face and prepare you to manage new ones.

As you can see, the differences between nomothetic and practical theories are not trivial. Each starts from different philosophical assumptions, makes use of different kinds of concepts and explanations, and has different orientations toward principles. In the case of nomothetic theories, the development of principles lies outside the scientific endeavor, whereas with most practical perspectives, the principles that evolve from the theory are a critical part of that theory. Each school strongly defends its point of view, and each has its place within the communication tradition. In turn, you may find that a certain theoretic ideal is most appealing to you—that it better fits how you view the world. Others might find both to be intriguing, and you might find yourself drawn to different traditions, based on the subject matter of the theory or other factors. The remainder of the book will give you many opportunities to explore different theories from both traditions, a process that will further clarify your personal stance in regard to theory.

◖ EVALUATING COMMUNICATION THEORY

As you encounter theories of communication, you will need a basis for judging one against another. The following is a list of criteria that can assist you to systematically evaluate theories.[48] All have limitations, so you will not find a theory for which each of these criteria holds "true" with equal weight. Furthermore, certain criteria will be more important to certain kinds of theories. This list, however, does offer a starting point from which you can begin to assess the theories you will encounter in this text.

Theoretical Scope

A theory's scope is its comprehensiveness or inclusiveness. Theoretical scope relies on the principle of generality or the idea that a theory's explanation must be sufficiently general to extend beyond a single observation.[49] When an explanation is a mere speculation about a single event, it is not a theoretical explanation. To be theoretical, an explanation must go beyond a single instance to cover a range of events.

The scope of a theory is critical. Stanley Deetz writes that "Few theories are failures in regard to specific situations, and all theories ultimately fail if applied far enough outside of the specific conditions for which they were developed."[50] A theory, then, can fail for generalizing too narrowly—from a single instance—or too broadly, by attempting to cover too broad a range of human behavior.

Two types of generality exist. The first concerns the extent of coverage. A theory that covers a sufficiently broad domain is considered a good theory. A communication theory that meets this test would explain a variety of communication-related behaviors usually confined to a specific context—communication apprehension, relationship initiation, or group consensus making, for example.

A theory need not cover a large number of phenomena to be judged good, however. Indeed, many fine theories are narrow in coverage. Such theories possess the second type of generality: they deal with a narrow range of events, but their explanations of these events apply to a large number of situations. Such theories are said to be powerful. Certain theories of relationship breakups illustrate this type of generality. They only cover one topic, but they are powerful because they explain many instances of relationship dissolution, whether between intimate partners, work colleagues, or parents and children.

Appropriateness

Are the theory's epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions appropriate for the theoretical questions addressed and the research methods used? In the last section, we discussed

the fact that different types of theory allow scholars to do different kinds of things. One criterion by which theories can be evaluated is whether their claims are consistent with or appropriate to their assumptions. If you assume that people make choices and plan actions to accomplish goals, it would be inappropriate to predict behavior on the basis of causal events. If you assume that the most important things affecting behavior are unconscious, it would be inappropriate to report survey data in which subjects were asked why they did certain things. If you believe that theory should be value free, it would be inappropriate to base your definition of communication on some standard of effectiveness or any other value.

In a way, then, appropriateness is a kind of logical consistency between a theory and its assumptions. For example, some writers from the cognitive tradition state that people actively process information and make plans to accomplish personal goals. Yet theories produced by these researchers often make law-like statements about universal behaviors, which, if true, would leave little room for purposeful action. In other words, causal explanation is not appropriate for explaining purposeful action.

Heuristic Value

Will the theory generate new ideas for research and additional theory? Does it have heuristic value? Theories within the nomothetic and practical ideals differ significantly in this regard. Both need to be heuristic—to aid discovery—but they accomplish this value in different ways. Nomothetic theories are heuristic in generating new research questions, new hypotheses, and new concepts or variables. Practical theories are heuristic to the extent that they produce new ideas by continually exploring new situations.

Validity

Generally speaking, validity is the truth value of a theory. "Truth" is not intended to mean absolute unchanging fact; rather, there may be a variety

of "truth" in an experience. Validity as a criterion of theory has at least three meanings.[51]

One kind of validity is that of *value*, or worth. This kind of validity refers to the importance or utility of a theory—does the theory have value? This is the primary form of validity in practical theories. Stanley Deetz writes: "The problem with most theories is not that they are wrong or lacking in confirming experiences but that they are irrelevant or misdirect observation, that is, they do not help make the observations that are important to meeting critical goals and needs."[52]

The second kind of validity is that of *correspondence*, or fit. Here the question is whether the concepts and relations specified by the theory can actually be observed. Nomothetic theorists assume that one and only one representation will fit, whereas practical theorists believe that a number of theories may fit simultaneously.

The third kind of validity is *generalizability*, which is exactly the same as theoretical scope, discussed earlier. This is the classical definition of validity and applies almost exclusively to traditional, discovery-oriented, law-like theories.[53]

Parsimony

The test of parsimony involves *logical simplicity*. If two theories are equally valid, the one with the simplest logical explanation is said to be the best. For example, if I can explain your behavior based on one simple variable such as reward, the theory is more parsimonious than if I need three variables such as reward, personality, and difficulty. We need to be careful with parsimony, however, as highly parsimonious explanations may be overly simple and may leave out many important factors that expand our insight into what is happening. Parsimony must always be balanced with the other criteria.

Openness

Finally, theories can be judged according to their *openness*. This criterion is especially important in the practical paradigm. It means that a theory is open to other possibilities; it is tentative,

contextual, and qualified.[54] The theorist recognizes that a construction is a way of looking rather than a reproduction of reality. The construction admits to diversity and invites dialogue with other perspectives. It acknowledges its own incompleteness.

So What Makes a Good Theory After All?

Theories that exhibit the criteria offered here tend to have a significant impact on the communication discipline in several ways. First, they provide insights we would not ordinarily have. When you read a really good theory, you have an "aha" reaction. You realize that the theory makes sense, yet it is not something you would necessarily have invented or considered on your own. In other words, the theory introduces you to new ideas and helps you see things in new ways.

Theories that fit the evaluative criteria are also conceptually interesting; they do not belabor the obvious or repeat what most of us already know just from having experienced life. Such theories are fascinating precisely because their concepts are intriguing and helpful. At the same time, such theories are constantly evolving. They morph into new forms. The leading theory of today is an evolution of earlier theoretical ideas that have grown, combined, and expanded through research and careful thinking. One of the hallmarks of an important or significant theory is that it has a history. It started small, developed over time, and continues to evolve as other scholars grapple with and contribute to it.

Leading theories are the products of collaboration, extension, or elaboration. Rarely is a single person responsible for a major theory. Although a theory may be associated with a particular scholar, you will see many contributors to it in the literature. This is an important sign because it means that the work has attracted a number of curious scholars, that these individuals have introduced their students to the work, and that the original team of researchers are now "grandparents" and sometimes even "great-grandparents" to generations of scholars who carry on the theorizing.

Theories that pass the test of evaluation also have staying power. They may change, but they stick around for a while. They are so useful, insightful, or interesting that they are not easily abandoned. Certain theories are seen as leaders because they have been known in one form or another for a number of years. Those theories that continue to be taught, not because they are necessarily in vogue today but because they had an important influence on scholars in earlier times, are considered classics. They are important enough to a discipline that they continue to be considered important to the overall understanding of the development of the discipline.

◗ LOOKING FORWARD

By the time you finish this book, you may feel that you have been assaulted by a seemingly limitless list of theories and a pile of names that boggle the mind and stuff the brain. Rather than using these unfortunate metaphors that only serve to overwhelm you further, we encourage you to take a different view, to find another metaphor that helps you put what you have read in some kind of larger, more workable perspective.

Try thinking about communication theory as a prism. Using this metaphor, communication becomes a multifaceted process that impacts and is understood in terms of many contexts, some narrow and some broad. You can look at a prism from any of its sides, peer into it, and watch various reflections come off the surface as you turn it at different angles. Like a prism, communication theory absorbs insight and reflects it back in colorful and interesting ways. Communication theory, then, can be a way to see many possibilities for how to think about and study communication, discover and understand how various theories correlate with and reflect one another, and gain insight into which facets of communication you prefer.

Or maybe a project metaphor works for you. Instead of thinking about communication theories as discrete bits of data produced by individual scholars, think of the field as a collaborative

building effort. What looks to you like a coherent structure—an edifice, a building—is in fact the result of decades of particular efforts to hammer out explanations for communication processes. But each of these efforts builds on other pieces that connect to yet other structures, and the end result looks like a single whole. The project is really never finished, however, as much as we can make it appear to be a sturdy edifice through how we organize and talk about it at any given time. Even as you read this, scholars are contributing new ideas to the project that is communication theory, and these will ultimately change the shape of the edifice as the years go by.

Another metaphor you might use to frame how to think about communication theory—and one we particularly like—is the metaphor of exploration. Imagine all of the theories described in this book as having been discovered during an expedition or some kind of journey of exploration. Think of communication—all of those aspects that make up the complicated processes involved in human symbol use—as an unexplored region with several major trails and many minor ones. These trails meander in many directions, looping around, crossing one another, diverging again and again. Each trail has numerous side pathways that also link up, creating a maze of possible paths to take. Over time, some pathways eventually come to be marked by deep ruts caused by heavy traffic, while others are less traveled, overgrown, and hard to find.

As an explorer or scholar of communication, you set off on your adventure by heading down one pathway. You may find you stay with that, not deviating much onto smaller trails. Or you may find yourself turning from your original path to take a less traveled trail that, for some reason, catches your attention. Or perhaps you choose to hike off trail, forging new trails and pathways for others to follow.

As a beginning scholar of communication—perhaps on your first visit to this region—you will probably start walking down whatever trail happens to be in front of you until you see something intriguing and turn off to see what it is. After some time, you will have favorite trails

that you revisit often, and you may find that in a while, there are some parts of the landscape that you no longer enter. You will also find that you tend to focus on some features of the landscape and not others. Some of you will look at landforms and geological structures—larger parts of theory. Others of you will be concerned with specifics within the landscape itself—the flowers growing there, for instance. Yet others might choose to focus on how climate and weather affect the landscape and how the relationships among features affect one another.

Each of these choices is not unlike how scholars choose to focus within the grand landscape that is communication theory. Some study smaller units, others larger ones, and yet others the connections among theories. Each of these kinds of investigations is necessary for understanding the landscape as a whole, but no one person can undertake the investigation of them all. And just as you can't investigate all of the communication questions the field offers up, neither will all of them appeal equally. Some theories will naturally resonate with your perspective on the world. You may find yourself questioning others, just as you questioned whether to follow a particular trail through the wilderness or not, but you can still appreciate the theory because it offers some understanding of a communication phenomenon.

If you come to love the land you are exploring, you might even write a guidebook to help others explore this terrain. Maybe the best way to think of our book, *Theories of Human Communication*, is as just such a guidebook, offering a coherent look at the field. It becomes a metadiscourse—communication about communication—that identifies the major trails within the discipline, maps where the trails of the terrain cross and where they diverge, and indicates where the newest trails are likely to be found. And just as you, as an explorer of this terrain, have to make choices about which trails to follow, we have had to make similar choices in writing this guidebook.

In this spirit, we move now, in Chapter 3, to a discussion of seven genres or traditions of communication theory, each of which paints a rather

different picture of communication. You will see that each tradition has a special combination of philosophical assumptions about being, knowl-edge, and values; makes use of particular concepts and explanations; and approaches the matter of the generation of principles quite differently.

▐● NOTES

1. For an excellent case in favor of multiple approaches to communication, see John Waite Bowers and James J. Bradac, "Issues in Communication Theory: A Metatheoretical Analysis," in *Communication Yearbook 5*, ed. Michael Burgoon (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1982), 1–28.

2. See Steven H. Chaffee, "Thinking About Theory," in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, ed. Michael B. Salwen and Don W. Stacks (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 15–32; Stephen W. Littlejohn, "Communication Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age*, ed. Theresa Enos (New York: Garland, 1996), 117–121; Karl Erik Rosengren, "Substantive Theories and Formal Models—Bourdieu Confronted," *European Journal of Communication* 10 (1995): 7–39; Fred L. Casmir, "The Role of Theory and Theory Building," in *Building Communication Theories: A Socio/Cultural Approach*, ed. Fred L. Casmir (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994), 7–45.

3. This idea is explored by Klaus Krippendorff, "Conversation or Intellectual Imperialism," in Comparing Communication (Theories)," *Communication Theory* 3 (1993): 252–66.; and W. Barnett Pearce, "On Comparing Theories: Treating Theories as Commensurate or Incommensurate," *Communication Theory* 2 (1991): 159–64.

4. Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1964), 309.

5. Stanley A. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 66. The mirror analogy is developed and critiqued by Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

6. Examples from N. R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 4–5.

7. This point is also made in Thomas L. Jacobsen, "Theories as Communications," *Communication Theory* 2 (1991): 145–50.

8. Deetz, *Democracy*, 71–72.

9. See James Anderson, *Communication Theory: Epistemological Foundations* (New York: Guilford, 1996), 7–9.

10. Quoted in "Anderson Succeeds Ellis as *Communication Theory* Editor, Invites Papers," *ICA Newsletter* 24 (January 1996): 1.

11. Many schemes have been devised to classify epistemological approaches. See, for example, Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942); B. Aubrey Fisher, *Perspectives on Human Communication* (New York: Macmillan, 1978); Kenneth Williams, "Reflections on a Human Science of Communication," *Journal of Communication* 23 (1973): 239–50; Barry Brummett, "Some Implications of 'Process' or 'Intersubjectivity': Postmodern Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 9 (1976): 21–51; Gerald Miller, "The Current Status of Theory and Research in Interpersonal Communication," *Human Communication Research* 4 (1978): 175.

12. Anatol Rapoport, "Strategy and Conscience," in *The Human Dialogue: Perspectives on Communication*, ed. Floyd Matson and Ashley Montagu (New York: Free Press, 1967), 95.

13. See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).

14. For a discussion of ontology, see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Ontology," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 5: 542–43. For an excellent recent exploration of ontological issues in communication theory, see Anderson, *Communication Theory*, 13–101.

15. For an ontological discussion of communication theory, see Bowers and Bradac, "Issues in Communication Theory," 1–28.

16. This debate is summarized by Peter A. Andersen, "The Trait Debate: A Critical Examination of the Individual Differences Paradigm in the Communication Sciences," in *Progress in Communication Sciences*, ed. Brenda Dervin and M. J. Voigt (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1987), 8: 47–82.

17. See, for example, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Kenneth Gergen,

"The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology," *American Psychologist* 40 (March 1985): 266–75.

18. For a good contemporary discussion of axiology, see Anderson, *Communication Theory*, 186–99.
19. See, for example, Kaplan, *Conduct of Inquiry*, 372.
20. For a development of this position, see, for example, Joli Jensen, "The Consequences of Vocabularies," *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 67–74.
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22. See, for example, Fay, *Social Theory and Political Practice*; Kenneth J. Gergen, *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1982), 21–34; and Penman, "Good Theory and Good Practice."
23. This issue is explored by Sheila McNamee, "Research as Social Intervention: A Research Methodology for the New Epistemology" (paper delivered at the Fifth International Conference on Culture and Communication, Philadelphia, October 1988).
24. See, for example, Cees J. Hamelink, "Emancipation or Domestication: Toward a Utopian Science of Communication," *Journal of Communication* 33 (1983): 74–79.
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26. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 128.
27. For more detail about concepts, see Pamela J. Shoemaker, James W. Tankard, and Dominic L. Lasorsa, *How to Build Social Science Theories* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 15–35.
28. Based on Peter Achinstein, *Law and Explanation: An Essay in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); see also Donald P. Cushman and W. Barnett Pearce, "Generality and Necessity in Three Types of Theory About Human Communication, with Special Attention to Rules Theory," *Human Communication Research* 3 (1977): 344–53. For an excellent discussion of explanation in the social sciences, see Paul F. Secord, ed., *Explaining Human Behavior: Consciousness, Human Action, and Social Structure* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982).
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31. See, for example, the critique of the new paradigm by Robert Bostrom and Lewis Donohew, "The Case for Empiricism: Clarifying Fundamental Issues in Communication Theory," *Communication Monographs* 59 (1992): 109–29.
32. See, for example, Franklin J. Boster, "On Making Progress in Communication Science," *Human Communication Research*, 28 (2002): 473–90; Michael A. Shapiro, "Generalizability in Communication Research," *Human Communication Research*, 28 (2002): 491–500; Michael J. Beatty and James C. McCroskey, *The Biology of Communication: A Communibiological Perspective* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2001), 13–26; Steven H. Chaffee, "Thinking About Theory"; Michael J. Beatty, "Thinking Quantitatively," in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, ed. Michael B. Salwen and Don W. Stacks (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 33–44; Myron W. Lustig, "Theorizing About Human Communication," *Communication Quarterly* 34 (1986): 451–59.
33. For an excellent elaboration of this type of theory, see Shoemaker, Tankard, and Lasorsa, *How to Build Social Science Theories.*
34. Figure 2.1 is adapted from Walter L. Wallace, *Sociological Theory: An Introduction* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), ix.
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39. J. Kevin Barge and Robert T. Craig, "Practical Theory," in *Handbook of Applied Communication,* ed. L. Frey and K. Cissna (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, forthcoming).

40. Penman, "Good Theory and Good Practice," based on Gergen, *Toward Transformation;* see also James A. Anderson, "Thinking Qualitatively," in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research,* ed. Michael B. Salwen and Don W. Stacks (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 45–59.

41. Deetz, *Democracy,* 77.

42. For a careful critique of this point, see Bostrom, "Theories, Data, and Communication Research."

43. Krippendorff, "Conversation or Intellectual Imperialism"; and Penman, "Good Theory and Good Practice." See also Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General System Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 117–37.

44. See, for example, Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality;* Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World,* trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967); Gergen, "The Social Constructionist Movement"; Harré and Secord, *Explanation of Social Behavior.*

45. See Robert T. Craig, "Communication as a Practical Discipline," in *Rethinking Communication: Paradigm Issues,* ed. Brenda Dervin, Lawrence Grossberg, Barbara J. O'Keefe, and Ellen Wartella (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 97–122.

46. Robert T. Craig and Karen Tracy, "Grounded Practical Theory: The Case of Intellectual Discussion," *Communication Theory* 5 (1995): 252.

47. Vernon E. Cronen, "Practical Theory, Practical Art, and the Pragmatic-Systemic Account of Inquiry," *Communication Theory* 11 (2001): 14.

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49. Achinstein, *Law and Explanation;* Cushman and Pearce, "Generality and Necessity." See also Stuart J. Sigman, "Do Social Approaches to Interpersonal Communication Constitute a Contribution to Communication Theory?" *Communication Theory* 2 (1992): 347–56.

50. Deetz, *Democracy,* 69.

51. This analysis is adapted from David Brinberg and Joseph E. McGrath, *Validity and the Research Process* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985).

52. Deetz, *Democracy,* 67.

53. Shapiro, "Generalizability in Communication Research," 52. This point is developed in some detail by Penman, "Good Theory and Good Practice."

54. See Penman, "Good Theory and Good Practice."

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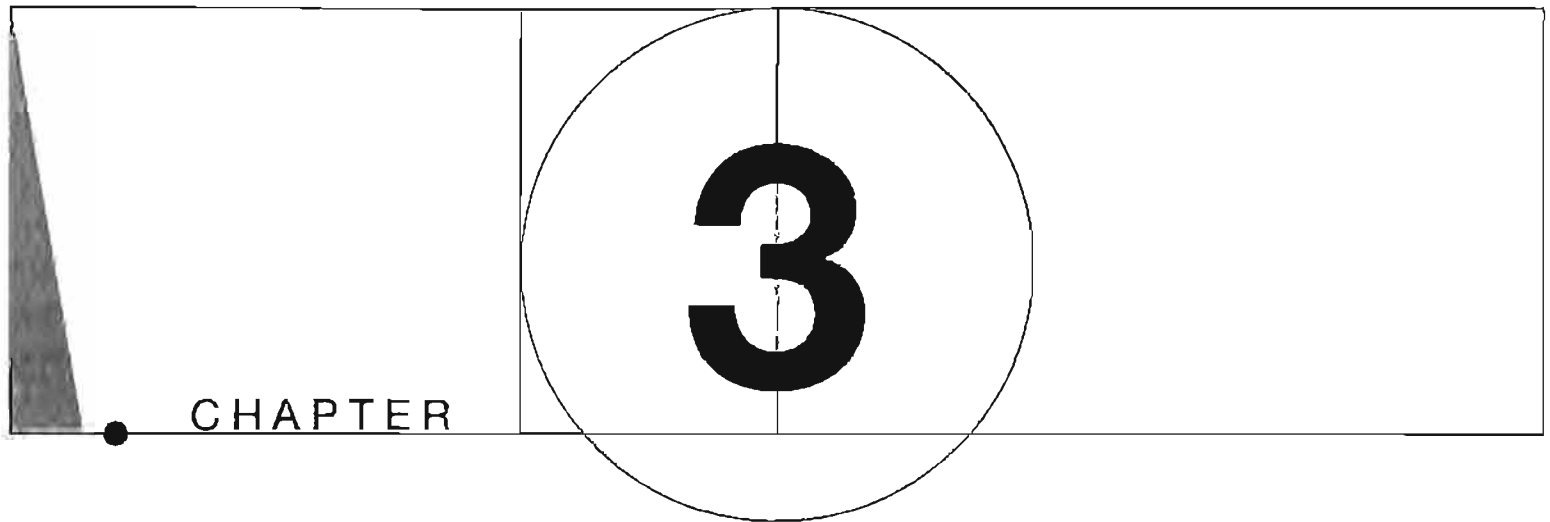
TRADITIONS OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

What kind of music do you like? You probably like several different kinds, but you can't even answer this question without having some knowledge of differences among the many different types of music. Music is not just one big lump of sounds and lyrics but is richly organized around genres, from classical to hip-hop. We would be bewildered by music if we did not have some sense of musical similarities and differences.

The same is true in the world of theory. As we move into an exploration of theories, we need to think about groups or genres as well. Some kind of organizing scheme needs to be established. To this end, in this chapter we offer a framework to use as a guide and tool for looking at the assumptions, perspectives, and focal points of communication theories — to be able to see their similarities and differences. In fact, this framework provides a useful method for understanding the field of communication as a whole and the several traditions within which scholars have worked.

◖ FRAMING COMMUNICATION THEORY

Think of the world of communication in which you live. How would you characterize it? What aspects would become immediately intriguing to you? Would you look first at the symbols in your environment and the ways in which these symbols designate important things to you and other people? Would you concentrate on your perceptions and feelings about these symbols and what they are doing to your life? Perhaps you would go beyond looking at objects, words, and acts as symbols to notice the complexity of the world around you and how everything seems to influence everything else. Or maybe you wouldn't think so much about all of these outside forces, but be captivated by individual differences and wonder about how your mind works, how to persuade other people and affect their minds, and how the media affect individual audience members.

Another track is the way in which groups and cultures come together—how they develop their own codes and meanings; and how your identity in a group is shaped by your gender, culture, family, or social networks. Maybe you would end up concentrating on how society and its institutions are shaped by social arrangements that marginalize some groups and privilege others. Finally, as a student of communication, you might be most interested in practice, or how to interact with audiences in a way that actually ends up changing society.

You will not find each of these questions equally compelling or worthy. Some of these considerations will be yawners for you, while others will draw you right in. What you pay attention to and how you study communication will have a certain character based on what you consider important, how you think communication should be studied, and what you think theory should accomplish. This is exactly what has happened in the communication field: different scholars approach the topic in vastly different ways, and your job as a student of communica-

From the Source . . .

I take a pragmatic view of theory. There is no one correct theory of communication but many theories are useful for thinking about specific problems. The more theories you know, the more different problem-solving options you have. However, the diversity of the field is also a source of confusion. My model simplifies the big picture by showing that most communication theories come from a small number of traditions representing fundamentally different practical approaches.

—Robert T. Craig

tion theory is to understand the various approaches that have influenced our knowledge of communication.

While various typologies of communication have been developed,[1] we particularly like Robert Craig's model because it offers a way of looking at and reflecting on the communication field in a holistic way.[2] This metamodel, or model of models, provides a coherent pattern that can help us define issues and talk about the assumptions that govern our approaches to theory. Craig's metamodel provides a robust system for ordering communication theory, and we use it here to help organize this book.

Craig divides the world of communication theory into seven traditions: (1) the semiotic; (2) the phenomenological; (3) the cybernetic; (4) the sociopsychological; (5) the sociocultural; (6) the critical; and (7) the rhetorical. We like to think of these traditions as scholarly communities drawn together by similar assumptions about communication, interests, and ways of working. Some of these traditions stand in opposition to one another, while others have a good deal of overlap. As a group, these traditions provide sufficient coherence to allow us to look at theories side by side and to understand their essential commonalities and differences. In this chapter, we will provide an overview of each of the seven traditions.

◖● THE SEMIOTIC TRADITION

Look around your room and select four or five objects that are meaningful to you. Why did you choose these things? Why are they important? Chances are that the objects you picked are not just things in themselves but that they bring to mind something else—a relationship, a time of your life, an accomplishment, a trip, a place, or any of a number of other experiences. In other words, the objects you selected are symbols.

Now look again and see if any of the objects you selected have words on or in them. If you thought of a T-shirt, for example, it may be the words on the shirt, more than the shirt itself, that have significance for you. Maybe you even selected a book or a CD that is filled with written words or lyrics. Whether words, objects, or actions, the symbols of your life have meaning because of how they relate to other symbols and how you organize these symbols together into larger patterns that help you understand who you are, what is important to you, and how to act in your life.

Semiotics, or the study of signs, forms an important tradition of thought in communication theory. The semiotic tradition includes a host of theories about how signs come to represent objects, ideas, states, situations, feelings, and conditions outside of themselves. The study of signs not only provides a way of looking at communication but also has a powerful impact on almost all perspectives now employed in communication theory.[3]

Key Ideas of the Semiotic Tradition

The basic concept unifying this tradition is the *sign*, defined as a stimulus designating or indicating some other condition—as when smoke indicates the presence of fire. A second basic concept is *symbol*, which usually designates a complex sign with many meanings, including highly personal ones. Some scholars make a strong differentiation between signs and symbols—signs have a clear referent to something in reality while symbols are arbitrary. Other scholars see them as different levels of terms within the same category. With its focus on the sign and

symbol, semiotics integrates an amazingly broad set of theories dealing with language, discourse, and nonverbal actions. In Chapter 5, we will look at some of the meanings of these terms as we explore this tradition in depth.

Most semiotic thinking involves the basic idea of the *triad of meaning*, which asserts that meaning arises from a relationship among three things—the object (or referent), the person (or interpreter), and the sign. Charles Saunders Peirce, the first modern theorist of semiotics, may have been the originator of this idea.[4] Peirce defined *semiosis* as a relationship among a sign, an object, and a meaning.[5] The sign represents the object, or referent, in the mind of an interpreter. For example, the word *dog* is associated in your mind with a certain animal. The word is not the animal but is instead the thoughts, associations, or interpretations that link the word with the actual object for you. A person who loves dogs and has one as a pet will experience the sign *dog* differently than the individual who was bitten by a dog as a child. All three elements form the semantic triangle, as it was labeled by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (Figure 3.1).[6]

A study of personal pronouns by Wendy Martyna provides a better idea of how this three-part process that connects the object, sign, and meaning, actually works.[7] Traditionally in English, the pronoun *he* has been used to designate either male or female when a singular pronoun is required, as in the sentence, "When a teacher returns tests, he usually discusses them with the class." Martyna was interested in finding out what generic pronouns people would actually use in such situations and the meanings they have for these pronouns. Forty students at Stanford completed a series of sentences requiring the use of a generic pronoun. Some of the sentences referred to people traditionally thought of as male ("Before a judge can give a final ruling, he must weigh the evidence"); some referred to people traditionally considered female ("After a nurse has completed training, she goes to work"); and some were neutral ("When a person loses money, he is apt to feel bad").

Martyna found that the participants usually used a pronoun that was consistent with sex

Thought or reference

Symbol   Referent

Stands for
(an imputed relation)
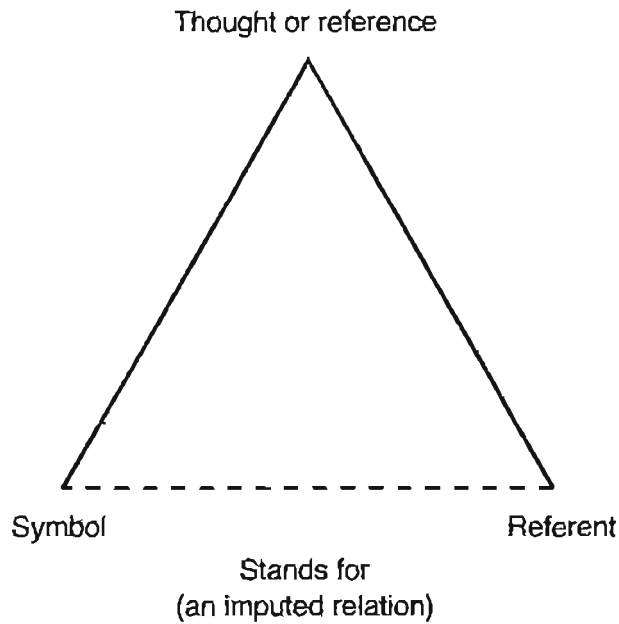
Ogden and Richards's Semantic Triangle

From *The Meaning of Meaning*, by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards.
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and Routledge & Kegan Paul.

stereotypes. In the neutral sentences, research subjects most often used the masculine pronoun, although some participants deliberately suggested role reversals by switching the pronouns, and others tried to avoid sexism by using a combination, as in *he or she*. Women were less likely to use the masculine term than men. After the participants completed the sentences, Martyna asked them what image they had when they completed a sentence. Most often, they imagined a man in male-stereotyped sentences and a woman in female-stereotyped ones. In neutral sentences, the image was almost exclusively male. This study shows that a sign such as a personal pronoun is connected to its referent through the mind, or interpretation, of the user. Meaning depends, in other words, on the image or thought of the person in relation to the sign and the object the sign represents.

Variations in the Semiotic Tradition

Semiotics is often divided into three areas of study—semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics.[8] *Semantics* addresses how signs relate to their referents, or what signs stand for. Semiotics imagines

two worlds—a world of things and a world of signs—and brings to light the relationship between these two worlds.[9] Whenever we ask the question, "What does a sign represent?" we are in the realm of semantics. Dictionaries, for example, are semantic reference books; they tell us what words mean, or what they represent. As a basic tenet of semiotics, representation is always mediated by the conscious interpretation of the person, and any interpretation or meaning for a sign will change from situation to situation. A more refined semantic question, then, is, "What meanings does a sign bring to the mind of a person within a situation?" Martyna's study of pronouns described earlier is firmly planted in the semantic branch of semiotics.

The second area of study within semiotics is *syntactics*, or the study of relationships among signs. Signs virtually never stand by themselves. They are almost always part of a larger sign system, or group of signs, that are organized in particular ways. Syntactics, then, refers to the rules by which people combine signs into complex systems of meaning. Semiotics rests on the belief that signs are always understood in relation to other signs. Indeed, a dictionary is nothing more than a catalogue of the relationship of one sign to other signs (one word defined in terms of other words).[10] When we move from a single word (*dog*) to a sentence (*The cute dog licked my hand*), we are dealing with syntax or grammar. Gestures are frequently combined with other gestures to form complex systems of nonverbal signs, and nonverbal signs are paired with language to express subtle, complex meanings. Syntactic rules enable human beings to use an infinite combination of signs to express a wealth of meanings.

Pragmatics, the third major semiotic study, looks at how signs make a difference in people's lives, or the practical use and effects of signs and their impact on social life.[11] This branch has had the most important impact in communication theory, as signs and sign systems are seen as tools with which people communicate. As such, pragmatics overlaps significantly with the socio-cultural tradition.[12] From a semiotic perspective, we must have some kind of common understanding not just of individual words but of

grammar, society, and culture in order for communication to take place. The system of relations among signs must allow communicators to refer to something in common.[13] We must share a sense of coherence in messages, or no amount of understanding will be possible, and we must assume that when we make use of the rules of language, large numbers of people who know those rules will be able to understand the meaning we intend. The pragmatics of signs is important to a number of broad communication concerns but is particularly powerful in looking at understanding and misunderstanding.[14]

Nonlinguistic signs create special pragmatic problems, and nonverbals also have been of interest to communication researchers. For example, visual codes are more open in their potential meanings—their interpretation is ultimately subjective and more connected to the internal perceptual and thought processes of the viewer than to conventional representations. This is not to say that a person's meaning for an image is entirely individual; indeed, visual meanings can be and are affected by learning, culture, and other socially shared forms of interaction. But perceiving visual images is not the same as understanding language. Images require pattern recognition, organization, and discrimination, not just representational connections. Thus the meanings of visual images rely heavily on both individualized and social perception and knowledge.[15]

The three-part division—semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics—is used widely to organize the field of semiotics. However, not everyone agrees that this is the most useful way to do so. For example, Donald Ellis asserts that semantics is not a separate branch but is more like the trunk supporting the whole tree.[16] Meaning, for Ellis, is not just a matter of *lexical semantics*, or the meaning of words, but also includes *structural semantics*, or the meanings of grammatical structures.

It is fair to say, at the least, that these three dimensions of semiotics are related to one another and that their separation helps us understand the different aspects of meaning. We learn from semiotics that signs (outside ourselves) come to represent objects, but only through our internal perceptions and feelings. While semiotics tends

to focus on the sign and its functions, phenomenology looks much more at the individual interpreter as the key component in this process.

◨ THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION

Theories in the phenomenological tradition assume that people actively interpret their experiences and come to understand the world by personal experience with it. This tradition concentrates on the conscious experience of the person.[17] Did you ever lie on your back at night looking at the stars in a really dark place? Sometime during childhood, nearly everyone begins to ask cosmological questions as they gaze into the sky and contemplate the enormity of the universe. Light, speed, time, matter, energy, movement, and distance come to be known to us by looking at the night sky and consciously contemplating the meaning of it all. We may expand our experience by using telescopes, looking at pictures from the Hubble Space Telescope, and comparing astronomical distances and times with those closer to home. The process of knowing through direct experience is the province of phenomenology, our second tradition in the communication discipline.

Key Ideas of the Phenomenological Tradition

The term *phenomenon* refers to the appearance of an object, event, or condition that is perceived. *Phenomenology*, then, is the way in which human beings come to understand the world through direct experience. You come to know something by consciously examining it and testing your feelings and perceptions about it. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a theorist in this tradition, wrote that "all my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world."[18] Phenomenology, then, makes actual lived experience the basic data of reality. All you can know is what you

experience: "Phenomenology means letting things become manifest as what they are."[19] If you want to know what love is, you would not ask psychologists; you would tap into your own experience of love.

Stanley Deetz summarizes three basic principles of phenomenology.[20] First, knowledge is found directly in conscious experience—we come to know the world as we engage it. Second, the meaning of a thing consists of the potential of that thing in one's life. In other words, how you relate to an object determines its meaning for you. For example, you will take your communication theory course seriously as an educational experience when you experience it as something that will have positive impact on your life. The third assumption is that language is the vehicle of meaning. We experience the world through the language used to define and express that world. We know *keys* because of language we associate with them: "lock," "open," "metal," "weight," and so on.

The process of *interpretation* is central to most phenomenological thought. Sometimes known by the German term *Verstehen* [understanding], interpretation is the active process of assigning meaning to an experience. In the semiotic tradition, interpretation is considered to be separate from reality, but in phenomenology, interpretation literally forms what is real for the person. You cannot separate reality from interpretation.

Interpretation is an active process of the mind, a creative act of clarifying personal experience. Interpretation involves going back and forth between experiencing an event or situation and assigning meaning to it, moving from the specific to the general and back to the specific again, in what is called a *hermeneutic circle*. We construct an interpretation of an event or experience and then test that interpretation by looking closely at the specifics of the event once again—a continual process of refining our meanings. An example might be a woman who had a particularly rocky relationship with her father. That experience forms the basis of her understanding of relationships with men. This interpretation will probably undergo continual

shifting throughout life as she continues to go back and forth between experiencing relationships and interpreting them in light of new experiences.

Variations in the Phenomenological Tradition

Three general schools of thought make up the phenomenological tradition: (1) classical phenomenology; (2) the phenomenology of perception; and (3) hermeneutic phenomenology. *Classical phenomenology* is primarily associated with Edmund Husserl, the founder of modern phenomenology.[21] Husserl, who wrote during the first half of the 20th century, attempted to develop a method for ascertaining truth through focused consciousness. For Husserl, truth can only be ascertained through direct experience, but we must be disciplined in how we experience things. Only through conscious attention can truth be known. In order to arrive at truth through conscious attention, however, we must put aside, or *bracket*, our biases. We must suspend our categories of thinking and habits of seeing in order to experience the thing as it really is. In this way, the objects of the world present themselves to our consciousness. Husserl's approach to phenomenology thus is highly objective; the world can be experienced without knowers bringing their own categories to bear on the process.

In contrast to Husserl, most phenomenologists today subscribe to the idea that experience is subjective, not objective, and believe that subjectivity is an important kind of knowledge in its own right. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a major figure in this second tradition, is associated with what is called the *phenomenology of perception*—a reaction against the narrow objectivist view of Husserl.[22] For Merleau-Ponty, the human being is a unified physical and mental being who creates meaning in the world. We know things only through our own personal relationship to these things. As persons, we are affected by the world, but we also affect the world by how we experience it. For Merleau-Ponty, then, things do not exist in and of themselves apart from how they are known.

Rather, people give meaning to the things in the world, so that any phenomenological experience is necessarily a subjective one. Thus, a dialogic relationship exists between people as interpreters and thing things they are interpreting.

The third branch, *hermeneutic phenomenology*, is quite consistent with the second but extends the tradition further by applying it more completely to communication. *Hermeneutic phenomenology* is associated with Martin Heidegger, known primarily for his work in *philosophical hermeneutics* (an alternative name for this movement).[23] His philosophy has also been called the *hermeneutic of Dasein*, which means "interpretation of being." Most important for Heidegger is the natural experience that inevitably occurs by merely existing in the world. For Heidegger, the reality of something is not known by careful analysis or reduction but by natural experience, which is created by the use of language in everyday life. What is real is what is experienced through the use of language in context: "Words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are."[24] Communication is the vehicle by which meaning is assigned to experience. When you communicate, you work out new ways of seeing the world— your speech affects your thoughts, and new meanings are in turn created by those thoughts. Language, then, is packed with meaning, and the discourse available to us in everyday life constantly affects our experience of events and situations. Consequently, this tradition of phenomenology—linking experience with language and social interaction—is especially relevant to the communication discipline.[25]

To many scholars the phenomenological tradition is naive. For them, life is shaped by complex, interacting forces, only some of which can ever be known consciously at any one time. You cannot interpret something by consciously looking at it and thinking about it. Real understanding comes from careful analysis of a system of effects. In the following section, we look at the tradition commonly associated with this form of theory.

◖ THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

What characterizes your family? Could you adequately describe your family by showing a picture of them? How about adding a description of each person? Neither of these approaches would be sufficient to really get across an idea of what your family *is*. This is because a family is more than a collection of persons. In order to fully understand family life, you would need to look at how the members interact with one another, how they influence one another, the different ways communication functions in the family, and how the family changes over time. A cybernetic perspective is necessary to understand the depth and complexity of family dynamics.

Cybernetics is the tradition of complex systems in which many interacting elements influence one another. Theories in the cybernetic tradition explain how physical, biological, social, and behavioral processes work.[26] Within cybernetics, communication is understood as a system of parts, or variables, that influence one another, shape and control the character of the overall system, and, like any organism, achieve both balance and change.

Key Ideas of the Cybernetic Tradition

The idea of a *system* forms the core of cybernetic thinking.[27] Systems are sets of interacting components that together form something more than the sum of the parts. The complexity of the family we discussed earlier makes it an ideal example of a communication system.[28] Family members are not isolated from one another, and their relationships must be taken into account to fully understand the family as a system. Like families, all systems are unique wholes characterized by a pattern of relationships.[29] Any part of the system is always constrained by its dependence on other parts, and this pattern of interdependence organizes the system itself.[30] But a system cannot remain alive without importing new resources in the form of inputs. Thus, a system takes in inputs from the environment, processes

these, and creates outputs back into the environment. Sometimes the inputs and outputs are tangible materials; sometimes they consist of energy and information.

In addition to interdependence, systems are also characterized by self-regulation and control. In other words, systems monitor, regulate, and control their outputs in order to remain stable and achieve goals. A thermostat and heater are a simple example of system control. An airplane is an example of an incredibly complex system that is able to maintain sufficient control through a highly complex system of interactions among parts to get cargo and passengers to their desired destinations. Because the system exists in a dynamic environment, it must be adaptable and able to change.[31]

Systems theorists, then, are not simply interested in the nature of the system and its functions but in how it manages to sustain and control itself over time. How does a plane manage to fight gravity, wind currents, and other forces and to direct itself along a programmed course? This can only happen because of systems within systems. Systems are embedded within one another, such that one system is part of a larger system forming a series of levels of increasing complexity.[32] We can take a very broad view by observing a number of systems that interact with one another in a large suprasystem, or we can take a narrower view by observing a smaller subsystem.

In a complex system, a series of feedback loops connects the parts. These feedback loops are called *networks*.[33] A simple illustration of a cybernetic network is the hypothetical example in Figure 3.2.[34] In this figure the pluses (+) represent positive relationships and the minuses (–) negative ones. In a positive relationship, variables increase or decrease together. In a negative relationship, they vary inversely, so that as one increases, the other decreases. For example, as family income goes up, access to health care also increases. With increased access to health care comes decreased family illness, which in turn improves school and work attendance. Notice that some of the loops in the network are positive feedback loops and some are negative.

The key ideas of system theory are amazingly coherent and consistent, and they have had a major impact on many fields, including communication. Because of its wide applicability in virtual, physical, and social environments, the cybernetic tradition is not monolithic. Here we will

FIGURE 3.2

Hypothetical Cybernetic Network
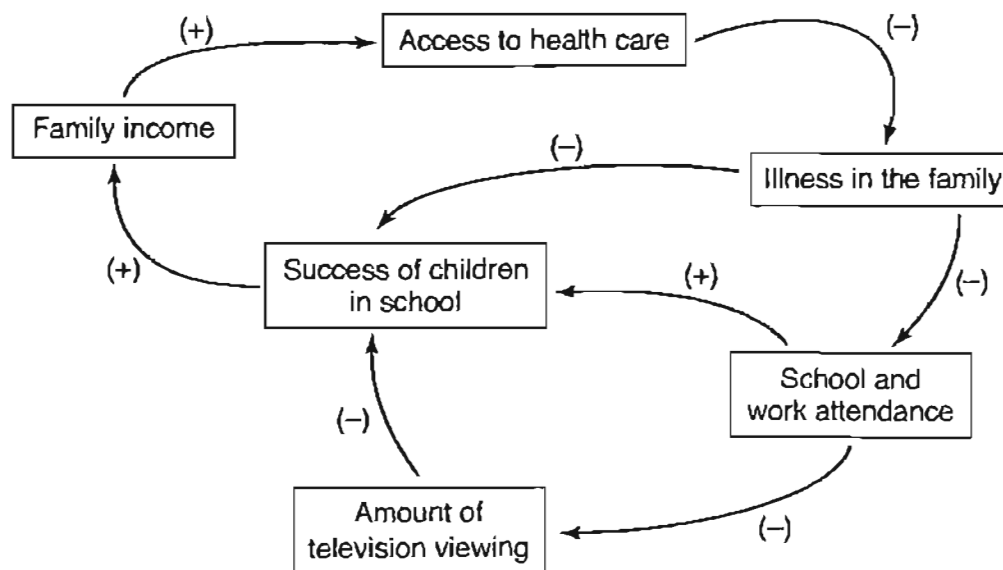
make distinctions among four variations of system theory. These include (1) basic system theory; (2) cybernetics; (3) General System Theory; and (4) second-order cybernetics.

Variations in the Cybernetic Tradition

The ideas outlined in the previous section can be thought of as *basic system theory*. In its most elementary form, this approach depicts systems as actual structures that can be analyzed and observed from outside. In other words, you can see the parts of the system and how they interact. You can observe and objectively measure the forces among parts of the system, and you can detect inputs and outputs of the system. Further, you can operate on or manipulate the system by changing its inputs and tinkering with its processing mechanisms. A whole raft of professions, such as systems analysts, management consultants, and system designers, has developed to analyze systems and improve them.

The term *cybernetics* can be confusing, because it applies to both the general tradition (as Craig has done) and the more specific field of cybernetics, one of its variations. Cybernetics in the narrow sense was popularized by Norbert Wiener in the 1950s.[35] As a field of study, cybernetics is the branch of system theory that focuses on feedback loops and control processes. Emphasizing circular forces, cybernetics challenges the very idea that one thing causes another in a linear fashion. Instead, this work calls our attention to how things impact one another in a circular way, how systems maintain control, how balance is achieved, and how feedback loops can maintain balance and create change.[36]

The third branch or area of study within system theory is *General System Theory (GST)*, originally formulated by the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Bertalanffy used GST as a broad, multidisciplinary approach to knowledge. This tradition uses system principles to show how things in many different fields are similar to one another, forming a common vocabulary for communication across disciplines.[37] More than this, however, GST recognizes the universal nature of

systems of all types and deals with the commonalities among systems as seemingly diverse as economic growth, biological development, and social movements.

In recent decades, some theorists have come to reject the idea that systems can be observed objectively. *Second-order cybernetics* developed as an alternative perspective and is the last variation within cybernetics that we will discuss. Second-order cybernetics holds that observers can never see how a system works by standing outside the system itself because the observer is always engaged cybernetically with the system being observed. According to this perspective, whenever you observe a system, you affect and are affected by it. This branch, most associated with Heinz von Foerster, is also called the *cybernetics of knowing* because it shows that knowledge is a product of feedback loops between the knower and the known.[38] What we observe in a system is determined in part by the categories and methods of observation, which in turn are affected by what is seen.

The cybernetic tradition has been a popular and influential line of work in communication, useful for understanding communication in general as well as instances of communication occurring in everyday life. Because of system influences, a common vocabulary makes these theories coherent and useful as a group. Although theories of the cybernetic tradition are excellent for understanding relationships, they are less effective in helping us understand individual differences among the parts of the system. In contrast, the following tradition has been powerful in helping us understand individual human beings as communicators.

THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

Almost certainly, you will think of yourself first as an individual. You have a body, a brain, and a skin that marks a boundary between yourself and the outside world. You have a unique appearance, and, even if you are an identical twin, your

face is never exactly the same as anyone else's. The same is true of your personality; you assume that you have a certain combination of traits that make you different from other people. At the same time, you are clearly aware that you are not an island but are part of a community of other people bound together by social interaction.

The study of the individual as a social being is the thrust of the *sociopsychological* tradition. Originating in the field of social psychology, this tradition has been a powerful tradition within communication.[39] The theories of this tradition focus on individual social behavior, psychological variables, individual effects, personalities and traits, perception, and cognition. Although these theories have many differences, they share a common concern for behavior and for the personal traits and cognitive processes that produce behavior.

The individualistic approach that characterizes the sociopsychological tradition is common in the study of communication and in the behavioral and social sciences at large. This is understandable within our cultural milieu.[40] The individual has dominated Western thought since the 18th-century Enlightenment, and the autonomous person is the primary unit of analysis in much Western thinking.[41] This psychological view sees persons as entities with characteristics that lead them to behave in independent ways. It views the single human mind as the locus for processing and understanding information and generating messages, but it acknowledges the power that individuals can have over other individuals and the effects of information on the human mind. Hardly surprising, then, is that psychological explanations have been so appealing to many communication scholars, especially in the study of attitude change and interaction effects.[42]

Key Ideas of the Sociopsychological Tradition

In the sociopsychological tradition, psychological explanations are crucial. The universal mechanisms that govern action are assumed to be discoverable through careful research.[43] Consequently, this tradition is most often associated with "the science of communication." Much of

the current work in this tradition in communication focuses on persuasion and attitude change—message processing, how individuals plan message strategies, how receivers process message information, and the effects of messages on individuals. A still-popular part of the sociopsychological approach is trait theory, which identifies personality variables and communicator tendencies that affect how individuals act and interact.

Most sociopsychological theories of communication today are cognitive in orientation, providing insights into the ways human beings process information.[44] In this area, the sociopsychological and cybernetic traditions come together to explain individual human information-processing systems.[45] Of special interest are the inputs (information) and outputs (plans and behaviors) of the cognitive system. Questions of importance to this line of investigation include how perceptions get represented cognitively and how those representations get processed through mechanisms that serve attention, retention, interference, selection, motivation, planning, and strategizing.

Much of the work in this tradition assumes that mechanisms of human information processing are beyond our awareness. As communicators, we may be made aware of specific aspects of the process such as attention and memory, and we may be very aware of certain outputs like plans and behaviors, but the internal processes themselves are behind the scenes. Communication scientists seek to discover and describe these systems.

Several themes are apparent in the sociopsychological tradition: (1) How can individual communication behavior be predicted? (2) How does an individual take into account and accommodate different communication situations? (3) How do communicators adapt their behaviors to one another? (4) How is information assimilated, organized, and used in forming message strategies and plans? (5) By what logic do people make decisions about the types of messages they wish to use? (6) How is meaning represented in the mind? (7) How do people attribute the causes of behavior? (8) How is information integrated to form beliefs and attitudes? (9) How do attitudes change? (10) How are messages assimilated into

the belief/attitude system? (11) How are expectations formed in interactions with others? (12) What happens when expectations are violated? The variations in this tradition answer these questions in different ways.

Variations in the Sociopsychological Tradition

The sociopsychological tradition can be divided into three large branches: (1) the behavioral; (2) the cognitive; and (3) the biological. In the *behavioral*, theories concentrate on *how* people actually behave in communication situations. Such theories typically look at the relationship between communication behavior—what you say and what you do—in relation to such variables as personal traits, situational differences, and learning. Until 1960 or so, the emphasis in psychology was on how we learn behavior by associating stimulus and response. When certain behaviors are rewarded, they tend to be repeated. Psychologists call this "learning." When responses are punished, they tend to be extinguished, or "unlearned." Today theorists of the sociopsychological tradition generally believe that this depiction is an overly simple explanation for human behavior.

The second approach, *cognitive theory*, is much in favor these days. Centering on patterns of thought, this branch concentrates on how individuals acquire, store, and process information in a way that leads to behavioral outputs. In other words, what you actually do in a communication situation depends not just on stimulus-response patterns, but also on the mental operations used to manage information.

The third general variation is *biological*. As the study of genetics assumed increasing importance, psychologists and other behavioral researchers became interested in the effects of brain function and structure, neurochemistry, and genetic factors in explaining human behavior. These researchers believe that many of our traits, ways of thinking, and behaviors are wired in biologically and derive not from learning or situational factors, but from inborn neurobiological influences.[46] These theories, which began to gain prominence in the 1990s, are probably best

labeled *psychobiology*, which may be an emerging tradition in its own right; at least for the present edition of this book, we will include them with their cousins in social psychology. The term *communibiology* refers to the study of communication from a biological perspective.[47]

Both the sociopsychological and the sociocultural traditions deal with the individual in interaction with others. The sociopsychological tradition foregrounds the individual, while the sociocultural emphasizes the social interaction part of the equation.

THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

Write 20 statements that answer the question, "Who am I?" Look back at your list and see what kinds of descriptions you included. If you wrote words or phrases like "artistic," "bashful," "good student," "likes horses," and "kind to others," you are thinking of yourself in terms of qualities, traits, or individual differences—all sociopsychological conditions. On the other hand, if you put down things like "father," "Catholic," "student," and "lives in Missoula," you are defining yourself in terms of your identity as a member of a group, your place within a larger community, your role in regard to others, or your relationships. This latter idea of identity is the focus of the *sociocultural* tradition.

Sociocultural approaches to communication theory address the ways our understandings, meanings, norms, roles, and rules are worked out interactively in communication.[48] Such theories explore the interactional worlds in which people live, positing that reality is not an objective set of arrangements outside us but constructed through a process of interaction in groups, communities, and cultures.

Key Ideas of the Sociocultural Tradition

This tradition focuses on patterns of interaction between people rather than on individual characteristics or mental models. Interaction is the

process and site in which meanings, roles, rules, and cultural values are worked out. Although individuals do process information cognitively, this tradition is much less interested in the individual level of communication. Instead, researchers in this tradition want to understand ways in which people *together* create the realities of their social groups, organizations, and cultures. Indeed, the categories used by individuals to process information are socially created in communication, according to the sociocultural tradition.

There is a healthy skepticism within this movement about discovery methods of research. Instead, sociocultural researchers tend to subscribe to the idea that reality is constructed by language, so whatever is "discovered" must be heavily influenced by the interaction patterns of the research protocol itself. Thus, within the sociocultural approach, knowledge is highly interpretive and constructed. These theories tend to deal with how meaning is created in social interaction in actual situations. The meaning of words within such situations assumes high importance, as do behavioral patterns in interaction in real time. Researchers in this tradition are always interested in what is getting made by these patterns of interaction.

Many sociocultural theories also focus on how identities are established through interaction in social groups and cultures. Identity becomes a fusion of our selves as individuals within social roles, as members of communities, and as cultural beings. Sociocultural scholars thus focus on how identity is negotiated from one situation to another. Culture is also seen as a significant part of what gets made in social interaction. In turn, culture forms a context for action and interpretation. Because communication is something that happens *between* people, the community assumes tremendous importance in many of these theories.

Context is explicitly identified within this tradition as crucial to the forms of communication and meanings that occur. Symbols, already important in any interaction, assume different meanings as communicators move from situation to situation. The symbols and meanings important to particular social groups and cultures are fascinating to sociocultural researchers.

Because of the importance of culture and context, then, sociocultural work is generally, though not always, holistic. Researchers in this tradition may focus on a small aspect of the whole situation in a particular study, but they fully recognize the importance of the whole situation to what happens on a microlevel of interaction.

Variations in the Sociocultural Tradition

Like all of the traditions, the sociocultural has various contributing lines of work: symbolic interactionism, constructionism, sociolinguistics, philosophy of language, ethnography, and ethnomethodology.[49] Based on the idea that social structures and meanings are created and maintained in social interaction, *symbolic interactionism* (SI) has been highly influential in this tradition.[50] Symbolic interactionism had its origins in the discipline of sociology with the work of Herbert Blumer and George Herbert Mead, who emphasized the importance of participant observation in the study of communication as a way of exploring social relationships.[51] The basic ideas of symbolic interactionism have been adopted and elaborated by many social scientists and today are incorporated into studies of groups, emotions, self, politics, and social structure.[52]

A second line of work highly influential in the sociocultural approach is *social constructionism.* Originally called *the social construction of reality* after the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, this line of work has been an investigation of how human knowledge is constructed through social interaction.[53] The identity of a thing results from how we talk about that object, the language used to capture our concepts, and the way in which social groups orient to their common experience. The nature of the world, then, is less important than the language used to name, discuss, and approach that world.

A third influence in the sociocultural tradition of communication theory is *sociolinguistics,* or the study of language and culture.[54]

Important in this tradition is that people use language differently in different social and cultural groups. Not merely a neutral vehicle for connecting individuals, language enters into the formation of who we are as social and cultural beings.

Closely related to sociolinguistics is work from the *philosophy of language*, particularly "ordinary language philosophy." Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian philosopher, began this line of work, suggesting that the meaning of language depends on its actual use.[55] Language, as used in ordinary life, is a *language game* because people follow rules to do things with language. When you give and obey orders, ask and answer questions, and describe events, you are engaged in language games. Like ordinary games such as chess and poker, each language game has a different set of rules. J. L. Austin came to refer to the practical use of language as *speech acts*.[56] When you speak, you are actually performing an act. The act may be stating, questioning, commanding, promising, or a number of other possibilities.

Another influential perspective within the sociocultural approach is *ethnography*, or the observation of how actual social groups come to build meaning through their linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors.[57] Ethnography looks at the forms of communication used in specific social groups, the words they use and what these mean to the group, as well as the meanings for a variety of behavioral, visual, and auditory responses.

Finally, the sociocultural tradition has been influenced by *ethnomethodology*, or the careful observation of microbehaviors in real situations.[58] Attributed primarily to sociologist Harold Garfinkel, this approach looks at how, in social interaction, we manage or mesh behaviors at actual moments in time. In communication, ethnomethodology has influenced how we look at conversations, including the ways in which participants manage the back-and-forth flow with language and nonverbal behaviors.

The following tradition—the critical tradition—follows closely many of the interests and assumptions of the sociocultural, but it adds an important dimension that moves it from the descriptive to the critical.

◖ THE CRITICAL TRADITION

Think for a moment about your privileges. What advantages and resources do you have at this point in your life? How did these come to you? What has happened in society for these particular assets to gain value or to be a resource that enables you to move forward in a healthy, self-fulfilling way, both as an individual and as a member of a community? Now think for a few minutes about what privileges others have that you do not. Why don't you have these? What stands in the way? Now think of a third set of questions: What special assets, abilities, or resources do you possess that have not come to be valued in our society? Why do these things remain unimportant to other groups? What symbols, rules, and meanings have emerged from communication within our society that give power to some groups and take it away from others? How do these power arrangements get reinforced through communication?

Questions of privilege and power have assumed importance in communication theory, and it is the *critical tradition* that carries this banner. If you have privilege, or lack it, because of the color of your skin, your nationality, your language, your religion, your sex, your sexual orientation, your regional affiliation, your income level, or any other aspect of your identity, then you are facing the kind of social difference that assumes great importance to critical scholars. These theories are concerned with how power, oppression, and privilege are the products of certain forms of communication throughout society, making the critical tradition significant in the field of communication theory today.

The critical tradition stands in opposition to many of the basic assumptions of the other traditions. Heavily influenced by work in Europe, by U.S. feminism, and by postmodern and postcolonial discourses, this tradition is growing in its popularity and impact on communication theory.

Key Ideas of the Critical Tradition

Although there are several varieties of the critical tradition all share three essential features.[59] First, the critical tradition seeks to understand the taken-for-granted systems, power structures, and beliefs—or ideologies—that dominate society, with a particular eye to whose interests are served by those power structures. Questions such as who does and does not get to speak, what does and does not get said, and who stands to benefit from a particular system are typical of those asked by critical theorists.[60] Second, critical theorists are particularly interested in uncovering oppressive social conditions and power arrangements in order to promote emancipation, or a freer and more fulfilling society. Understanding oppression is the first step to dispelling the illusions of ideology and to taking action to overcome oppressive forces.

Third critical theory makes a conscious attempt to fuse theory and action. Such theories are clearly normative and act to accomplish change in the conditions that affect society, or as Della Pollock and J. Robert Cox put it, "to *read* the world with an eye towards *shaping* it."[61] Critical research aims to reveal the ways in which competing interests clash and the manner in which conflicts are resolved in favor of particular groups over other ones.[62] Critical theories therefore frequently ally themselves with the interests of marginalized groups.

In the field of communication, critical scholars are particularly interested in how messages reinforce oppression in society. Although critical scholars are interested in social action, they also focus on discourse and the texts that promote particular ideologies, establish and maintain power, and subvert the interests of certain groups and classes. Critical discourse analysis looks at actual features of texts that manifest these oppressive arrangements,[63] without separating communication from other factors in the overall system of oppressive forces.[64]

Because critical theories are so broad and cast such a wide net, they are often hard to place and categorize within the overall body of communication theory. We will describe several of the major branches: Marxism, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, postmodernism, cultural studies, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and feminist studies.

Variations in the Critical Tradition

Although critical theory has come a long way since the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marxism* is clearly the originating branch of critical theory.[65] Marx taught that the means of production in society determines the nature of society;[66] so the economy is the basis of all social structure. In capitalistic systems, profit drives production, a process that ends up oppressing labor or the working class. Only when the working class rises up against dominant groups can the means of production be changed and the liberation of the worker be achieved.[67] Such liberation furthers the natural progress of history, in which forces in opposition clash in a dialectic that results in a higher social order. This classical Marxist theory is called the *critique of political economy*.

Today, Marxist critical theory is thriving, although it has become diffused and multitheoretical. Few critical theorists today wholeheartedly adopt Marx's ideas on political economy, although his basic concerns of dialectical conflict, domination, and oppression remain important. For this reason critical theory today is frequently labeled "neomarxist" or "marxist" (with a lowercase *m*). And in contrast to the simple materialist model of Marxism, most contemporary critical theories view social processes as *overdetermined*, or caused by multiple sources. They see social structure as a system in which many factors interact and affect one another.

An interest in language remains important to critical theorists. In Marxism, communication practices are seen as an outcome of the tension between individual creativity and the social constraints on that creativity. Only when individuals are truly free to express themselves with clarity and reason will liberation occur. Paradoxically, however, language is also an important constraint on individual expression, for the language of the dominant class makes it difficult for

working-class groups to understand their situation and to discover the means to achieve emancipation. In other words, the dominant language defines and perpetuates the oppression of marginalized groups. It is the job of the critical theorist to create new forms of language that will enable the dominant ideology to be exposed and competing ideologies to be heard.

The *Frankfurt School* is a second branch of critical theory and, in fact, was largely responsible for the emergence of the label *critical theory*; the Frankfurt School is still often described as synonymous with the critical-theory label. The Frankfurt School refers to a group of German philosophers, sociologists, and economists—Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse are among its most important members—associated with the Institute for Social Research, established in Frankfurt in 1923.[68] The members of the school believed in the need for integration among disciplines—philosophy, sociology, economics, and history in particular—in order to promote a broad social philosophy or critical theory capable of offering a comprehensive examination of the contradictions and interconnections in society.

The Frankfurt School is clearly Marxist in inspiration; its members saw capitalism as an evolutionary stage in the development, first, of socialism and then of communism. The failure of working-class movements and the rise of Fascism, however, led many members of the Frankfurt School to abandon their belief in the working-class proletariat as the agent of revolutionary change in favor of intellect and reason. As a result, the Frankfurt School has been criticized for its elitism, distaste for popular culture, and dismissal of activism in favor of intellectualism.

With the rise of the National Socialist Party (Nazism) in Germany in the 1930s, many Frankfurt scholars immigrated to the United States, where they established the Institute for Social Research at Columbia University. While in the United States, they became intensely interested in mass communication and the media as structures of oppression in capitalistic societies. Communication continues to be central to critical

theory, and the study of mass communication has been especially important.[69] The best-known contemporary Frankfurt scholar is Jürgen Habermas, whose theories continue the valorization of reason and call for a return of rational ideas from the Enlightenment or modern period.[70]

Critical theory clearly falls within a modernist paradigm. Whether intellectual or populist in approach, there is a reliance on reason established through science, the individual as the agent of change, and the discovery of taken-for-granted aspects of a culture. Four additional branches that can be grouped with critical theory break with modernity in various ways: postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and feminist studies What these philosophical traditions have in common is an insistence on the plurality and instability of meaning, a distrust of the scientific, and a reluctance to grant credence to grand narratives.

Postmodernism, in its most general sense, is characterized by a break with modernity and the Enlightenment project. It coincides in large part with the end of the industrial society and the emergence of an information age, in which the production of commodities has given way to the production and manipulation of knowledge. Originating in the 1970s, postmodernism rejects the "elitism, puritanism and sterility" of the rational in favor of pluralism, relativity, novelty, complexity, and contradiction.[71] Jean-François Lyotard's contribution to postmodernity is the rejection of grand narratives of progress—there are no longer shared stories that make sense across a culture. Jean Baudrillard's contribution is an insistence on the increasing separation of signs from their referents. Simulation has taken over, and signs are reproduced to the degree that they no longer refer to actual objects or things in the material world. Both tenets call into question traditional notions of "reality"; if the "stories" of culture cannot be believed and artificial constructions of signs often are deemed more real than the signs themselves, reality is a constantly changing and fleeting construction.[72]

The line of work known as *cultural studies* is most often associated with the postmodern variation of the critical tradition. As a loosely knit

tradition within a tradition, cultural studies looms large as an important postmodern branch of the critical tradition. Cultural studies theorists share an interest in the ideologies that dominate a culture but focus on social change from the vantage point of culture itself: "to make intelligible the real movement of culture as it registered in social life, in group and class relations, in politics and institutions, in values and ideas."[73]

This interdisciplinary enterprise began at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England, in 1964. With its focus on culture as ordinary and worthy of investigation, it has made available for academic study a range of subjects and subcultures traditionally not deemed suitable for academic attention. Cultural studies, then, is decidedly populist in orientation, in contrast with the intellectual bias of the Frankfurt School.

The possibility of studying all kinds of subcultures not usually studied in the academy gave rise to cultural studies' most important contributions to contemporary scholarship—studies of previously marginalized concepts such as gender, race, class, age, and most recently, sexuality. This is not to say that these topics were not studied before the advent of cultural theory—in fact, virtually every discipline has seen an emergence of these subject matters from a variety of historical and theoretical standpoints. The value cultural studies placed on the marginalized and the ordinary, however, has been a major impetus behind the continuing scholarly interest in these subjects.

Poststructuralism is usually conceptualized as part of the postmodern project because it rejects the modern effort to find universal truths, narratives, methods, and meanings by which to know the world. The specific origins of poststructuralism are attributed to a 1966 paper by Jacques Derrida, and at the heart of poststructuralism is a rejection of universalizing meanings determined by structural constraints, conditions, and stable symbols. Instead, theorists within the poststructuralist tradition advocate a historical and social approach to both the nature of the world and the human being. What each means is determined in the dynamic and fluid production

and interplay of symbols specific to a particular historical moment. Poststructuralists are concerned with the differences among people rather than any grand narratives they may have in common and how these differences play out in individual lives. The challenge to traditional and stable views of signs, symbols, and meanings posed by poststructuralism places it clearly within the purview of communication theory. In addition to Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, and Richard Rorty are among the better known poststructuralists. Some aspects of Michel Foucault's work are very poststructuralist; others depend very much on structural elements.[74] For this reason, some consider him a poststructuralist and others do not.

Next, *postcolonial theory* refers to the study of "all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day."[75] At the core of postcolonial theories is the notion, first put forth by Edward Said, that the colonizing process creates "othering," which is responsible for stereotypic images of nonwhite populations. Said's theory is very much both a critical project and a postmodern one, seeking not simply to describe processes of colonization and why they came about but to intervene with an "emancipatory political stance."[76] The postcolonial is also a postmodern project in its questioning of established knowledge structures rooted in modernity, asking that the geographic, national, and historical links and erasures be made explicit in discourses. Postcolonial scholars, then, study many of the same issues as critical and cultural studies do—race, class, gender, sexuality—but always as they are situated "within geopolitical arrangements, and relations of nations and their inter/national histories."[77]

Finally, *feminist studies* has for many years been a highly influential area within the critical tradition.[78] *Feminism* has been defined in many ways, ranging from movements to secure rights for women to efforts at ending all forms of oppression. Thus scholars today are more likely to talk about feminisms in the plural rather than the singular. Feminist scholars first began with a focus on gender and sought to distinguish between sex—a biological category—and

gender—a social construction. They have examined, critiqued, and challenged assumptions about, and experiences of, masculinity and femininity that pervade all aspects of life, in an effort to achieve more liberating ways for women and men to exist in the world.[79]

But feminist inquiry is much more than a study of gender. It seeks to offer theories that center women's experiences and to articulate the relations between the categories of gender and other social categories, including race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.[80] Most recently, studies of how communication practices function to disseminate ideologies of gender in mediated discourse have become especially prominent, reflecting the viability of cultural studies within the communication discipline. Also increasingly evident are studies of positive examples of communication styles and practices that can provide role models for how to achieve changes consistent with feminist values.[81]

◖ THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

Do you enjoy learning how to communicate effectively, especially in public situations? Would you enjoy being a speaker—maybe a politician or minister? Does public art as a symbolic statement intrigue you? Do you like to study texts and think about their meaning and impact? If so, you are probably drawn to the rhetorical tradition within communication theory.

The word *rhetoric* often has a pejorative meaning today—empty or ornamental words in contrast to action. In actuality, however, the study of rhetoric has a distinguished history dating back, in the West, to 5th-century BC Greece. The study of rhetoric is really where the communication discipline began because rhetoric, broadly defined, is human symbol use. Originally concerned with persuasion, rhetoric was the art of constructing arguments and speechmaking. It then evolved to include the process of *"adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas"* (italics in the original) in messages of all kinds.[82] The focus of rhetoric has broadened even more to encompass

all of the ways humans use symbols to affect those around them and to construct the worlds in which they live.

Key Ideas of the Rhetorical Tradition

Central to the rhetorical tradition are the five canons of rhetoric—invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory. These were the elements involved in preparing a speech, and the rhetor in ancient Greece and Rome was concerned with the discovery of ideas, their organization, choices about how to frame those ideas in language, and, finally, issues of delivery and memory. With the evolution of rhetoric, these five canons have undergone a similar expansion. *Invention* now refers to conceptualization—the process through which we assign meaning to symbols through interpretation, an acknowledgment of the fact that we do not simply discover what exists but create it through the interpretive categories we use. *Arrangement* is the process of organizing symbols—arranging information in light of the relationships among the people, symbols, and context involved. *Style* concerns all of the considerations involved in the presentation of those symbols, from choice of symbol system to the meanings we give those symbols, as well as all symbolic behavior, from words and actions to clothing and furniture. *Delivery* has become the embodiment of symbols in some physical form, encompassing the range of options from nonverbals to talk to writing to mediated messages.[83] Finally, *memory* no longer refers to the simple memorization of speeches but to larger reservoirs of cultural memory as well as to processes of perception that affect how we retain and process information.

Regardless of the choice of symbol and medium, rhetoric involves a rhetor, or symbol user, who creates a text or artifact for a particular audience, subject to various situational constraints. Many see *rhetoric* as synonymous with the term *communication*, and the decision of which term to use depends largely on the philosophical tradition with which you most identify. In fact, we will not focus further on rhetoric in this book because it has a lengthy tradition apart

from communication theory, and we cannot do justice to both here. Still, it is important to the discipline of communication, so we do include it as a tradition in this chapter.

Variations in the Rhetorical Tradition

Rhetoric has had different meanings in different time periods, which have contributed to confusion over the word's meaning. We will identify several such periods to indicate the various possibilities of the rhetorical tradition: classical, medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment, contemporary, and postmodern.

The origins of rhetoric in the *classical* era, from the 5th to the 1st century BC, were dominated by efforts to define and codify the art of rhetoric. Traveling teachers called *Sophists* taught the art of arguing both sides of a case—the earliest rhetorical instruction in Greece. Plato disliked the Sophists' relativistic approach to knowledge, believing instead in the possibility of ideal or absolute truths. That Plato's dialogues on rhetoric have survived is in large part what gave the field of rhetoric a bad name. Plato's student Aristotle took a more pragmatic approach to the art, codifying it in his lecture notes that were compiled into what we now know as the *Rhetoric*. Greek writings on rhetoric were further refined and elaborated by the Romans, including Isocrates, Quintilian, and Cicero.

The *Middle Ages* (400–1400 AD) saw the study of rhetoric focus largely on matters of arrangement and style. Medieval rhetoric was debased to a practical and pagan art and contrasted with Christianity, whose truth alone was seen as enough to persuade. Augustine, a rhetoric teacher who converted to Christianity, revitalized the rhetorical tradition with his book *On Christian Doctrine*. In it he argued that preachers needed to be able to teach, to delight, and to move—Cicero's conception of the duties of an orator.

The pragmatic orientation of medieval rhetoric also was evident in another major use of rhetoric in the Middle Ages—for letter writing. Letter writing had become increasingly important as a means of record keeping because many decisions were made privately in decrees and letters. Matters of style were emphasized in teaching the adaptation of salutation, language, and format to a particular audience.

The *Renaissance* (about 1300–1600 AD), which followed the Middle Ages, saw a rebirth of rhetoric as a philosophical art. Humanist scholars, interested in and concerned for all aspects of the human being, rediscovered classical rhetorical texts in an effort to know the human world. They were especially interested in the power of the word and believed language, not philosophy, to be the foundation discipline because of its capacity to disclose the world to humans.

Rationalism was a trend that began during the Renaissance but was especially characteristic of the next rhetorical period—the *Enlightenment* (1600–1800 AD). During this era, thinkers such as René Descartes sought to determine what could be known absolutely and objectively by the human mind. Francis Bacon, seeking to subject sensory perceptions to empirical investigation, argued that the duty of rhetoric was to "apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will."[84] Logic or knowledge thus became separated from language, and rhetoric became only the means to communicate the truth once known. This split—separating content from rhetorical concerns—contributed to the negative definitions of rhetoric that persist today.

The focus on the rational during the Enlightenment also meant that rhetoric once again was limited to matters of style, giving rise to the *belles lettres* movement—literally fine or beautiful letters. *Belles lettres* referred to literature and all fine arts—rhetoric, poetry, drama, music, and even gardening—and all of these could be examined according to the same aesthetic criteria. Given the interest in matters of style, taste, and aesthetics, it is not surprising that an elocution movement teaching pronunciation and a system of gestures and movement to speakers also sprang up. Elocutionists had two main goals: to restore the canon of delivery, largely neglected since classical times, in order to improve the poor delivery styles of speakers of the era; and to contribute scientifically to the understanding of the human being by studying the effects of

various aspects of delivery on the minds of audience members.

The 20th century—and the *contemporary* rhetorics that accompanied it—exhibited a growing interest in rhetoric as the amount, kinds, and influence of symbols increased. While the century began with an emphasis on the value of public speaking for the ideal citizen, the invention of mass media brought a new focus on the visual and verbal. Rhetoric shifted from a focus on oratory to every kind of symbol use. During the two world wars, institutes of mass media, established to study propaganda, began studying advertising and mass-mediated messages from rhetorical perspectives. Today, television and movies, billboards and video games, websites and computer graphics are studied by rhetoricians as much as are discursive texts. There is literally no form of symbol use that cannot be investigated by rhetorical scholars.

Most important, the contemporary period has also seen a return to an understanding of rhetoric as epistemic—as a way to know the world, not simply a way to communicate about the world. Most rhetorical theorists today subscribe, to some degree, to the notion that humans create their worlds through symbols—that the world we know is the one offered to us by our language. The strong form of this position suggests that the material conditions around us are less important than the words we use to name that reality and that changing one's labels or symbols can literally produce another world by creating a different perspective or vantage point on that world. The weaker form simply suggests the critical role language plays in how we approach the world.

Another trend emerging in the late 20th and early 21st century has been the intersection of rhetoric with *postmodernism*, especially in terms of the postmodern appreciation for, and valuing of, diverse standpoints. Postmodern rhetorical theorists, for example, privilege the standpoints of race, class, gender, and sexuality as they intersect in an individual's unique life experience rather than seek broad theories and explanations about rhetoric. Feminist and gendered rhetorical practices often fall within the postmodern

purview, as does queer theory, in which rhetorical scholars examine distinctive features of queer public address and other rhetorical forms to understand the nuances offered by a queer rhetor.[85] The mapping of alternative rhetorics of all kinds—Afrocentric, Asiacentric, Native American, Aboriginal—is part of the postmodern project and has done much to change the contemporary character of the rhetorical tradition.[86]

Rhetoric, then, is far more than meaningless, empty, or ornamental talk. It is the basic art and practice of human communication. Where once it was concerned with the practice of oratory according to a singular standard developed in Greece, today we recognize the existence of many rhetorics, each of which offers a different perspective on symbol use. But because this book focuses on the communication theories in the discipline, we will not include many theories that are considered traditionally rhetorical. Thus, we will not have a section for the rhetorical tradition per se as we move through the various contexts of communication; those theories that are rhetorical will be encompassed in other traditions as appropriate.

◼◗ EXPANDING CONTEXTS FOR COMMUNICATION

Theories within the seven traditions discussed previously cover many aspects of communication. To organize theories, we have decided to look at their primary interests, or focal points. Imagine looking at the process of communication through a zoom lens. We can narrow the area of focus down to individuals and then zoom out slowly to look at increasingly wide views. At each point, we can pan the lens around a bit to see other features of the scene in focus. As we do this, we realize that each aspect of communication is part of a larger context. We see, too, that each level of communication affects and is affected by these larger contexts.

For purposes of organization, we have arranged theories of communication into eight contexts, illustrated in Figure 3.3. We begin in Chapter 4 with the individual, looking at ways in
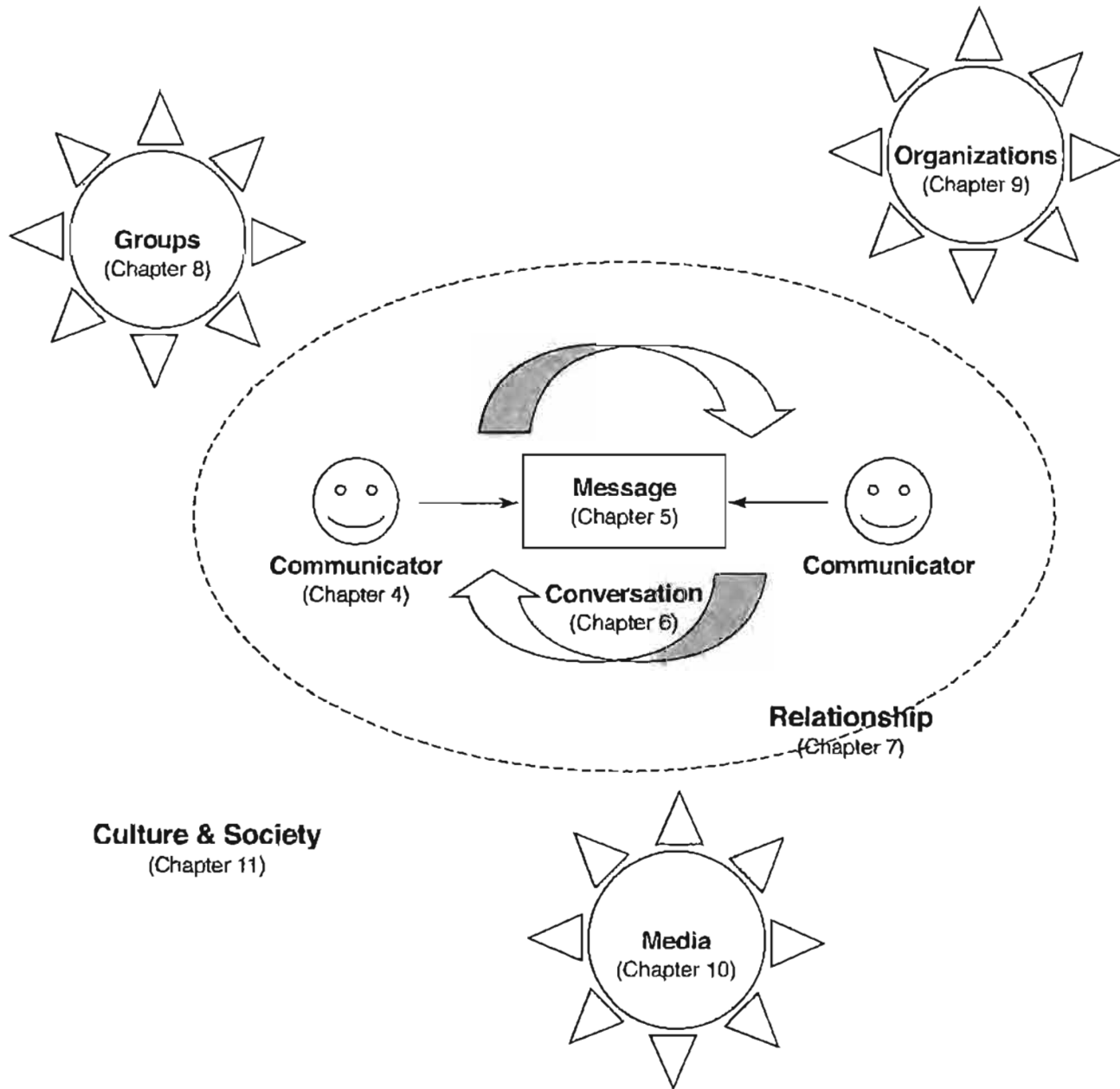
FIGURE **3.3**

Expanding Contexts for Communication Theory

which the various traditions have explained *communicators* as persons engaged in social interaction. Then, in Chapter 5, we zoom out a bit more to look at theories of *messages* and, in Chapter 6, *conversations*. As people use messages in conversations with others, they develop *relationships*, which are explored in Chapter 7. Next, in Chapter 8, we move to the larger context of *groups* and, in Chapter 9, *organizations*. We then discuss theories of *media* (Chapter 10). Finally, in Chapter 11, we broaden our lens to the widest level to look at communication in *culture and society*.

The contexts of communication—from the communicator to society—impact one another. For example, our relationships are defined and managed through the exchange of messages in conversations. Communicators make decisions about messages, but messages, organized into conversations, impact communicators. Culture is built up through communication over time, but the kinds of messages we send, how we understand those messages, and the resulting relationships are determined in many ways by the cultures and communities in which we live.

It would be a mistake, then, to treat these contexts as discrete. They are not. As we focus on individual theories within particular contexts, don't lose sight of the telescoping nature of contexts and forget their mutual influence. As we move from one context to the next in the following chapters, we encourage you to broaden or narrow the lens from time to time to keep an eye on these connections.

Within each of the following chapters, we organize theories by tradition, so that you can see how different traditions have contributed to the topic at hand. We have tried to organize individual chapters based on the most logical order of theories, so the traditions are not always presented in the same order in every chapter. Indeed, not all traditions contribute to every chapter, so some chapters include four traditions, some five, and some all six.

Table 3.1 will give you an idea of what to expect in each chapter ahead. The following points will serve as guidelines as you proceed through the theories in the next eight chapters:

1. **Notice that no tradition contributes to every aspect of communication.** For example, the sociopsychological tradition has been very powerful in addressing many aspects of communication, but it has said little about society and culture. The phenomenological tradition has been somewhat limited in its contribution to communication theory, at least directly; yet, its ideas about interpretation have been vital in helping us interpret culture and understand texts of all kinds.

2. **The traditions are not mutually exclusive.** Indeed, they have influenced one another and overlap in significant ways. Notice, for example, that the semiotic, phenomenological, sociocultural, and critical traditions seem to cluster together at points in their shared concern for the power of symbols, the importance of human experience and interpretation, and, at least in communication theory, their mutual regard for the centrality of social relations. Even unexpected affinities sometimes arise, so that, for example, the cybernetic and sociopsychological traditions occasionally merge.

3. **Still, each tradition does have its distinctive character, and in some cases, the traditions even**

repel one another. The sociopsychological and sociocultural occasionally touch, but rarely. The critical and sociopsychological traditions never come together, and the cybernetic and semiotic rarely do. In these cases, the basic assumptions that drive the traditions are essentially incompatible.

4. **As you switch contexts, different traditions become more or less valuable.** Because communication is multicontextual, each tradition has value in helping us understand similarities and differences across context. It is quite understandable, for example, why the context of the communicator is dominated by the psychological perspective, at least in our highly individualized Western tradition. Yet, as the context broadens to include increasingly larger social structures, the sociopsychological begins to lose power.

5. **Even though traditions do not distribute themselves equally across contexts, neither are they limited to a narrow range of concerns.** Critical theory, for example, which has much to say about broad social structures, also contributes to our understanding of individual communicators as the embodiment of political identity. Even the sociopsychological tradition, which applies most clearly to individuals, has something to say about groups, organizations, and even the media in terms of the role of psychology in social entities.

In the end, then, we think it more productive for you to spend some time thinking about how to think about communication than to contemplate the long list of theories and concepts you will encounter in the following chapters. We want you to realize that any time you think about communication, you have a perspective, which will be influenced, in part, by the kinds of questions you are asking and the traditions that frame those questions, your academic aptitudes, your life experiences, and your goals. Once you begin to look through a certain lens, you reify what you see, you reproduce it, and you elaborate it.

This is exactly how traditions of communication theory are developed and sustained: Cadres of devoted scholars initially found a certain way of thinking attractive, assimilated this thinking into their way of working, and developed a way

TABLE 3.1

Thinking about Communication

Context	Focus	Description	Contributing Traditions	Key Questions
The Communicator (Chapter 4)	The autonomous individual	The communicator is a unique individual with particular characteristics, determined partially by genetics. Individuals have complex minds that organize information into attitudes, beliefs, and values, which in turn affect behavior.	Cybernetic Sociopsychological	What mechanisms make a person think and act a certain way?
	Personal identity	The communicator is a person with a conscious sense of identity, a "self" that is developed through interaction. Individuals are positioned in a social fabric of culture and power relations.	Sociocultural Critical	How does personal identity embody social affiliations and relationships? What privileges and positions do these identities afford?
The Message (Chapter 5)	Interpretation of texts	Messages are texts, or organized sets of signs, that have meaning for communicators.	Semiotic Phenomenological	How does meaning arise, and how is it signified?
	Message Production	Individuals produce messages strategically to achieve goals.	Sociopsychological	How are messages formed in the mind of communicators?
	Social function	Messages accomplish social functions that bring people together into relationships of various kinds.	Sociocultural	What do messages achieve?
The Conversation (Chapter 6)	Individual behavior	Conversations consist of individual social behavior	Sociopsychological	How do individuals behave in social situations?
	Coordinated social action	Conversations are processes in which communicators coordinate or organize interaction in ways that create coherent patterns of meaning.	Cybernetic Sociocultural	How do communicators together pattern their interactions, and what gets made in this process?
	Cultural productions	Power relations are enacted through the use of language in conversations.	Critical	What are the consequences of conversational forms on the treatment of individuals and groups?
The Relationship (Chapter 7)	Patterns of interaction	Relationships are defined by patterns of interaction.	Cybernetic Sociopsychological	How is a relationship structured?
	Management of tension	Relationships involve the management of opposing forces in a way that provides a sense of coherence and wholeness.	Cybernetic Sociocultural	What makes a relationship dynamic?
	Dialogue	Good relationships are characterized by a healthy view of self and other.	Phenomenological	What is a healthy relationship?
The Group and the Organization (Chapters 8 & 9)	Process of organizing	Groups and organizations are created through interaction.	Cybernetic Sociopsychological Sociocultural	How do groups and organizations work?
	Structuration	Group and organizational action lead to unintended consequences that constrain future effort.	Cybernetic Sociocultural Critical	What are the consequences of interaction in groups and organizations?

continues

TABLE **3.1** (CONTINUED)

Thinking about Communication

Context	Focus	Description	Contributing Traditions	Key Questions
The Media (Chapter 10)	Cultural production	Media create cultural forms and influence social structure.	Semiotic Sociocultural Critical	How do media influence society?
	Media participation	The media and the community respond to one another, leading to outcomes that are consequential to the media, to individuals, and to communities.	Cybernetic Sociocultural Sociopsychological	How do audiences and media affect one another?
	Individual effects	Media affect individual behavior.	Sociopsychological	What are the personal effects of media communication?
Culture and Society (Chapter 11)	Power of symbols	Society and culture are largely shaped by the use of language and other symbolic forms.	Semiotic Sociocultural Critical	How does language affect culture?
	Personal networks	Society is organized by a complex system of personal networks.	Cybernetic	How are groups, institutions, and communities comprised?
	Cultural forms	Cultures are distinguished by particular ways of being, reflected in and produced by symbolic forms and cultural practices.	Phenomenological Sociocultural	What is culture?

of understanding what they experienced. We know that as you explore communication theory, you will also make connections and contributions of your own as you navigate this terrain, come to appreciate some theories over others, and find they work for you in explaining how you see the world. And throughout this process, you will be collaborating with many others in helping to develop the field of communication.

◖ NOTES

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5. For a good summary of Peirce's theory, see Richard J. Parmentier, "Signs' Place in *Medias Res*: Peirce's Concept of Semiotic Mediation," in *Semiotic Mediation: Sociocultural and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Mertz and Richard Parmentier (Orlando FL: Academic, 1985), 23–48.
6. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923).
7. Wendy Martyna, "What Does 'He' Mean?" *Journal of Communication* 28 (1978): 131–38.
8. This model is attributed to Charles Morris, *Signs, Language, and Behavior* (New York: Braziller, 1946). A shorter version can be found in Charles Morris, "Foundations of the Theory of Signs," in *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), vol. 1, part 1, 84. A unified theory of signs and values is developed in Charles Morris, *Signification and Significance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964).
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31. Hall and Fagen, "Definition of a System"; and Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

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PART

THEORIES
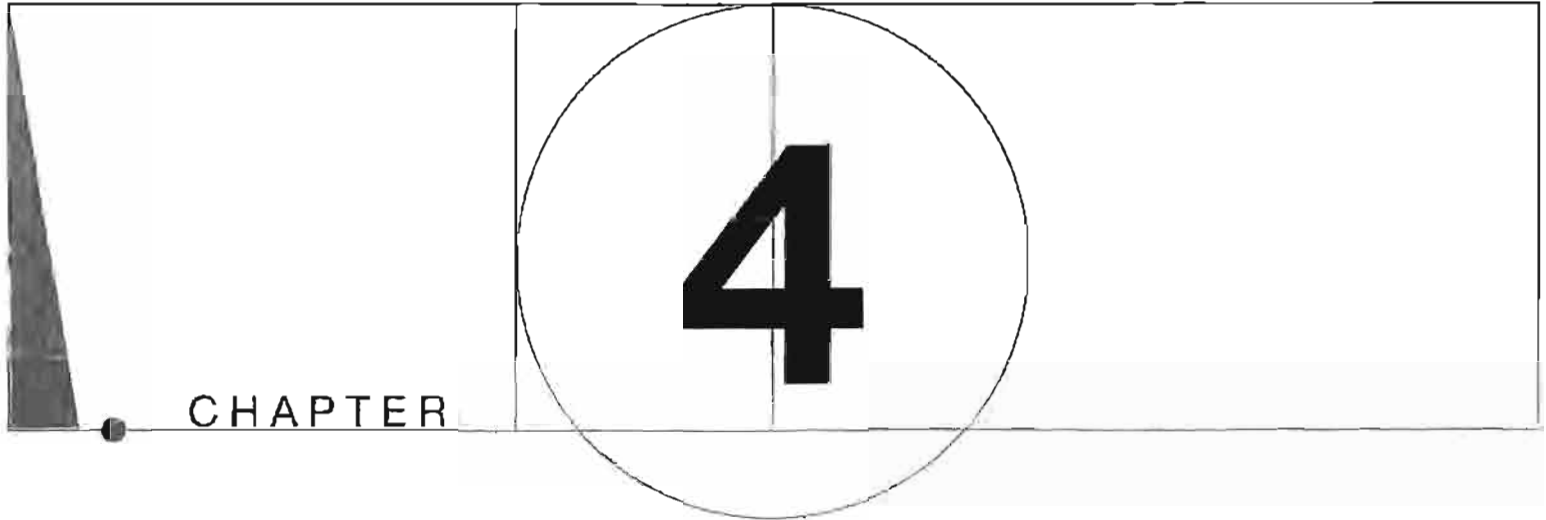
THE COMMUNICATOR

As you move through life communicating with lots of people in numerous settings, there is one constant: you bring yourself to the encounter. Whether you are watching television, talking to a friend, arguing with your boss, working on a radio production, or designing a PR campaign, you most often look at the situation from your own perspective as a communicator. In Western society, the individual assumes tremendous importance as the "key player" in social life. It is natural, then, for us to start with the individual as we begin to think about communication theories. Core questions are these: Who am I as a communicator? What resources enable me to communicate? How am I different from other communicators? How do other people view my behavior? How does my communication change as I move from one situation to another?

The individual as communicator has captured the attention of a significant number of researchers and theorists in our field. In this chapter, we look at several traditions that theorize about the individual communicator. The most prominent of these traditions has been the sociopsychological, but the cybernetic, sociocultural, and critical traditions have provided insights as well.

A starting point of this tradition is the constancy of any single person's behavior across situations. One of the goals of psychology has been to identify and measure personality and behavioral traits of individuals. Communication theorists are also interested in individual differences and have developed a number of tests to find out

Topics Addressed	Sociopsychological Theories	Cybernetic Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Critical Theories
Traits	Argumentativeness Social and communicative anxiety Trait-factor models Traits, temperament, and biology			
Cognition and information processing	Attribution theory Social-judgment theory Elaboration-likelihood theory	Information-integration theory • Expectancy-value theory • Theory of reasoned action Consistency theory • Theory of cognitive dissonance • Problematic-Integration Theory		
Self		Symbolic interactionism Social construction of self Social construction of emotion Presentational self Communication Theory of Identity Identity Negotiation Theory		
Identity				Standpoint theory Identity as constructed and performed Queer theory

how you might score on communication traits such as argumentativeness or communication anxiety. If you are intrigued by questions about communication traits — what makes up your communicator style, what kinds of communication situations do you like and which do you avoid, and how are you similar and different from others in terms of your communication — you will find yourself drawn to the theories in the sociopsychological tradition.

While the researchers in this tradition are interested in categorizing communication traits, even more important is understanding what lies behind behavior. In other words, questions about what motivates behavior and the mental processes we use to make decisions about what to say and how to react in communication situations are paramount here.

One of the issues that has been central to this tradition is how we process information and organize it into a cognitive system. We take in massive amounts of information every day. Some of this information is factual, some is loaded with values and opinions, some of it urges action, and some provides explanations. How do you process this information? What do you do with it? How does it fit into your mental maps and the other information you have absorbed over the years?

The theories that address traits and information processing are based heavily in psychology and have a psychological orientation, but when you think about yourself, you soon realize that much of who you are is shaped by interaction in social groups and consists of your culture, your history as a person, and the meanings you have created with other people over a lifetime of interaction. Although many Western societies characterize individuals in terms of traits and differences, this is only part of the story. Indeed, your identity depends just as much on what you share with others. This difference — between psychological constructs and social ones — creates a dividing point between sociopsychological and sociocultural theories of the communicator. The chapter map on page 65 outlines the theories we will cover here.

◖ THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

The sociopsychological tradition in communication theory clearly has had the most powerful effect on how we think of communicators as individuals. This is certainly understandable when we realize that most of this work either comes from or is modeled on research in psychology, which is the study of human behavior. The drive behind the sociopsychological tradition is to understand how and why individual human beings behave the way they do, and in communication, the scholar-

ship in this tradition tries to answer the question, "What predicts how individual communicators will think and act in a given communication situation?" We will look at two types of theory within this tradition—trait theory and cognitive theory.

Trait Theory

A trait is a distinguishing quality or characteristic; it is an individual's relatively consistent way of thinking, feeling, and behaving across situations. Traits are often used to predict behavior, so it makes sense organizationally to include trait and behavior theories in the same section in this book. Perhaps the most commonly held belief

among psychologists today is that behavior is determined by a combination of traits and situational factors. How you communicate at any given moment depends on the traits you exhibit as an individual and the situations, or environments, in which you find yourself.[1]

Numerous traits have been studied in communication research, and we cannot cover them all here.[2] As examples, we feature two of the most commonly researched traits in communication—argumentativeness and communication anxiety. These were among the earliest traits researched in this tradition and serve as prototypes of how this research has proceeded. We discuss the trait-factors approach, in which groups of traits are considered together, and then discuss studies that extend trait research to temperament and biology.

Argumentativeness. Argumentativeness is the tendency to engage in conversations about controversial topics, to support your own point of view, and to refute opposing beliefs.[3] Dominic Infante and his colleagues, who have been primarily responsible for developing this concept, believe that argumentativeness can improve learning, help people see others' points of view, enhance credibility, and build communication skills. Argumentative individuals are by definition assertive, although not all assertive people are argumentative. It is entirely possible to be assertive without arguing your point. To help sort these concepts out, these authors distinguish between two clusters of variables—argumentativeness, which is a positive trait, and verbal aggressiveness and hostility, which are negative ones. Indeed, knowing how to argue properly may be a solution to otherwise hurtful aggressive tendencies, so these have the possibility of balancing each other out.

As a case in point, Infante and two colleagues studied husbands and wives in violent relationships and discovered that violent marriages are characterized by higher verbal aggressiveness and lower argumentativeness than are nonviolent ones.[4] It seems that many nonviolent spouses deal with their problems by arguing constructively, whereas violent spouses may be unable to solve their differences in this way.

Social and Communicative Anxiety. Many people are afraid of or dislike communicating, and there has been much research about communication anxiety and apprehension. Within the communication field, the best-known work is that of James McCroskey and his colleagues on *communication apprehension* (CA).[5] Although everyone has occasional stage fright, *trait CA* is an enduring tendency to be apprehensive about communication in a variety of settings. Normal apprehension is not a problem, but pathological CA, in which an individual suffers persistent and extreme fear of communication, is. Abnormally high CA creates serious personal problems, including extreme discomfort and avoidance of communication to the point of preventing productive and satisfying participation in society.

Communication apprehension is part of a family of concepts that includes social avoidance, social anxiety, interaction anxiety, and shyness. As a group these have been called *social and communicative anxiety*. In a comprehensive survey and analysis of this literature, Miles Patterson and Vicki Ritts outlined several parameters.[6] First, they found that social and communicative anxiety has *physiological* aspects such as heart rate and blushing, *behavioral* manifestations such as avoidance and self-protection, and *cognitive* dimensions such as self-focus and negative thoughts. Interestingly, cognitive correlates were found to be the strongest of the three, which may mean that social and communicative anxiety has most to do with how we think about ourselves in regard to communication situations. Negative thinking can lead to anxious self-preoccupation that keeps a person from considering all of the information and cues in the environment, disrupts normal information processing, and leads to reinforcing behaviors such as withdrawal.

Trait-Factor Models. While many traits have been investigated in both psychology and communication, at some point, researchers began to realize that listing one trait after another is not very helpful. Psychologists began to develop various trait-factor models, sometimes called *super traits*.[7] These models consist of a small set of

general traits that can explain many other traits and individual differences among them.

One of the most popular trait-factor models is the commonly known *five-factor model*, described by Digman.[8] This model identifies five rather general factors that, in combination, determine an individual's more specific traits. The five factors include (1) *neuroticism*, or the tendency to feel negative emotions and distress; (2) *extraversion*, or the tendency to enjoy being in groups, be assertive, and think optimistically; (3) *openness*, or the tendency to be reflective, have imagination, pay attention to inner feelings, and be an independent thinker; (4) *agreeableness*, or the tendency to like and be sympathetic toward others, to be eager to help other people, and to avoid antagonism; and (5) *conscientiousness*, or the tendency to be self-disciplined, to resist impulses, be well organized, and see tasks to completion.

The task of the communication-trait theorist is to use models such as this to help explain various communication behaviors. For example, *conversational narcissism* might be explained as a combination of something like medium neuroticism, high extraversion, low openness, low agreeableness, and high conscientiousness. *Argumentativeness* might be understood as a combination of low neuroticism, high extraversion, low openness, low agreeableness, and high conscientiousness. Communication anxiety could include high neuroticism, low extraversion, low openness, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness. The trait approach offers a way to understand differences across human behavior while also acknowledging the similarities.

Seeing human differences in terms of a small set of factors has made researchers wonder about the role of biology and heredity in explaining behavior. In other words, if we all exhibit the same five factors to some degree, perhaps they are biologically determined. Indeed, within communication, the trait-factors approach has led to serious investigation of the role of biology in communication.

Traits, Temperament, and Biology. For a number of years, psychologists have been exploring the biological bases of human behavior, and traits have been increasingly explained in terms of genetic predisposition. Recently, Michael Beatty and James McCroskey have brought this line of work into the communication field.[9] Generally, this work is predicated on the idea that traits are predispositions of temperament rooted in genetically determined neurobiological structures, or brain activity. According to Beatty and McCroskey, how we experience the world is very much a matter of what is happening in our brain, and that in turn is largely genetically determined. The impact of the environment, or learning, is not very important, according to this theory, so we can expect that individual differences in how people communicate can be explained biologically. Consistent with the trait-factors approach, Beatty and McCroskey point to work in psychology suggesting that all traits can be reduced to just a few dimensions that are about 80 percent determined by genetics.[10] Using psychologist H. J. Eysenck's Big Three model—which condenses human behavior into three traits rather than the five traits that Digman identified—these theorists posit that communication behavior manifests various combinations of three factors, including (1) extraversion, or outward focus; (2) neuroticism, or anxiety; and (3) psychotocism, or lack of self-control.

Beatty and McCroskey apply the communibiological paradigm specifically to their own work in communication apprehension, calling this trait a form of "neurotic introversion." After years of exploring an explanation for this trait, they are now convinced that the cause of high-trait CA is biological. This is a retreat from the generally accepted thesis held by many researchers—including McCroskey himself at an earlier time—that fear of communication is learned.

McCroskey and Beatty argue that the limbic system, deep in the brain, controls emotion. When you are exposed to something in the environment, such stimuli are processed through a part of your brain known as the behavioral inhibition system (BIS). Negative stimuli cause an arousal of the BIS, which in turn activates your limbic system. When your BIS is stimulated, you tend to pay more attention to threats. Thus, people who have an overactive BIS will be more prone to anxiety and fear than individuals with a less active one. In general,

then, the more sensitive your limbic system, the more anxiety you may experience.

In communication apprehension, something has to happen to cause communication to be viewed as a very aversive stimulus. This involves yet another part of your brain, the behavioral activation system (BAS). Because it is associated with rewards, this system seems to stimulate motivation and bring about action. Even apprehensive persons are at least occasionally motivated to communicate because of perceived rewards. For example, despite high CA, you might go ahead and give a presentation in a speech class because you want a good grade. In this case, the BAS would enable you to do something potentially fearful. The problem for highly apprehensive individuals is that they will experience extreme fear in the process of giving the speech, making the overall experience unpleasant. They will remember this and continue to associate the communication experience with negative stimuli.

Along with whatever neurochemical processes may be going on, you also bring cognitive processes—your thoughts—to bear on any given communication situation. In the next section, we look at theories that specifically address this concern.

Cognition and Information Processing

If trait theories give you some labels to describe yourself and other communicators, information-processing theories go behind the scenes to explain how you think, how you organize and store information, and how cognition helps shape your behavior. We discuss several cognitive theories that have been especially important in the communication literature: attribution theory, social-judgment theory, and elaboration-likelihood theory. These have been foundational to the sociopsychological tradition, providing the basis for understanding how interpretation and persuasion occur among individuals.

Attribution Theory. Attribution theory starts with the notion that individuals try to understand their own behavior and that of others by observing

From the Source . . .

One of the most important things scholars, particularly beginning scholars, need to know is the difference between a theory and a paradigm. Paradigms are not just big theories! While there are many definitions of theory, one is that "a theory is an explanation of the relationships among two or more variables." A paradigm is "an approach or method of study." Hence, theories can be tested and judged to be good or bad. A paradigm can be employed and determined to be either useful or not useful. Paradigms are never right or wrong, but theories are. Steve Littlejohn made this point at a convention when he was serving as a reviewer of a paper submitted by Dr. Michael Beatty and me. We referred to our work on communibiology as "theoretical." Dr. Littlejohn in his normal, kind mode informed us we didn't know what we were talking about. He accurately noted that communibiology is a paradigm, not a theory. We will not make that mistake again!

—James C. McCroskey

how individuals actually behave. As communicators, we seem to need to figure out why we act as we do, and we somehow want to be able to explain why others act in certain ways as well. Attribution theory, then, deals with the ways we infer the causes of behavior—both our own and others'.

Fritz Heider, founder of attribution theory, outlines several kinds of causal attributions that people commonly make.[11] These include situational causes (being affected by the environment), personal effects (influencing things personally), ability (being able to do something), effort (trying to do something), desire (wanting to do it), sentiment (feeling like it), belonging (going along with something), obligation (feeling you ought to), and permission (being permitted to). How many times have you said something to another person and later asked yourself, "Why did I do that?" Your answer probably sounded something like this: "I couldn't help it; I had to say that," or "I wanted to," "I felt like it," "I wanted to fit in," or "I was obligated to."

Regardless of how you might explain what you said, it would be impossible to find a one-to-one relationship between your statement and your explanation for it. In other words, you might explain why you said a certain thing in any number of ways. A variety of behaviors might be perceived as stemming from a single cause, or, conversely, one behavior may be thought to arise from several causes. When you are communicating, then, you often need to resolve such ambiguities, and attribution theory helps you understand how you do so.

For example, let's say you are the supervisor in a small company. You notice that one of your employees seems particularly industrious all of a sudden, and you want to figure out why. You might think that the workload has gone way up, which would be attributing the behavior to the environment. Or you might think that the employee is angling for a raise. Or maybe he is ingratiating himself to you because he hopes to get a managerial slot someday. Or maybe he is bored and needs to keep himself busy. Naturally, you would make use of the context to help you determine the cause of your employee's behavior. You would observe him at work over time to see what you could learn about his sudden industriousness.

Your perception of the situation is mediated further by variables in your own psychological makeup. You always assign meaning to what you observe, and this meaning is crucial to what you "see." Meanings help you integrate your perceptions and organize your observations into patterns that help you make sense of the world. Because of a need for consistency, you define things in such a way that helps you make sense of them as a coherent whole. For example, if you think that you have a great company, you may have a tendency to attribute your employee's hard work to loyalty. The way you decide to make sense of your employee's behavior may be different from the way other people in the company might do so.

Heider calls individual patterns of perception *perceptual styles*. He recognizes that any state of affairs may give rise to a number of interpretations, each of which seems true to the person involved, depending upon that person's style of attribution. For example, maybe you are essentially optimistic and tend to attribute behavior to

good intentions. If this were the case, you probably would feel that your employee's behavior came from his desire for self-improvement.

When we believe someone is doing something on purpose, another dimension of attribution comes into play. If you think someone did something on purpose, you are recognizing two underlying attributes: ability and motivation. Suppose, for example, that an associate of yours fails to show up for a meeting. You figure that (1) she was not able to make it for some reason; or (2) she didn't try. If you go with the first attribution—that she wasn't able to make it—you think to yourself that something might be wrong—she's ill, was in an accident, had a flat tire, or something else happened that prevented her appearance. If you choose the second attribution—that she did not try—you end up thinking that she either didn't want to come to the meeting (an attribution of intent) or was too lazy (an attribution of exertion). In perception, then, you infer the causes of your associate's behavior according to your overall experience, meanings, and perceptual style in combination with situational factors.

Another interesting kind of attribution happens when you think that you "ought" to do something. An obligation is seen as an impersonal, objective demand. It can have a tremendous sense of validity because most people would agree with it. For example, you might say, "I ought to go to the dentist," or "I ought to get to the gym more often." But "oughts" do not necessarily correspond with values. Perhaps you dread going to the dentist even though you think you should. Because people want to be consistent, they will balance their obligations and values so that what they want to do is consistent with what they think they should do.[12]

Heider's theory, though influential as the original theory of attribution, is not the only theory in this movement; it has been extended in many ways.[13] In the field of communication, Brant Burleson has done research on how attributes play out in real life. In attempting to understand how attribution functions in everyday practice, Burleson tape-recorded a variety of conversations, including a conversation between two teaching assistants.[14] In this conversation

one teacher, Don, complains to his colleague, Bob, that one of his students failed an exam three times. Don is very concerned and explores the reasons for the student's failure. Don and Bob first discuss the possibility that the test was too hard, but Don says that the test was identical to the test he gave the previous semester and that no one else failed it. Thus, they were able to rule out test difficulty as a cause. They then conclude that the failure must have something to do with the student herself. Either she did not have the ability or she wasn't trying. Because she completed all assignments and took the test three times, she appeared to be trying, so by deduction, then, they conclude that she just did not have the ability to pass the test.

In this example, it looks like Don and Bob are being very logical and systematic in trying to determine the student's problem, but one of the most common research findings is that people are often illogical and biased in their attributions. Rather than weighing all factors, people tend to make quick judgments about themselves and other people based on available cues and emotional factors. Research also shows that people's prior judgments are hard to dislodge, no matter how compelling the evidence. Thus, once you make an attribution, you are apt to stick with it.

Yet there is a persistent assumption in attribution theory that people are logical and systematic. How do we reconcile these research findings? Several researchers have adopted the position that people can process information in both logical and illogical ways, depending on circumstances such as motivation. If motivation to promote the self is high, as when we need to save face, there is probably a tendency to be biased in favor of self-serving, situational attributions. If you were late for a date, for example, you would probably make an excuse. On the other hand, when a person is motivated to control the situation, there will probably be a bias toward attributions of personal responsibility. So if your boss gave you a compliment about your work, you would probably think that you were personally responsible for doing so well.

This example illustrates one of the most persistent findings in attribution research: the *fundamental attribution error*. This is the tendency to attribute the cause of events to personal qualities. It is a feeling that people are personally responsible for what happens to them. In general, we seem to be insensitive to many circumstantial factors that cause events when considering others' behavior but are sensitive to circumstances when considering our own behavior. In other words, we tend to blame other people for what happens to them but blame the situation— things beyond our control—for what happens to us. If your roommate fails a test, you are apt to claim that he did not study hard enough, but if you fail the test, you will probably say that the test was too hard. Social-judgment theory extends the work on attribution by looking specifically at how we judge the statements or messages of ourselves and others.

Social-Judgment Theory. Attribution theory shows us the importance of interpersonal judgment. Social-judgment theory, a classic in social psychology, focuses on how we make judgments about statements we hear. Suppose, for example, that your best friend surprises you by sharing an opinion that is directly opposite what you believe about something. How will you handle this? What impact will this statement have on your own beliefs? Social-judgment theory, based on the work of Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues, tries to predict how you will judge your friend's message, and how this judgment will affect your own belief system.[15]

Sherif was influenced by early physical-judgment research, in which people were tested on their ability to judge such things as the weight of an object or the brightness of a light. For example, suppose that you were asked to judge the relative weight of five objects without a scale. On what would you base this judgment? You would need some reference point. A common way of doing this would be to find something that you know has a certain weight—a 10-pound sack of flour, for instance. You would first lift the sack of flour and then judge the weight of the other objects based on the feeling of the bag. The known weight would act as an

"anchor," influencing your perception of the weight of the other objects. We make these kinds of physical judgments all the time. We might judge how long something is without a ruler, how late in the day it is based on the light in the room, or how hot it is based on how the air feels.

To demonstrate this power of anchors, try a simple experiment. Take three bowls. Fill the first with hot water, the second with cold water, and the third with tepid water. Put one hand in the hot water and the other in the cold water. After a few moments, place both hands in the third, tepid bowl. Your perceptions of the temperature of this water will be different for each hand (even though both hands are now in the same tepid bowl) because each hand came from a different bowl and had a different anchor or reference.

Thinking that similar processes might explain judgments of nonphysical stimuli, Sherif investigated the ways individuals judge messages, coining the term *social perception* to describe this phenomenon. In interaction with others, we don't have a sack of flour we can use to judge a message; we have to rely on an internal anchor, or reference point. Our anchors are in our heads, in other words, and are based on previous experience.

In a social-judgment experiment, you would be given a large number of statements about some issue. You then would be asked to sort them into groups according to their similarities, using a process called a Q-sort. You could sort them into as many groups as you wished. Then you would put the piles in order from positive to negative. Next you would indicate which piles of statements are acceptable to you personally, which are not acceptable, and which are neutral. The first pile forms your *latitude of acceptance*—the statements you can agree with, the second your *latitude of rejection*—those you cannot agree with, and the third your *latitude of noncommitment*.

This research procedure is a systematic way of simulating what happens in everyday life. On any issue, there will usually be a range of statements that you accept, others that you are willing to tolerate, and a range that you reject. A person's latitudes of acceptance and rejection are influenced by a key variable—ego involvement.

Ego involvement is your sense of the personal relevance of an issue.

For example, you have undoubtedly heard much lately about global warming. If you have not yet experienced any personal difficulties because of this possible problem, it may be unimportant to you, and your ego involvement is low. On the other hand, if you lived in New Orleans or on the Gulf Coast in 2005, we're betting that your ego involvement on the topic is high. Although you probably have a more extreme opinion on those topics with which you are ego involved, this is not always the case. You could have a moderate opinion and still be ego involved—the case, for example, if you prided yourself on being a political independent and like to see the arguments on both sides of political issues.

What does social judgment say about communication? First, we know from Sherif's work that individuals judge the favorability of a message based on their own internal anchors and ego involvement. However, this judgment process can involve distortion. On a given issue, such as the ozone hole, a person may distort the message by contrast or assimilation. The *contrast effect* occurs when individuals judge a message to be farther from their own points of view than it actually is, and the *assimilation effect* occurs when people judge the message to be closer to their own points of view than it actually is. When a message is relatively close to one's own position, that message will be assimilated, whereas more distant messages will be contrasted.

These assimilation and contrast effects are heightened by ego involvement. So, for example, if you believe strongly that industry should be regulated to stop chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) emissions, a moderately favorable statement—*industry-wide standards need to be in place by 2010*—might seem like a strong positive statement because of the assimilation effect. A slightly unfavorable statement, on the other hand, such as *industry has done what they can in this regard*, might be perceived to be strongly opposed to regulation because of the contrast effect. If you were highly ego involved in the issue, this effect would be even greater.

Another area in which social-judgment theory aids our understanding of communication is attitude change. Social-judgment theory predicts that messages falling within the latitude of acceptance facilitate attitude change. An argument in favor of a position within the range of acceptance will be somewhat more persuasive than an argument outside of this range. If you think that incentives should be provided for owning electric cars as one way to mitigate global warming, you might be persuaded by a message in favor of gas-powered cars that get more miles to the gallon and produce fewer emissions, provided this position is still within your latitude of acceptance.

Furthermore, if you judge a message to lie within the latitude of rejection, attitude change will be reduced or nonexistent. In fact, a *boomerang effect* may occur in which the discrepant message actually strengthens your position on the issue. Thus, a message against research and development of electric cars might even make you more firmly in favor of them!

Third, if a message falls within your latitude of acceptance or in your neutral area, the more discrepant the message from your own stand, the greater the expected attitude change. However, once the message hits the latitude of rejection, change is not likely. A statement farther from your own attitude will probably bring about more change than one that is not very far from your position. In other words, you would be more likely to be influenced by messages that disagree with you slightly on the issue of CFC emission, or messages that are somewhat neutral, than by messages that are strongly opposed to your view.

Finally, the greater your ego involvement in the issue, the larger the latitude of rejection, the smaller the latitude of noncommitment, and thus the less the expected attitude change. Highly ego-involved persons are hard to persuade. They tend to reject a wider range of statements than people who are not highly ego involved, so if you are highly ego involved in the ozone-depletion problem, you have a large latitude of rejection and will be persuaded by very few statements divergent from your own.

As another example of how social judgment works, consider an interesting experiment done by a group of researchers shortly after Oklahoma passed an alcohol-prohibition law in the 1950s.[16] The researchers recruited a number of people who were deeply involved in the issue one way or the other and several who were moderate and not very involved. They found that those who were highly ego involved and extreme in their opinions had much wider latitudes of rejection than did moderates, and the moderate subjects had much wider latitudes of noncommitment than did those who held extreme opinions. Interestingly, when presented with the same moderate message, the extreme "drys" judged the message to be much more toward the nonprohibition side than did other subjects, and the "wets" judged it to be much more toward the prohibition side. In other words, both extreme groups exhibited a contrast effect. Among the moderates, the attitude change experienced after hearing a message on the issue was about twice as great as the attitude change experienced by those who were highly involved in the issue.

Clearly, ego involvement is a central concept of social-judgment theory. Elaboration-likelihood theory extends social-judgment theory by looking at the differences in how we make judgments.

Elaboration-Likelihood Theory. As you read about social-judgment theory in the previous section, you might have realized that you do not always make conscious judgments about what you hear. You take some things with a grain of salt, while reflecting on other topics very seriously. Sometimes you go along with something almost unconsciously, and other times, you really resist on a highly conscious level. Sometimes, too, you ponder something for a while and make a rather conscious decision to change your opinion.

Social psychologists Richard Petty and John Cacioppo developed elaboration-likelihood theory (ELT) to help us understand these differences.[17] ELT is essentially a persuasion theory because it tries to predict when and how you

will and will not be persuaded by messages. Elaboration-likelihood theory seeks to explain the different ways in which you evaluate the information you receive. Sometimes you evaluate messages in an elaborate way, using critical thinking, and sometimes you do so in a simpler, less critical manner.

Elaboration likelihood, then, is the probability that you will evaluate information critically. Elaboration likelihood is a variable, meaning that it can range from little to great. The likelihood of elaboration depends on the way you process a message. There are two routes for processing information—a central route and a peripheral route. Elaboration, or critical thinking, occurs in the *central route*, while the lack of critical thinking occurs in the *peripheral* one. Thus, when you process information through the central route, you actively think about and weigh it against what you already know; you consider arguments carefully. If your attitude changes, it is apt to be a relatively enduring change that will probably affect how you actually behave. When you process information through the peripheral route, you are much less critical. Any resulting change is probably temporary and may have less effect on how you act. Keep in mind, however, that because elaboration likelihood is a variable, you will probably use both routes to some extent, depending on the degree of personal relevance an issue has for you.

The amount of critical thinking that you apply to an argument depends on two general factors— your motivation and your ability. When you are highly motivated, you are likely to use central processing, and when motivation is low, peripheral processing is more likely. For example, if you are a typical college student, you probably pay more attention to the campus newspaper's arguments for and against fee increases than you do to its arguments for and against installing new roofing on the student center (unless your family owns the roofing business hired to do the work!).

Motivation consists of at least three things. The first is involvement, or the personal relevance of the topic. The more important the topic is to you personally, the more likely it is that you will think critically about the issues involved.

The second factor in motivation is diversity of argument. You will tend to think more about arguments that come from a variety of sources. The reason for this is that when you hear several people talking about an issue, you cannot make snap judgments very easily. Other things being equal, then, where multiple sources and multiple arguments are involved, receivers tend to process information centrally.

The third factor in motivation is your personal predisposition toward critical thinking. People who enjoy mulling over arguments will probably use more central processing than those who do not. This would be the case with individuals high in terms of the argumentativeness trait discussed earlier in the chapter. No matter how motivated you are, however, you cannot use central processing unless you are knowledgeable about the issue. Most students, for example, would be more critical of a speech on fashion trends than one on quarks and electrons. If you are not motivated and do not have the ability to process the message, you will be more likely to monitor and rely on peripheral cues.

When processing information in the central route, you will carefully consider the arguments, and the strength of the argument will play a role. The degree to which the message matches your previous attitude will have an effect here as well. Messages that are more favorable to your view will probably be evaluated more positively than those that are not.

In peripheral processing, you do not look closely at the strength of the argument. Indeed, you quickly make judgments about whether to believe what you hear or read on the basis of simple cues. For example, when source credibility is high, the message may be believed regardless of the arguments presented. Also, you tend to believe people you like. Or you may simply rely on the number of arguments to determine whether to accept a message. In most situations involving peripheral processing, a variety of external cues are used to make a judgment, in contrast to the critical thinking that characterizes central processing.

Richard Petty, John Cacioppo, and Rachel Goldman conducted an experiment that shows

how central and peripheral processing work in combination. One hundred forty-five students were asked to evaluate audio-taped arguments in favor of instituting comprehensive examinations for seniors at their college.[18] Two versions were used—one with strong arguments and the other with weak ones. Half of the students were told that the examination could go into effect the following year, but the other half were led to believe that the change would not occur for ten years. Obviously, the first group would find the message more personally relevant than the second group and would therefore be more motivated to scrutinize the arguments carefully. Based on ELT, you would expect that these students in the high-relevance group would be less susceptible to peripheral cues.

The researchers also added source credibility as a variable. Half of the students in each group were told that the tape was based on a report from a high-school class, and the remaining students were told that the tape was based on a report from the Carnegie Commission. Thus, the first group was presented with a low-source-credibility cue, whereas the other group was presented with a high-credibility one.

As expected, the students who heard the highly relevant message were motivated to pay careful attention to the quality of the arguments and were more influenced by the arguments than were the students who heard the less-relevant message. Those students who heard the less-relevant message were more influenced by credibility as a peripheral cue than were the other students.

The lesson from this theory might seem to be the need to always be critical in evaluating messages, but, practically speaking, it is impossible to attend carefully to every message. Some combination of central and peripheral processing is to be expected. Even when motivation and ability are low, you might still be influenced somewhat by strong arguments, and even when you are processing in the central route, other less-critical factors can also affect your attitudes.

The sociopsychological tradition has had an immense influence on how we think about communicators. The study of social psychology gained prominence in the early part of the 20th century, and the earliest studies of communication in the United States adopted the methodologies of the discipline of psychology and its individualistic approach to human social life. While the field of communication has branched out considerably since this tradition began, there is no denying the need to study the individual communicator, and this tradition has been crucial to this process.

Also important, however, to understanding the individual communicator is the strong kinship between the sociopsychological and cybernetic traditions of communication theory—the tradition we explore in the next section. It is fair to say that within this realm, cybernetic theories are also sociopsychological in orientation, although the former take a more systemic view of individual cognition.

THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

Cybernetic theories emphasize the interrelationship among parts of a system. Here we will present two genres of cybernetic theory. The first is a group of theories that generally come under the rubric of *information-integration*. The second is a group of theories generally known as *consistency theories*. We have included these because of their immense impact on the field of communication over the years.

Information-Integration Theory

The information-integration approach to the communicator centers on the ways we accumulate and organize information about persons, objects, situations, and ideas to form *attitudes*, or predispositions to act in a positive or negative way toward some object.[19] The information-integration approach is one of the most popular models offered to explain the formation of attitudes and of attitude change.[20] This model starts with the concept of cognition, which is depicted as a system of interacting forces. Information is one of those forces, and it has the potential to affect an individual's

belief system or attitudes. An attitude is considered an accumulation of information about an object, person, situation, or experience.

Two variables seem especially important in affecting attitude change. The first is *valence*, or direction. Valence refers to whether information supports your beliefs or refutes them. When information supports your beliefs, it has "positive" valence. When it does not, it has "negative" valence. If you favor putting tax money into human exploration of Mars, a statement opposing the use of such money would be negative and one supporting it would be positive.

The second variable that affects the impact of information is the *weight* you assign to the information. Weight is a function of credibility. If you think the information is probably true, you will assign a higher weight to it; if not, you will assign a lower weight. Clearly, the more the weight, the greater the impact of that information on your system of beliefs—about a Mars mission or anything else.

Attitude change occurs because new information is brought to bear on a belief, causing a shift in attitude, or because new information changes the weight or valence given to some piece of information. So valence affects *how* information influences your belief system, and weight affects *how much* it does so. Any one piece of information usually does not have too much influence because the attitude consists of a number of beliefs that could counteract the new information. But changing one piece of information or giving it different weight can begin to shift the entire schema.

Suppose that you have two friends—one who strongly favors a Mars mission and another who strongly opposes it. Imagine that you and your friends view a television documentary contending that such a mission would be a complete waste of time and resources. Your friend who favors it will not be affected if he assigns little weight to the television program. On the other hand, if he decides that the documentary is true, he will assign a high weight to it, and it will affect his system of beliefs. The combination of a high weight and a negative valence will change his attitude to be less in favor of human exploration of the planets.

Now let's look at your friend who opposes trying to send humans to Mars. Again, if she assigns low weight to the information, it will have little effect, but if she believes this information and assigns high weight to it, it will make her even more opposed to the idea than she originally was because the combination of high weight and positive valence reinforces her opinion.

You would not expect your friends to completely reverse their attitudes because they have other beliefs that enter the picture. Your friend who favors Mars exploration does so for a number of reasons, and he may not be very worried about the use of tax money for this purpose. Even though the television program persuades him that this would greatly increase the federal deficit, he might say that careful planning can prevent misuse of funds.

The basic idea behind information-integration theory, then, depends on a balancing of beliefs, valence, and credibility. Let's look at some extensions of this theory.

Expectancy-Value Theory. One of the best-known and highly respected information-integration theorists is Martin Fishbein.[21] Fishbein's work highlights the complex nature of attitudes in what is known as *expectancy-value theory*. According to Fishbein, there are two kinds of belief. The first is *belief in* a thing. When you believe in something, you would say that this thing exists. The second kind of belief—*belief about*—is your sense of the probability that a particular relationship exists between two things. For example, you might believe in the potential for tremendous expansion of knowledge by space exploration. You may also have a belief about the use of direct human observation in gaining such knowledge. Putting these two together will form a positive attitude about sending human beings to Mars.

According to Fishbein, attitudes differ from beliefs in that they are evaluative. Attitudes are correlated with beliefs and lead you to behave a certain way toward the attitude object. Attitudes are also organized, so that general attitudes are predicted from specific ones in a summative

fashion. A generally positive attitude toward Mars exploration, then, would consist of other attitudes—about science, the space program, and appropriate use of tax dollars. So the two beliefs mentioned previously—about the existence of Mars and human observation—would probably lead you to support pro-Mars legislation.

Fishbein represented the relationship between beliefs and attitudes algebraically:

$$A_o = \sum_i^N B_i a_i$$

where

A_o = attitude toward object o

B_i = strength of belief i about o (the probability or improbability that o is associated with some other concept x)

a_i = evaluative aspect of B (the evaluation of x)

N = number of beliefs about o.

The distinctive feature of Fishbein's formula is its proposition that attitudes are a function of a complex combination of beliefs and evaluations. The example in Table 4.1 helps clarify this model. This table describes a hypothetical attitude toward sending people to Mars. Here, Mars exploration is associated with beliefs about six concepts—science, space exploration, education, public money, the importance of direct human observation, and the future of the country. Each of these concepts is associated with a belief, and each belief has either positive or negative valence. In this example, when you add up all the beliefs and multiply them by the evaluations, you end up with a very positive attitude about a potential mission to Mars that is staffed with a human crew.

To summarize, according to expectancy-value theory, attitude change can occur from three sources. First, information can alter the believability, or weight, of particular beliefs. The two friends mentioned earlier in our Mars example might learn, for instance, that the report on the use of tax money is erroneous. Information can also change the valence of a belief. For instance, your friends might learn that obstacles to Mars exploration were solvable, making the information seem positive rather than negative. Finally, information can add new beliefs to the attitude structure. In our example, this could occur if your friends learn that 70 percent of Americans favor using tax money to develop a Mars mission.

Theory of Reasoned Action. Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein expand expectancy-value theory by adding the notion of intentions to the equation.[22] They refer to this as a theory of reasoned action. Specifically, your intention to behave in a certain way is determined by your attitude toward the behavior and a set of beliefs about how other people would like you to behave. Consider your progress in college as an example. Do you plan to continue until you get your degree or will

TABLE **4.1**

A Simplified Example of an Attitude Hierarchy According to the Fishbein Model

Attitude object (o) → jogging	$N = 6$ (number of beliefs in system)	
Associated concepts (x_i)	Probability of association (B_i)	Evaluation (a_i)
x_1 Cardiovascular health	B_1 Jogging promotes cardiovascular vigor.	a_1 Cardiovascular vigor is good.
x_2 Disease	B_2 Jogging reduces the chance of disease.	a_2 Disease is bad.
x_3 Obesity	B_3 Jogging reduces weight.	a_3 Being overweight is bad.
x_4 Mental health	B_4 Jogging promotes peace of mind.	a_4 Letting off mental tensions is good.
x_5 Friendship	B_5 Jogging introduces a person to new friends.	a_5 Friendship is important.
x_6 Physique	B_6 Jogging builds better bodies.	a_6 A beautiful body is appealing.

you take some time off to work for a while? The answer to this question depends on your attitude toward school and what you think other people like your parents want you to do. Each factor—your attitude and others' opinions—is weighted according to its importance. Sometimes your attitude is most important, sometimes others' opinions are most important, and sometimes your attitude and others' are more or less equal in weight. The formula developed to indicate this process is as follows:

$$BI = A_B w_1 + (SN)w_2$$

where

BI = behavioral intention
A_B = attitude toward the behavior
SN = subjective norm (what others think)
w_1 = weight of attitude
w_2 = weight of subjective norm

Your intention toward school can be predicted, according to the theory of reasoned action, by looking at your attitude toward the behavior—staying in school—and your parents' attitudes toward it as well. If you have developed a poor attitude toward school, and your parents are encouraging you to drop out for a semester to work, that is probably what you will do. On the other hand, if your parents are encouraging you to stick it out, and their opinions are very important to you, you will probably stay despite your negative attitude. If your parents' opinions don't matter that much, your attitude will win out, and you will make plans to leave college and get a job.

The preceding formula predicts your behavioral intention, but it does not necessarily predict the actual behavior. This is because we do not always behave in accordance with our intentions. We know that people are notorious for going against their own best intentions. Sometimes, for example, people cannot do what they want because they are not able to. Smokers may want to stop smoking but cannot because they are addicted. You might want to drop out of school, but your parents threaten to cut off support, and this possibility prevents you from doing so.

As cybernetic theories, then, information-integration theories deal with systems of factors. What you think about issues and how you behave will result from a complex interaction among variables, and the work of Fishbein and Ajzen helps us see what those relationships are. Consistency theories, the topic of the following section, show how these factors seek balance, or homeostasis, adding another layer to the complexity of human behavior.

Consistency Theory

One of the largest bodies of work related to attitude, attitude change, and persuasion falls under the umbrella of consistency theory. All consistency theories begin with the same premise: people are more comfortable with consistency than inconsistency. Consistency, then, is a primary organizing principle in cognitive processing, and attitude change can result from information that disrupts this balance. Although the vocabulary and concepts of these theories differ, the basic assumption of consistency is present in all of them. In cybernetic language, people seek *homeostasis*, or balance, and the cognitive system is a primary tool by which this balance is achieved.

We will summarize two theories of cognitive consistency here. The first is Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. We have chosen this theory because it is a classic in the field and still has great impact on our thinking in the communication field. The second, a more recent piece of work produced in the communication field, is the theory of problematic integration by Austin Babrow.

Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.   Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance is one of the most important theories in the history of social psychology. Over the years, the theory of cognitive dissonance has produced a prodigious quantity of research and volumes of criticism, interpretation, and extrapolation.[23] While it is one of the most prominent theories in the sociopsychological tradition, it is so infused with system thinking that it must be included in the cybernetic tradition as well.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance begins with the idea that the communicator carries around a rich assortment of *cognitive elements* such as attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and behaviors. These are not isolated cognitive elements but relate to one another within a system, and each element of the system will have one of three kinds of relationships with each of the others. The first type of relationship is null, or *irrelevant*: neither element really affects the other. The second is consistent, or *consonant*, with one element reinforcing or bolstering the other. The third type of relationship is inconsistent, or *dissonant*. Dissonance occurs when one element would not be expected to follow from the other. Believing that saturated fats are harmful to your health is inconsistent with eating a lot of red meat. What is consonant or dissonant for one person, however, may not be for another, so the question always is what is consistent or inconsistent within a person's own psychological system. You might think, for example, that meat provides valuable protein that cancels out the harmful effects of the fat in the meat.

Two overriding premises govern dissonance theory. The first is that dissonance produces tension or stress that creates pressure to change. The second premise follows naturally from the first: when dissonance is present, the individual not only will attempt to reduce it but will also avoid situations in which additional dissonance might be produced. The greater the dissonance, in other words, the greater the need to reduce it. For example, the more inconsistent your diet is with your knowledge about cholesterol, the greater the pressure you will feel to do something about it to reduce the dissonance.

Dissonance itself is a result of two other variables—the importance of the cognitive elements and the number of elements involved in the dissonant relationship. In other words, if you have several important things that are inconsistent, you will experience greater dissonance. So in our example, if you believe in good health, but smoke, eat red meat, and never exercise, you are more apt to feel dissonance.

Festinger imagined a number of methods for dealing with cognitive dissonance. First, you might change one or more of the cognitive elements—a behavior or an attitude, perhaps. For example, you might become a vegetarian or at least stop eating meat every day, or you might start believing that fats are less important than genetics, to resolve the dissonance between eating red meat and fat. Second, new elements might be added to one side of the tension or the other. For instance, you might switch to using olive oil exclusively. Third, you might come to see the dissonant elements as less important than they used to be. For example, you might decide that what you eat isn't as important as state of mind to overall health. Fourth, you might seek consonant information, such as evidence for the benefits of meat, by reading new studies on the topic. Finally, you might reduce dissonance by distorting or misinterpreting the information involved. This could happen if you decided that although a lot of meat poses a health risk, meat is not as harmful as the loss of important nutritional ingredients like iron and protein. No matter which of these methods you employed, it would reduce your dissonance and make you feel better about your attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

Much of the theory and research on cognitive dissonance has centered on the various situations in which dissonance is likely to occur. These include such situations as decision making, forced compliance, initiation, social support, and effort. Salespeople label the dissonance that occurs after buying something "buyer's remorse." Often, while waiting for delivery of a car, a customer will cancel the purchase because of buyer's remorse or what is technically called *post decisional dissonance*. In a 1970 study, a group of automobile customers were called twice during the period between signing the contract and actual delivery to reassure them about their purchase. Members of a control group were not called. As expected, about twice as many of those who were not called canceled the order compared to those who were.[24] We recently helped our daughter buy a car, and in the days following the purchase, we received two letters from the car company. One offered $100 for referring others

customers to them, and the other offered $100 in services for the newly purchased car. Both of these can be seen as contemporary approaches to managing post decisional dissonance.

The amount of dissonance experienced as a result of a decision depends on four variables. First is the importance of the decision. Certain decisions such as skipping breakfast may be unimportant and produce little dissonance, while buying a car can result in a great deal of dissonance. The second variable is the attractiveness of the chosen alternative. Other things being equal, the less attractive the chosen alternative, the greater the dissonance. You will probably suffer more dissonance from buying an ugly car than a snazzy one. Third, the greater the perceived attractiveness of the not-chosen alternative, the more dissonance you will feel. If you wish you had saved your money to go to Europe instead of buying a car, you will probably find yourself suffering some dissonance. Finally, the greater the degree of similarity or overlap between the alternatives, the less the dissonance. If you are debating between two similar cars, making a decision in favor of one will not result in much dissonance, but if you are deciding between buying a car and going to Europe, you might experience quite a bit of dissonance.

Another situation in which dissonance is likely is forced compliance, or being induced to do or say something contrary to your beliefs or values. This situation usually occurs when a reward for complying or a punishment for not complying is involved. This could happen at work, for example, when your boss asks you to do something you would rather not do. Dissonance theory predicts that the less the pressure to conform, the greater the dissonance. If you were asked to do something you didn't like doing but were offered a handsome bonus for doing so, you would feel more justified than if you were offered a minimal reward such as a company mug.

In one well-known experiment, students were asked to complete a boring task, after which they were "bribed" to tell other students that the task would be fun.[25] Some of these participants were paid $1 to lie, and the others were paid $20. As expected, because they experienced more disso-

nance, the $1 liars tended to change their opinion of the task to actually believe it was fun, whereas the $20 liars tended to maintain the belief that the task was dull but justified the lie on the basis that they could pocket a considerable amount of cash. This feature of dissonance explains why you might stay in a high-paying job you dislike. The high pay can be used as a justification for doing so. The less external justification (such as reward or punishment) is involved, the more you must focus on the internal inconsistency within yourself.

Dissonance theory also predicts that the more difficult one's initiation into a group, the greater the commitment toward that group. This explains why many organizations incorporate some kind of initiation rite in order to join. Another prediction of dissonance theory concerns the amount of social support received for a decision. The more social support one receives from friends about an idea or action, the greater the pressure to believe in that idea or action. Finally, dissonance theory also predicts behavior based on task difficulty. The greater the amount of effort one puts into a task, the more one will rationalize the value of that task. Have you ever put a lot of work into an assignment you hadn't looked forward to, only to discover after completing it that you liked it after all? This outcome is entirely consistent with cognitive-dissonance theory.

Problematic-Integration Theory. Cybernetic theories of the communicator feature cognitive integration as central to human life. The mind is characterized by a set of attitudes, beliefs, and values that move in the direction of increasing consistency. Austin Babrow adds to this line of work by explaining the role of communication in helping individuals manage cognitive dissonance or what he calls *problematic integration* (PI).[26] Babrow's theory rests on three propositions: First, you have a natural tendency to align your expectations (what you think will happen) and your evaluations (what you want to happen). Second, integrating expectations and evaluations can be problematic—it is not always easy to get expectations and evaluations to align. Third,

problematic integration stems from communication and is managed through communication.

Babrow's first proposition—the need we feel to align expectations with values—can be tension producing when what you want doesn't line up with what you expect. In other words, as a rule, you are more comfortable when you like the things you think you can have, and you tend to expect the things you like. For example, you might have a fantasy about dating Jennifer Aniston or Denzel Washington, but you don't really have an expectation that this will happen. More likely, you will be attracted to people around you, and you expect that your significant relationships will develop within the workplace or other groups you move in on a daily basis. Your evaluations and expectations line up, in other words.

The second proposition is that the integration of expectations and evaluations is often problematic. Babrow identifies four such problematic conditions. The first is *divergence* between an expectation and an evaluation. Here your evaluation and expectation do not match. This might happen, for example, when you are getting very good grades in a class you hate. The second condition of problematic integration is *ambiguity* or lack of clarity about what to expect. For example, you might be very interested in a new sport like tennis but be quite unclear about whether you can ever succeed in this sport.

The third condition is *ambivalence*, or contradictory evaluations. You may, for example, have an acquaintance who is constantly trying to set you up with blind dates, but you are not sure whether that's the best way to meet potential partners. Finally, problematic integration can occur when the chance of something happening is impossible. This final state of problematic integration is especially interesting, because valuing something we know we can never achieve can be a source of wonder, mystery, and inspiration. So despite the impossibility of achieving our desire, it remains problematic. Thinking of someday climbing Mt. Everest, running a marathon, or flying solo around the world might be such impossible goals, depending on the individual.

Often, the issue of problematic integration is minor and inconsequential. However, it can be-

come quite a problem when the problematic evaluations and expectations are tied closely to a strong network of beliefs, values, and feelings within the cognitive system. The more central the evaluations and expectations are within a cognitive system, the greater the problematic integration. In other words, the more you have at stake, the more you will experience PI.

The third proposition of this theory is that problematic integration entails communication. This is true in part because we come to experience PI through communication. For example, if you were unattached, it would be quite normal for you to be attracted to another student and perhaps want to explore a romantic relationship with this person. However, if a mutual friend told you that your love interest was already engaged to be married, you would indeed have a problem. Both your interactions with your love interest and the information about that person's engaged state are made possible through communication.

Communication is also a way to resolve or manage PI. For example, you might use communication to try to get others to do things differently. You might reframe what is happening so that it is less unpleasant or less important to you. When PI is caused by ambiguity or ambivalence, you might ask questions to clarify and get resolution or greater integration that way. You might seek information to change other parts of your cognitive system so that expectations and evaluations are easier to integrate. Problematic-integration theory is one of many that helps us understand the ways in which individual communicators think—how they integrate and organize information that affects attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Cybernetic theories of the communicator share much with the sociopsychological, because both focus on the individual's cognitive system— a complex, interacting set of beliefs, attitudes, and values that affect and are affected by behavior. Imagine your mind as a system that takes inputs from the environment in the form of information, often in messages sent by others. The mind operates on, or processes, this information and then creates behaviors that in turn affect those around you.

From the Source . . .

PI theory arose out of my dissatisfaction with expectancy-value theories, which seem to trivialize the experience of communication in relation to uncertainty, ambivalence, and diverging expectation and desire. Since then, the theory has been evolving away from its roots in individual psychological models of information integration; in the most recent developments, we have begun to examine the dynamic interpersonal and sociocultural meaning making that occurs when people strive to understand challenging situations (e.g., pregnancy, cancer, bioterrorism).

—Austin Babrow

As theories about the communicator, the cybernetic and sociopsychological traditions merge, since both come from studies of social psychology and both use research methods that focus on the prediction of individual behavior. However, cybernetic theories are distinguished by their emphasis on the cognitive system and relationships among various aspects of human information processing. In this regard, these theories are both sociopsychological and systemic in orientation. This connection begins to fade, however, as we move to higher levels of communication analysis. As we will see in upcoming chapters, most cybernetic thinking goes beyond the individual mind to look at social and cultural factors as well.

▮C THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

As a communicator, do you think of yourself as a separate entity communicating with other autonomous human beings, or do you think of yourself as a member of a social group with bonds that shape your communication experience? Are you first an individual or first a member of the group? This question marks the dividing line between the traditions discussed in this chapter.

Sociopsychological and cybernetic theories of the communicator assume that individual differences come before social relationships, while sociocultural theories assume just the opposite—that social relationships prefigure individual differences.

Social and cultural theories show how communicators come to understand themselves as unified beings with individual differences and how such differences are socially constructed rather than determined by fixed psychological or biological mechanisms. Social theories, too, imagine that a history of social interaction gives individuals a set of tools for shifting their ideas about who they are, based on the situations in which they find themselves. In other words, through interaction, we construct a unified, yet flexible sense of self. In this section we look at five lines of work related to the self—symbolic interactionism, social construction of self, social construction of emotion, the presentational self, and the communication theory of identity.

Symbolic Interaction and the Development of Self

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a way of thinking about mind, self, and society that has contributed greatly to the sociocultural tradition of communication theory.[27] George Herbert Mead is normally considered the founder of symbolic interactionism. With foundations in the field of sociology, SI teaches that as people interact with one another over time, they come to share meanings for certain terms and actions and thus come to understand events in particular ways. Society itself arises from interlinked conversations among individuals. Because of the importance of conversation to the SI movement, we will discuss symbolic interactionism in more detail in Chapter 6. Here we will consider one concept from SI that has special relevance to the communicator—the *self*.

Indeed, an important outcome of interaction is a certain idea of the self—who you are as a person. Manford Kuhn and his students placed the self at the center of social life.[28] Communication is crucial from the beginning as children are

socialized through interaction with others in the society in which they live. The process of negotiating the world occurs through communication as well: the person makes sense of and deals with objects in the environment through social interaction. An *object* can be any aspect of the person's reality: a thing, a quality, an event, or a state of affairs. The only requirement for something to become an object is that the person must name it or represent it symbolically. Objects, then, are more than objective things; they are *social objects*, and reality is the totality of a person's social objects. To Kuhn, the naming of an object is important, for naming is a way of conveying the object's meaning.

Communicators do not just interact with others and with social objects; they also communicate with themselves. Communicators undertake self-conversations as part of the process of interacting; we talk to ourselves, have conversations in our minds in order to make distinctions among things and people. When making decisions about how to act toward a social object, we create what Kuhn calls a *plan of action*, guided by *attitudes*, or verbal statements that indicate the values toward which action will be directed. For example, going to college involves a plan of action—actually a host of plans—guided by a set of attitudes about what you want to get out of college. How you relate to college could be influenced, for example, by positive attitudes toward money, career, and personal success.

We do not work out the meaning of social objects, attitudes, and plans of action in isolation. Indeed, the whole premise of SI is that these things arise from interaction with others. Certain other people, *orientational others*, are particularly influential in a person's life. They are people to whom we are emotionally and psychologically committed. Orientational others, like parents, provide us with general vocabulary, central concepts, and categories that come to define our realities. Orientational others may be in our present or past; they may be present or absent. At some point in our lives, these individuals are or were especially important in helping us learn to distinguish between ourselves and other people, helping us work out who we are as persons.

The *self*, then, is itself an important social object, defined and understood in terms developed over time in interaction with orientational others. Your self-concept is nothing more than your plans of action toward yourself, your identities, interests, aversions, goals, ideologies, and self-evaluations. The self-concept provides anchoring attitudes, for it acts as your most common frame of reference for judging other objects. All subsequent plans of action stem primarily from the self-concept. Kuhn invented the *Twenty Statements Test* (TST) for measuring various aspects of the self. If you were to take the TST, you would be confronted with twenty blank spaces preceded by the following simple instructions:

> There are twenty numbered blanks on the page below. Please write twenty answers to the simple question, "Who am I?" in the blanks. Just give twenty different answers to this question. Answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself, not to somebody else. Write the answers in the order that they occur to you. Don't worry about logic or "importance." Go along fairly fast, for time is limited.[29]

There are a number of ways to analyze the responses from this test, each tapping a different aspect of the self. The *ordering variable* refers to the relative salience of identifications. For example, if the person lists "Baptist" a great deal higher than "father," the researcher may conclude that the person identifies more readily with religion than with family affiliation. The *locus variable*—another way to assess the test—is the extent to which the subject in a general way tends to identify with consensual groupings such as "American" rather than idiosyncratic, subjective qualities such as "strong."

Other theorists have explored the self as well; we will see it become an even more important concept in social constructionism, the next theory we introduce in the sociocultural tradition.

Harré on Person and Self

In the previous section, we learned that human beings, through social interaction, create their understanding of experience, including ideas

about themselves as persons. These ideas are essentially "personal" theories of life that function as templates that help us define, live in, and negotiate our world. The objective world around us becomes less important than the ways we choose to perceive, label, and interact with the world we make with our symbols.

Rom Harré is among contemporary social scientists who have made these assumptions central to their work; at the core of his theory is the idea that the self is structured by a personal theory that affects how we approach the world.[30] You learn to understand yourself by employing an idea, or theory, of personhood and an idea or theory of selfhood. For Harré, the *person* is a publicly visible being that is characterized by certain attributes and characteristics established within a culture or social group. The *self*, in contrast to the person, is your private notion of your own unity as a person. Personhood is *public*, whereas the self, though you may share it with others, is ultimately *private*.

Personal being is thus two-sided, consisting of a social being (person) and a personal being (self), learned through a history of interaction with other people. Many traditional cultures conceptualize the person as the embodiment of a role (such as mother, father, priest, worker), and people in general are seen as manifestations of these roles. Within that role, however, the individual assigns a particular or private definition or character to construct a personal sense of self. A man whose personhood consists of the roles of father and worker might have the personal sense of self of "a good father" and "a hard worker."

Self and person, then, are not inherent categories but emerge from social interaction. For instance, most Western industrialized cultures stress theories of self that emphasize whole, undivided, and independent persons. In Harré's terms, personhood and selfhood are highly integrated. The Javanese, in contrast, see themselves as being two independent parts—an inside of feelings and an outside of observed behaviors; in other words, a self of feelings and a person viewed by or constructed by others. Moroccans have yet another theory of self—as embodiments

of places and situations—and their identities are always tied to these situations.[31] What a self is, then, is very much a function of personal sense of identity in intersection with the culture of which that individual is a part.

Harré further elaborates the "self" by discussing three elements that characterize it—consciousness, agency, and autobiography. By means of our intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions, we are able to construct ourselves and present ourselves to others as a coherent identity. First, there is a sense of *consciousness*. This means that you have the capacity to "objectify" yourself—to get out of yourself and think about yourself as observed by others. You are the "knower" and what is "known about" simultaneously. Consider the following statement: "I_1 know that I_2 am afraid." I_1 reflects the sense of being aware—the "known about"—and I_2 reflects the sense of being the "knower"—the person who is afraid. Consciousness is the dimension of the self that relates most clearly to the present because as we are conscious of ourselves moving through time and space, we use our perceptions, experiences, and interactions to negotiate our place in the world.

In addition to self-consciousness, the self consists of what Harré calls *autobiography*. Autobiography consists of recollections—memories, beliefs about, or understandings of what happened in the past that get used to interpret present and future experiences. One's autobiography or history is a social construction just as is the present consciousness of self.

Finally, *agency* is Harré's third dimension of self, and it relates more to future events. Agency is most apparent whenever we intend to do something. It involves a construction or hypotheses about what one is capable of, what possibilities exist for the future. We bring our past constructions to bear as we make sense of what we think and feel in the present, and both of those guide our sense of future agency. With all of these dimensions of self-consciousness, autobiography, and agency, what is most important is that they are constructions that are created, maintained, and changed in interaction with self and others.

Harré's theory of personhood also contains a set of dimensions that differentiate the ways the self is constructed and presented. These differences can be plotted and viewed spatially along the dimensions of *display*, *realization*, and *agency*. *Display* refers to whether an aspect of the self is displayed publicly or remains private. For example, you might define *emotions* as private and *personality* as public, while in other cultures, *emotions* might be defined as quite public.

The second dimension of selfhood is *realization* or source—the degree to which some feature of the self is believed to come from within the individual or from the group of which the self is a part. Elements of a self that are believed to come from the person are *individually realized*, whereas those elements believed to derive from the person's relationship to the group are *collectively realized*. For instance, your particular theory of the self might treat "purpose" as individually realized because to you it seems to be something that individuals have on their own. On the other hand, you think of "cooperation" as collectively realized because it seems to be something that one can only do as a member of a group.

The third dimension—*agency*—is the degree of active power attributed to the self. *Active* elements ("speaking" or "driving") are contrasted with *passive* elements (like "listening" or "riding"). Again, the degree of agency you attribute to an activity will depend on your personal conceptions as well as cultural interpretations.

Various aspects of self are defined differently within the three-dimensional scheme. For example, people of Anglo-Saxon descent tend to treat emotions as privately displayed, individually realized, and passive. In other words, they believe that emotions just happen to them and are within them. Many southern Europeans, on the other hand, see emotions as public, collective, and active. In other words, they believe that emotions are something they create as a group and display together. Each of these constructions of self would be plotted differently in Harré's scheme.

The notion of selfhood, then, as described by Harré, is a complex and multilayered notion. The range of possible "selves"—as constructed

across both public and private dimensions—is highly variable from one culture to another because the social realities of cultures are different from one to another. It is the social construction of these variables that makes Harré's theory a social-constructionist theory.

The Social Construction of Emotion

Another group of theories within the symbolic interactionist perspective deals with the construction of emotion. While we usually do not think of emotions as constructed, emotional displays do vary according to culture. Harré suggests that emotions are constructed concepts, like any other aspect of human experience, because they are determined by the local language and moral orders of the culture or social group.[32]

One of the scholars best known for work on the social construction of emotions is James Averill.[33] According to Averill, emotions are belief systems that guide one's definition of the situation. As such, emotions consist of internalized social norms and rules governing feelings. These norms and rules tell us how to define and respond to emotions. Emotions do have a physiological component, but identifying and labeling bodily feelings are learned socially within a culture. In other words, the ability to make sense of emotions is socially constructed.

How an emotion is labeled—what it is called—is instrumental in how the emotion is experienced. You may have very different meanings for the same physiological response, depending on whether you call it "anger" or "fear." You experience an emotion one way when you call it "jealousy" and quite another when you call it "loneliness." We have rules for what anger, fear, jealousy, and loneliness are, and we have rules for how to respond to these feelings, rules constructed in social interaction throughout a lifetime.

Averill calls emotions *syndromes*, defined as clusters or sets of responses that go together. No single response is sufficient by itself to define an emotion, but all must be viewed together. Emotional syndromes are socially constructed

because people learn through interaction what particular clusters of behavior should be taken to mean and how to perform a particular emotion. Emotions are acted out in specific ways, and we learn these roles from communication. What does grief look like? It looks different in various societies. People must learn within their respective cultures how to recognize and carry out the role of the grieving person, or the angry person, or the jealous person.

Each experience of an emotion has an *object*—where the emotion is directed—and each emotion has a limited range of possible objects. When you are angry, you are angry at someone. When you are envious, you have envy about some achievement or possession. When you grieve, you grieve some loss. As Averill points out, you cannot be proud of the stars because pride is something reserved for accomplishment. You may say that you "love" your new car, but you cannot really be "in love" with it. Nor can you say that someone's angry attack on you makes you feel jealous.

Averill conducted an interesting study in which he isolated more than 500 terms for various emotions, a list that was representative of emotional terms in the English language.[34] His subjects then rated these terms on a number of dimensions, including an evaluative one (for example, is the emotion pleasant/unpleasant?). He found that far more emotional terms were evaluated as negative (such as *anger* and *jealousy*) than positive (*joy* and *happiness*).

Averill's explanation for the dominant labeling of emotions as negative is that while emotions do not come prepackaged as positive or negative, we define them that way based on our social constructions. In Averill's sample, positive outcomes tend to be action oriented, whereas negative results tend to be seen as beyond one's control. So, for example, courage is the result of one's brave actions, whereas jealousy is the consequence of an unfortunate situation. Further, emotions in general tend to be viewed in our society as beyond control—something that just happens to us. So it is logical that positive outcomes are defined less as emotions and more as actions, whereas negative outcomes are more

often seen as emotions and thus out of our control. In other cultures the outcome of Averill's study might be quite different.

For example, the Ifaluk of Micronesia experience several forms of anger, including that which accompanies sickness, that which builds up slowly from several bothersome irritations, that which is experienced when relatives do not live up to expectations, and that which is caused by personal misfortune.[35] Justifiable anger, called *song*, occurs in a highly predictable pattern among the Ifaluk. A rule must be violated, and someone must point out that this occurred. The person who witnessed the violation must condemn the act, and the one who did it must react to this condemnation with fear, promising not to do it again. Clearly, in the Ifaluk culture, anger is not just anger; the various types are sharply distinguished.

In general, four kinds of rules govern emotions, according to Averill. *Rules of appraisal* tell you what an emotion is, where it is directed, and whether it is positive or negative. *Rules of behavior* tell you how to respond to the feeling—whether to hide it, to express it in private, or to vent it publicly. *Rules of prognosis* define the progression and course of the emotion: how long should it last, what are its different stages, how does it begin, and how does it end? *Rules of attribution* dictate how an emotion should be explained or justified: what do you tell others about it, and how do you express it publicly?

If you are angry at another person, your rules of appraisal would tell you what you are feeling and who the target of the feeling is. These rules would also define whether that anger is positive (righteous indignation) or negative (rage). Behavior rules would guide your actions, including how to express the anger, whether to lash out or remain quiet, whether to aggress or retreat. Prognosis rules would guide how long the anger episode should last and the different phases through which it might pass. Finally, the rules of attribution would help you explain the anger ("She was acting like a jerk and made me mad").

Thus, emotions are not just things in themselves. They are defined and handled according

to what has been learned in social interaction with other people. We learn emotional rules in childhood and throughout life. Averill is clear that people can and do change emotionally. When you enter a new life situation, you are exposed to new ways of understanding emotion, and your feelings, their expression, and the ways you manage those emotions change.

The Presentational Self

Erving Goffman, one of the best-known sociologists of the 20th century, uses a theatrical metaphor to explain how communicators present the self. Everyday settings are viewed as a stage, and people are considered actors who use performances to make an impression on an audience. When you come into any situation, you put on a presentation or performance—you must decide how to position yourself, what to say, and how to act.

Goffman begins with the assumption that the person must somehow make sense of events encountered in everyday life.[36] The interpretation of a situation is the *definition* of the situation. When you enter a situation, you tend to ask the mental question, "What is going on here?" Your answer constitutes a definition of the situation. Often the first definition is not adequate and a rereading may be necessary, as in the case of a practical joke, a mistake, a misunderstanding, or even outright deception.

The definition of a situation can be divided into strips and frames. A *strip* is a sequence of activities such as opening the refrigerator door, removing the milk, pouring it into a glass, drinking it, and putting the glass into the dishwasher. A *frame* is a basic organizational pattern used to define the strip. The strip of activities just listed, for example, would probably be framed as "getting a drink of milk."

Frame analysis thus consists of determining how individuals organize or understand their behaviors within a given situation. Frames allow you to identify and understand otherwise meaningless events, giving meaning to the ongoing activities of life. A natural framework is an unguided event of nature with which you must cope, such as a windstorm. A social framework, on the other hand, is seen as controllable and guided by some intelligence—such as planning a meal. These two types of frameworks relate to each other because social beings act on, and are in turn influenced by, the natural order.

Frameworks, then, are the models we use to understand our experience, the ways we see things as fitting together into some coherent whole. A *primary framework* is a basic organizational unit such as conversing, eating, and dressing, but primary frames can be transformed or altered into *secondary frameworks*. In secondary frameworks, the basic organizational principles of a primary frame are used to meet different ends. A game, for example, is a secondary framework modeled after the primary framework of a fight or competition. Most of what happens in human social life has layers of meaning beyond the basic action involved. So eating and drinking, the primary framework of sustaining life, more often than not is transformed as we ritualize a holiday dinner or turn drinks after work into a framework where socializing with coworkers is the real goal.

Communication activities, like all activities, are viewed in the context of frame analysis. A *face engagement* or *encounter* occurs when people interact with one another in a focused way.[37] In a face engagement, you have a single focus of attention and a perceived mutual activity. In unfocused interaction in a public place, you acknowledge the presence of another person without paying much attention. This happens, for example, when you are standing in a line or waiting at a bus stop. In such an unfocused situation, you may be accessible for an encounter that could begin when another person in line or a passenger strikes up a conversation. Once an engagement begins, a mutual contract exists to continue the engagement to some kind of termination. Face engagements are both verbal and nonverbal, and the cues exhibited are important in signifying the nature of the relationship as well as a mutual definition of the situation.

People in face engagements, then, take turns presenting dramas to one another. We tell stories, we engage in dramatic portrayals, according to

Goffman, in order to present a particular view of self:

> I am suggesting that often what talkers undertake to do is not to provide information to a recipient but to present dramas to an audience. Indeed, it seems that we spend most of our time not engaged in giving information but in giving shows. And observe, this theatricality is not based on mere displays of feelings or faked exhibitions of spontaneity or anything else by way of the huffing and puffing we might derogate by calling theatrical. The parallel between stage and conversation is much, much deeper than that. The point is that ordinarily when an individual says something, he is not saying it as a bold statement of fact on his own behalf. He is recounting. He is running through a strip of already determined events for the engagement of his listeners.[38]

In engaging others, you present a particular character to the audience, just as in a play an actor assumes a particular role. If the frame you are offering is accepted, your audience accepts the characterization you are providing.[39]

Goffman believes that the self is literally determined by these dramatizations. Here is how he explains the self:

> A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.[40]

You have only to think about the many situations in which you project a certain image of yourself. You probably do not behave the same way with your best friend as you do with your parents, and it is unlikely that the self you present to a professor is the same one you present at a party. In most of the situations in which you participate, you decide on a role and enact it, selecting the characterization you think will best fit the scene and facilitate the achievement of your goals.

In attempting to define a situation, you not only give information about yourself; you also get information about the others in the situation. This process of exchanging information enables people to know what is expected of them. Usually, this exchange occurs indirectly through observing the behavior of others and structuring your own behavior to elicit impressions in others. *Self-presentation* is very much a matter of *impression management*.[41] Goffman offers an example of a man intent on impression management: "He may wish them to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how in fact he feels toward them or to obtain no clearcut impression; he may wish to insure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them."[42]

Because all participants in a situation project images, an overall definition of the situation emerges. This general definition is normally unified. Once the definition is set, moral pressure is created to maintain it by suppressing contradictions and doubts. A person may add to the projections but typically does not contradict the image initially set. The very organization of society is based on this principle.

Performance, then, is not trivial but literally defines who you are as a communicator. The communicator is the presentation of a self, and any one person may have many selves, depending upon the many ways in which self is presented in the myriad of situations faced in life.

The Communication Theory of Identity

When you address the question, "Who am I?" you are exploring the topic of personal identity, your composite picture of your self as a person. Theories concentrating on the individual communicator will always entail personal identity to some degree, but identity is in large measure cultural, and peoples of the world vary in how they construe themselves. In Africa, for example, identity is most often understood as an outcome of a lifelong search for balance in life and relies in part on the strength that people get from their

ancestors. In Asia, identity is most often gained not through individual effort but through the collective group and reciprocity among humans. In Greek culture, identity is understood as individual, and one sees the self in opposition to, or as different from, other identities.

Primarily attributable to Michael Hecht and his colleagues, the *communication theory of identity*, or CTI, incorporates all three of these cultural contexts—the individual, the communal, and the societal.[43] For these theorists, then, *identity* is a joining point between the individual and the society, and communication is the link that allows this intersection to occur. Indeed, your identity is a "code" that defines your membership in various communities—a code that consists of symbols, like certain kinds of clothing or possessions; and words, such as self-descriptions or things you commonly say; and the meanings that you and others ascribe to these things.

Hecht identifies particular dimensions of identity, including feelings (the affective dimension), thoughts (the cognitive dimension), actions (the behavioral dimension), and a sense of a relationship to the transcendent (the spiritual). Because it is so all encompassing, identity is a source of your motivations and expectations in life, and it has staying power—it is enduring. This does not mean that identities, once formed, never change. Rather, while there is a core of a stable identity, identity is never fixed but always emergent.

Communication is the means by which identity is established and the mechanism by which it changes as well. Your identity, in your own eyes and those of others, is established when you interact socially with other human beings across your life span. You internalize the views and reactions of others in social interaction, and conversely show your sense of identity by how you express yourself and respond to others. The *subjective dimension* of identity is your personal sense of self, while the *ascribed dimension* is what others say about you. In other words, your sense of identity consists of meanings that are learned and that you internalize—your subject self; these meanings are projected to others

whenever you communicate—a process that creates your ascribed self.

Hecht breaks identity down beyond simply the personal and ascribed dimensions. These two dimensions interact in a series of four tiers or layers. The first tier is the *personal layer*, which consists of your sense of yourself within a social situation. Within a particular situation like attending church, going out with a friend, approaching a professor about a grade, or traveling with your family, you see yourself in particular ways. These identities consist of feelings and ideas about yourself, who you think you are and what you think you are like. The second tier is the *enactment layer*, or others' insights about you based on what you do, what you have, and how you act. Your enactments are symbols of deeper aspects of your identity, and others come to define and understand you through these enactments.

The third tier of your identity is the *relational*, or who you are in relation to other individuals. Identity gets constructed in your interactions with them. You can most obviously see the relational identity when you refer to yourself specifically as a relational partner, such as father, spouse, or co-worker. Notice that your identity becomes attached to certain roles vis-à-vis other roles, such as "boss," "best friend," "cook," or "counselor." At the relational level, then, identity is not strictly individual but is attached to the relationship itself. Just ask yourself what your relationship with your mother, lover, or roommate is like and you begin to visualize this relational identity.

Finally, the fourth tier of identity is the *communal* layer, which is attached to a larger group or culture. This level of identity is very strong in many Asian cultures, for instance, in which one's identity is established most predominantly by the larger community rather than by individual differences among persons within the community. Whenever you pay attention to what your community thinks or does, you are tuned in to this layer of your identity.

Although cultures will emphasize different layers of identity, all four are always present.[44] They are "interpenetrated." How, for example,

could you separate your sense of self from the many relationships that you have? It would be impossible to look at how you "do" relationships apart from your cultural history. Likewise, your personal identity cannot be removed from the larger society in which you live. In other words, identities are simultaneously individual, social, and communal.

You probably noticed how different the theories in this section seem compared to the theories in the sociopsychological tradition. Instead of thinking of individuals as isolated minds, which is at the core of sociopsychological theories, sociocultural theories broaden the scope to look at ways in which one's sense of self is a product of social life. The following theory continues this line of thinking.

Identity Negotiation Theory

Continuing this line of thought, Stella Ting-Toomey explores ways in which identity is negotiated in interaction with others, especially across cultures.[45] As we learned in the other theories in this chapter, one's identity is always emerging from social interaction. Identities, or self-reflective images, are created through negotiation whenever we assert, modify, or challenge our own or others' self-identifications. This begins early in life in the family setting, where we start to internalize various social and personal identities. Here, for example, we come into first contact with various *social identities*, or group affiliations such as culture, sex, and age. The development of initial gender identity also occurs in the family and subsequently becomes a very important part of social identity. *Personal identities* are the more unique characteristics we associate with ourselves, which are also learned initially in family interaction. In some families, for example, children learn to identify more with social positions and roles, while in other families, they may learn to think of themselves more as individuals not associated with particular positions or roles.

Cultural and ethnic identities are especially important and, like all others, are learned in social interaction. Specifically, *cultural identity* is

related to some sense of attachment to a larger cultural group—a religious denomination, a region of the country, a member of a certain organization, or even an age group—and is defined in large measure by the amount of affiliation we feel. One can also have a cultural attachment to a larger, heterogeneous society consisting of a multitude of smaller cultural groups. An important cultural connection for many people is ethnicity. *Ethnic identity* consists of an association with ancestry, or a group history across generations. This can include national origin, race, religion, and/or language. Ethnic identity can be an important part of who you are.

Cultural and ethnic identities are characterized by value content and salience. *Value content* consists of the kinds of evaluation that you make based on cultural beliefs. For example, some cultures predispose members to value the community or group above the individual, while other cultures bring out more individualistic values. *Salience* is the strength of affiliation we feel. You may have very strong cultural and/or ethnic ties, or these may feel somewhat weak to you. In other words, part of your identity—who you are as a person—is determined by how strongly you connect to larger groups and the clarity of values that emerge from this relationship.

Although identity can be based on any number of personal and social factors, Ting-Toomey focuses on cultural and ethnic identity and particularly the negotiation that occurs when we communicate within and between cultural groups. Identity, thus, is constructed in communication in various cultural settings. People in all cultures develop personal and social identities in this way. When you communicate within a familiar cultural group, you will experience more security, inclusion, predictability, connection, and consistency; but when you interact across cultures, you may experience the opposite—vulnerability, differentiation, unpredictability, autonomy, and change—leading to a lack of stability and even the possibility of transformation. Most of us work through identity negotiation to develop some balance between these extremes. Too much cultural or ethnic identity can lead to ethnocentrism; too little can lead to confusion.

Too little change leads to stagnation; too much change will lead to chaos.

Some individuals are more effective at achieving a comfortable balance. You know you have done so when you maintain a strong sense of self but are able to explore flexibly the identities of others and allow them, too, to have their own sense of identity. Ting-Toomey calls this the state of *functional biculturalism*. When you are able to shift from one cultural context to another mindfully and easily, you have reached the state of being a *cultural transformer*. The key to achieving these states is intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence consists of three components—knowledge, mindfulness, and skill. *Identity knowledge* is an understanding of the importance of cultural/ethnic identity and the ability to see what is important to others. This means knowing something about cultural identities and being able to see the difference, for example, between a collectivist and an individualist identity. *Mindfulness* simply means being habitually and conscientiously aware. It means a readiness to shift to new perspectives. Finally, *negotiation skill* refers to the ability to negotiate identities through careful observation, listening, empathy, nonverbal sensitivity, politeness, reframing, and collaboration. You know if you have achieved effective identity negotiation if both parties feel understood, respected, and valued.

This does not always happen, of course, and the place of one's group within the larger society can lead to marginalization and disempowerment. These eventualities are discussed by theories in the critical tradition.

◖ THE CRITICAL TRADITION

In the previous section, we looked at several theories that show how our sense of self arises from social interaction. However, many believe that a mere description of self, or even the process by which self arises, is insufficient to give a complete picture of who we are as individuals. In this section, we look at a line of work that centers on the politics of self, or the ways in which we position ourselves socially as empowered or disempowered individuals.

Theories of *identity politics*—personal social power—share a similar critical view of identity, with important implications for the communicator. The starting point for theories of identity originated during the various social movements that emerged in the United States in the 1960s, including the civil rights, black power, women's, and gay/lesbian movements. In general, these movements shared some assumptions about identity categories: (1) members of an identity category share a similar analysis of their shared oppression; (2) the shared oppression supersedes all other identity categories; and (3) identity group members are always each other's allies.[46] These assumptions resulted in certain expectations about how individuals involved in these movements behaved on the basis of how they constructed their identities. This analysis assumed, for example, that if you were a woman, you accepted and advocated a feminist analysis of a woman's situation, would consider your status as a woman your primary identity category, and would count on other women to respond to oppression as you would.

At the core of these assumptions is a conception of identity as a stable, intact, largely self-evident category based on markers such as sex, race, and class—dimensions that exist in the individual. Not only was identity seen as fixed, there was an implicit understanding that one aspect of identity was always most important to an individual—black or female, for example. A third assumption of this identity perspective was that the gaps between identity categories were not only substantial but significant.

The notion of identity as a fixed, stable category has generally given way to theories, like Ting-Toomey's, that emphasize difference. Scholars began to recognize that there are no essential characteristics that define all women, all men, all Asians, or all Latinos. The idea of difference began to be emphasized, and all of the markers of identity that characterized someone were brought into play. Rather than having to identify first, foremost, and only as a woman, you can identify as a Latina lesbian feminist, for example.

The term *gay* as a sexual identifier became *gay and lesbian* and then *gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered* to represent a range of identity positions in regard to sexuality. These additive approaches to issues of identity and identity politics also had their limitations and gave rise to theories that recognize that identities are lived as unities and that our theories need to deal with identity as a multilayered, coherent construction. We will discuss three theories here—standpoint theory, identity as constructed and performed, and queer theory—that have been valuable for helping communication scholars think of identity in more complicated and challenging ways.

Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory is the first critical theory we will discuss. The work of Sandra Harding and Patricia Hill Collins did much to crystallize standpoint theory in the social sciences;[47] Julia Wood and Marsha Houston[48] have been instrumental in incorporating it into the communication discipline.[49] Standpoint theory focuses on how the circumstances of an individual's life affect how that individual understands and constructs a social world. The starting point for understanding experience, then, is not social conditions, role expectations, or gendered definitions, but the distinctive ways individuals construct those conditions and their experiences within them. Feminist standpoint is not simply social location, however, and is not conferred automatically by being female: "A standpoint is achieved—earned through critical reflection on power relations and through engaging in the struggle required to construct an oppositional stance."[50]

Standpoint epistemology thus takes into account the variations within women's communication by understanding the different vantage points that women bring to communication and the many ways they enact those understandings in actual practice. Standpoint theory counters essentialist views of women, to continue with our example, by introducing the importance of the individual's agency in interpreting and implementing a particular understanding of the social world.

Important to standpoint theory, too, is the notion of layered understandings. This means that we have multiple identities that overlap to form our unique standpoints, including intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among many facets of identity. Feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa offers an example of her layered identities when she describes herself as a "third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings."[51] She uses the phrase "mestiza consciousness"[52] to signal the perspective or vantage point that is part of her worldview. With this phrase, Anzaldúa not only indicates her various identity positions but celebrates the strength of a multilayered identity. Her multiple and interlocking identities enable her to construct a standpoint that offers much more tolerance of ambiguity and awareness of various possibilities than a singular identity could. Rather than forcing an individual to choose an identity construction imposed from without, standpoint epistemology acknowledges the multiplicity of identities as constructed by any given individual.

Standpoint theory also introduces the element of power to the issue of identity. Marginalized or subjugated individuals see the world through multiple standpoints—they experience and understand it from their own vantage point—and they also see it from the standpoint of those in power. This survival tactic is not true in reverse. Those in power do not have the need to see from the standpoint of the oppressed; they do not need to learn about others in order to survive. The novel *July's People* by Nadine Gordimer is a good example of this aspect of standpoint theory. Set in South Africa, July is a servant to a white couple. When a revolution occurs, July takes the couple and their three children back to his village, where they learn about who he really is and must depend for the first time on him and his world.[53] Marsha Houston in particular has developed standpoint epistemology from African-American feminist perspectives. She articulates the difficulties of dialogue between white women and black women, given the epistemological differences in terms of lived experience for each. She also describes the

culture of resistance as a force that characterizes black women's lives. Together, characteristics of black women's experience create an angle of vision, or standpoint, that is substantially different from that of communication theorists who do not start from this standpoint.[54]

Identity as Constructed and Performed

In addition to efforts to understand identity as a category that consists of interlocking identities, theories that fall under the label of identity politics today share a concern for construction and performance of identity categories. Following in both the socially constructed and performative traditions outlined in the previous section, critical identity theories suggest that no identity exists outside the social construction of that category by the larger culture. We gain our identities in large part from the constructions offered about that identity from the various social groups of which we are a part—family, community, cultural subgroups, and dominant ideologies. Regardless of the dimension or dimensions of identity—gender, class, race, sexuality—identity is also performed according to or against norms and expectations.

This means that our identities are always in the process of becoming, as we respond to the contexts and situations around us. Identity politics now is seen as an effort to set identities "in motion."[55] They are moment-by-moment performances that can change. As one example, Barbara Ponse describes steps in the development of lesbian identity as "identity work."[56] Coming out as lesbian or gay is very much a reconfiguration of the self—what Shane Phelan calls a "project rather than an event."[57] Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is a strong articulation of identity as both constructed and performed, and 'her theories have had a major impact on thinking about identity in the communication discipline.[58]

Queer Theory

Judith Butler's work has not only been influential in performative theories of identity but in the field known as *queer theory* as well. Historically,

the term *queer* has carried a variety of meanings. It has meant something strange or unusual, as in *quirky*; it has referred to negative characteristics, such as madness, that lie outside social norms, as in "that's a bit queer or unusual"; and it has been used both abusively and endearingly to refer to homosexuals. Most recently, *queer* has become theorized and has become an academic subdiscipline called queer theory.[59]

The origins of the phrase *queer theory* are attributed to Teresa de Lauretis who, in 1990, chose it as the title for a conference she coordinated, wanting to deliberately disrupt the complacency of lesbian and gay studies.[60] As an interdisciplinary discipline, queer theory has retained the disruptive mission de Lauretis first assigned to it: to deliberately shake up the meanings, categories, and identities around gender and sexuality. Queer theory attempts "to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up—heteronormative knowledges and institutions."[61] Queer theory seeks to "trouble" the categories of sexuality and identity by showing them to be social constructions created in discourse rather than essential, biological categories.

Judith Butler has been instrumental in elaborating the ways these categories get reified and normalized by the dominant hegemonic discourses of culture. She asks, "To what extent is 'identity' a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?"[62] By continually questioning existing discursive constructions around identity categories, queer theorists open a space for different, more fluid constructions to emerge. Butler summarizes: "I'm permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them, and even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble."[63] For Butler and queer theorists generally, constructions of gender and sexuality become fluctuating, evolving productions or performances rather than stable, essential, unchanging categories.[64]

Queer becomes an ongoing and unfixed site of engagement and contestation; the most interesting and rich examples are not those in which someone lives up to or fits within an established identity category, but rather all of those times when that person does not.[65] The possibilities for performing

identity are endless, with each of us choosing from the identity matrix the particular construction of gender, sex, sexuality, and identity that best suits us: whatever the source of one's sexual desire and pleasure, one is 'queer' by choice."[66]

While queer theorists' starting points are gendered and sexed identities categories, many scholars choose not to limit the content of queer theory to these categories alone. David Halperin describes queer as "*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence." Queer denotes not a "positivity but a positionality" in regard to the normative.[67] Thus, while gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered are central cases of queer identity, some choose to broaden the category to include anyone who feels marginalized or who does not fit the heteronormative labels of dominant culture. According to this definition, single mothers and even married couples without children could be called *queer* because while they might be heterosexual, they do not completely adhere to heteronormative practices in regard to being married and having children.[68] *Queer* is perhaps better thought of as a verb rather than a noun, a set of actions rather than a stable identity. Queer theory, then, lives up to its label by refusing to pin down its own identity: "it is a discipline that refuses to be disciplined, a discipline with a difference."[69]

The fluidity of the label itself and its desire to continually disrupt the normal, however, has been the impetus behind much of the recent developments in, and critiques of, queer theory.

If almost everything can be defined as queer from some standpoint, what is the point of the term? And what's normal? Something abnormal can be discovered about virtually all of human experience, making the term too general to be useful.[70] Has the term itself become normative? The "anti" stance of queer theory—antinormative, anticategories, antidominant—necessarily sets up dichotomies that are in fact are just as rigid as the categories it seeks to overcome. Will queer theory lose its center and its momentum if it refuses to define itself, or has it in fact implicitly defined itself and lost the power of its original challenge? [71] These issues continue to confront queer theorists.

Within the academy, then, queer theory has been a major challenge to traditional notions of identity. The contradictions and paradoxes within which it finds itself point both to its success and to its limitations. Simultaneously marginal and central, it has offered a unique viewpoint to communication, among other disciplines, with its disruptive standpoint.

We see in this section that the sociocultural and critical traditions come together in defining the self as a product of social interaction. What characterizes the critical approaches to identity summarized in this section is the importance of power relations in society in determining where you position yourself vis-à-vis mainstream or marginalized society. This emphasis establishes a critical turn that this tradition brings to the discussion of communicators and communication. This distinction carries forward into many aspects of communication, as we will see in upcoming chapters.

APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Many of us begin our thinking about communication with the communicator.
Several generalizations characterize the individual as communicator.

1. Each communicator brings a special set of characteristics and resources to any encounter.

As a group, the theories described in this chapter are powerful in helping us understand the nature and genesis of individual differences. They also outline a

variety of psychological and social resources that make human communication possible.

Trait theories are appealing because they give us a set of labels to use when we are trying to describe a communicator's characteristics. For example, if you find that someone frequently tends to argue his point a lot, it might be useful to think of this person as "highly argumentative." Trait theories can also give you a good sense of your own styles of communication. You can use traits, too, to get a feel for the different styles that might have to be merged in a relationship or group encounter.

Trait theories, however, have their limitations. Primary is whether the trait actually exists or is, in fact, a construction — a putting together of certain variables or behaviors under a label. How "real" such traits are is open to discussion. Even if they are real, different labels could be used to identify those traits. What currently is called argumentativeness, for example, might have been labeled by another researcher as "outgoingness" or "critical engagement." The label has a lot to do with how we understand and operationalize a trait in the world. Finally, there is also the issue of how much control you have over your predisposition to respond in certain ways. For example, if you feel that you are low on the argumentativeness scale, how much freedom do you have to change this? If you were to follow the biological approach, you might conclude that you have very little control over your behavior. On the other hand, if you look at many of the sociocultural theories described in this chapter, you would conclude that traits are actually rather malleable.

Cognitive explanations of human behavior, including cybernetic theories of the cognitive system, take us well beyond traits by showing the mental resources that people bring to the communication encounter. These theories can help us understand what people do when they view a television news program, read a novel, attend a play, talk to a friend, or plan a project. These theories also give us a way to understand why equally intelligent, well-meaning, and experienced persons come to different opinions and behave differently within the same situation. Each person brings a set of mental resources to bear, and each person has a different cognitive system that absorbs, categorizes, organizes, and reorganizes information. Although you cannot normally control the hidden processes or mechanisms of thought, you can be aware of what information you have and lack, whether you are processing that information critically or peripherally, and the extent to which your ego involvement or existing attitudes affect the information you receive.

Sociocultural theories of the communicator bring an entirely different set of resources to light. They show us that our self-definitions and definitions of situations are critical in shaping our responses. They show us that our meanings for words and objects are intimately connected to our actions within situations. Sociocultural explanations give balance to trait theories by introducing choice into the formula. As communicators, we have many socially constructed meanings from which we draw in understanding and responding to events. At the same time, however, we do not have free choice to do whatever we want. Indeed, the social and cultural rules of meaning and action prefigure how we will interpret and act within a situation.

As you think about theories of the communicator, you may find it tempting to ask what makes a person effective as a communicator. In order to answer this

question, researchers have conducted many studies of communicator competence. Indeed, communicator competence has become an important concept in the communication literature. Ironically, however, we lack coherent theories of competence, which is why competence is not included as a theory in this chapter. Recently, Steven Wilson and Christina Sabee have provided an extremely helpful analysis of this problem.[72] According to these authors, scholars have had a hard time developing theories of competence because it is not a theoretical realm in and of itself but is related to many other theories. In other words, we must look at competence as a theoretical term relevant to other theories, not only of the communicator, but of messages, conversations, and relationships — all subjects of upcoming chapters.

As an application, then, think about translating the theories in this chapter and upcoming ones into questions of competence. For example, we might ask: (1) How can I make constructive attributions of my own and others' behavior — attributions that balance personal responsibility with situational factors? (2) How can I prepare myself to process messages in a more central and critical way? (3) How can I resolve dissonance in ways that achieve optimal balance between stability and change? (4) How can I interact with others in a way that enables me and other people to develop a healthy self-concept? (5) How can I reinterpret my emotions so that they help me grow and guide my actions toward productive, relationship-building ends? (6) How can I learn to consider carefully the self I wish to present in various social situations, so that I am effective in relating to others and in building a positive self-image at the same time?

2. A communicator's perspectives are never completely unique but always are shared to some extent with others.

What, exactly, do we share with other communicators? The theories in this chapter outline two types of shared resources. The first are cognitive mechanisms such as social judgment, attribution, information-integration, and cognitive routing. The second kinds of shared resources are social and cultural in nature and include rules, norms, meanings, emotions, and definitions of self. A fascinating quality of shared resources is that they show us how people can be both the same and different.

For example, social judgment theory says that people are the same because they all use mental anchors based on experience to make social judgments, and their ego involvement in an issue determines in large measure how much they will be persuaded by contrary points of view. At the same time, however, each person has a different set of anchors, so their judgments will differ. As ego involvement varies, too, the amount of influence you can have on others varies. People are the same in that they want to control the impression they make on others, but they are different in terms of what impression they want to make.

This idea of similarity and difference can be helpful in understanding communication situations, and the theories in this chapter give you a way to define what is happening, in terms of, say, information-integration or emotions, providing a frame of interpretation when you communicate with others. At the same time, the idea of similarity and difference helps explain why you might be very persuasive with one person but rejected entirely by another, or why you might

bow to the crowd after dropping your tray in the cafeteria, while your sister, in the same situation, might run out of the room to hide.

How can you be sure what mechanisms are actually operating in persuasion or information processing or social behavior? You can't. As always, realize that each theory is incomplete and continually shift your perspective in order to gain a full appreciation and understanding of what is happening in a communication situation.

3. A communicator's interpretations and actions are always organized according to certain expectations, ways of understanding, and categories of thought.

We do not live in an unorganized world of confusion. The human mind is power-ful, enabling us to sort out what we see, organize stimuli into categories, apply reasoning to what we experience, and integrate what all of this information means into an existing system of beliefs, attitudes, values, and perceptions. When we act in the world, we are acting on the basis of a highly organized and systematic set of understandings.

The theories detailed in this chapter provide a set of concepts that help us see some of the ways in which we organize our worlds of experience. A very strong theme of these theories is that our perceptions of self lie at the heart of our perceptions of the world. If you want to get a sense of how a person will un-derstand the world, develop a sense of how the person understands the self.

Social constructionist ideas of self are especially useful because they draw our attention to the ways in which the self-concept forms through social interac-tion with significant, or orientational, others. When we interact with those who are important in our lives, we are doing more than transmitting information: we are actually creating, changing, or reinforcing our ideas of self. We will return to the social construction of self in Chapter 6 to explore the ways in which forma-tion of self is an important outcome of conversation.

In this chapter we have encountered a wide variety of constructs, which have been given a host of interesting names: dissonance, elaboration, attitude, ex-pectancy, relevance, attribution, ego involvement, and more. The mere fact that these concepts vie for our attention as competing explanations of thought and action demonstrates the challenge of explaining cognition and action.

We believe that these theories can be very useful if applied judiciously. The cognitive mechanisms outlined by these theories are useful constructs, not uni-versally ordained categories of nature. Use these concepts to gain insight, not to predict truthful outcome. Realize that we do have minds, we do think, and we do integrate information. There is no need to become overly concerned debating the precise processes that always govern our organization of experience. At the same time, we can have a powerful say in the outcome of those processes.

4. A communicator's interpretations and actions change over time through interaction with others.

As we move now from this chapter on the individual communicator to interaction among communicators, you will come to realize how important social explanations are for a complete understanding of communication. With the exception of trait theories, all of the theories in this chapter anticipate this move. They all show how the individual's attitudes, beliefs, and values can change when messages are

received. They also hint at some of the things that will become important as communicators begin to select, plan, and deliver messages to others.

Most of the theories in this chapter paint a dynamic picture, more like a moving image than a still shot. We know, for example, that ego involvement is an important variable, but ego involvement changes over time. We know that as an individual gains more experience in a certain realm of life, that individual will develop the capacity to process information critically on that subject, and that information will impact the cognitive system differently than it would have earlier. We know from these theories that the self-concept is important as an organizing mechanism of the mind, but the self changes as we live out our lives in increasingly broader communities of interpretation and action.

A perennially popular application of the theories in this chapter is persuasion or influence. How can we use theories of communication to help us be more persuasive in interaction with other people? This question has been so important in the communication field that most sociopsychological and cybernetic theories of the communicator have been treated as "persuasion" theories. They not only provide insights into why and how people are persuaded but they provide some guidelines as to what you need to know about people in order to persuade them.[73]

◖ NOTES

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2. For an overview of several traits studied by communication researchers, see Howard Giles and Richard L. Street, Jr., "Communicator Characteristics and Behavior," in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, 2nd ed., ed. Mark L. Knapp and Gerald R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 103–61.
3. For a summary of this work, see Dominic A. Infante and Andrew S. Rancer, "Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness: A Review of Recent Theory and Research," in *Communication Yearbook 19*, ed. Brant R. Burleson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 319–52; Dominic A. Infante, Andrew S. Rancer, and Deanna F. Womack, *Building Communication Theory* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1993), 162–68.
4. Dominic A. Infante, Teresa A. Chandler, and Jill E. Rudd, "Test of an Argumentative Skill Deficiency Model of Interspousal Violence," *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 163–77.
5. This work is summarized in James C. McCroskey, "The Communication Apprehension Perspective," in *Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension*, ed. John A. Daly and James C. McCroskey (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 13–38.
6. Miles L. Patterson and Vicki Ritts, "Social and Communicative Anxiety: A Review and Meta-Analysis," in Brant R. Burleson, ed., *Communication Yearbook 20* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 263–303.
7. For descriptions and discussions of these models, see Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Steve Booth-Butterfield, "The Role of Affective Orientation in the Five Factor Personality Structure," *Communication Research Reports* 19 (2002): 301–13; James C. McCroskey, Alan D. Heisel, and Virginia Richmond, "Eysenck's BIG THREE and Communication Traits: Three Correlational Studies," *Communication Monographs* 68 (2001): 360–366; and Michael J. Beatty and James C. McCroskey, *The Biology of Communication: A Communibiological Perspective* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2001), 83–92.
8. J. Digman, "Personality Structure: Emergence of the Five-Factor Model," *Annual Review of Psychology* 41 (1990): 417–40. See also Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield, "The Role of Affective Orientation."

9. Beatty and McCroskey, *The Biology of Communication*; Michael J. Beatty, James C. McCroskey, and Alan D. Heisel, "Communication Apprehension as Temperamental Expression: A Communibiological Paradigm," *Communication Monographs* 65 (1998): 197–219. See also James C. McCroskey, ed., *Personality and Communication: Trait Perspectives* (New York: Hampton Press, 1998).

10. Hans J. Eysenck, *The Biological Dimensions of Personality* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1976).

11. Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958).

12. Heider, *Psychology*, p. 233.

13. For a recent summary, see Eliot R. Smith, "Social Cognition Contributions to Attribution Theory and Research," in *Social Cognition: Impact on Social Psychology*, ed. Patricia G. Devine, David L. Hamilton, and Thomas M. Ostrom (San Diego: Academic, 1994), 77–108. See also David R. Seibold and Brian H. Spitzberg, "Attribution Theory and Research: Formalization, Review, and Implications for Communication," in *Progress in Communication Sciences*, ed. Brenda Dervin and M. J. Voigt (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981), 3: 85–125; Alan L. Sillars, "Attribution and Communication," in *Social Cognition and Communication*, ed. Michael E. Roloff and Charles R. Berger (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982), 73–106.

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15. The first major work in this area was Muzafer Sherif and Carl I. Hovland, *Social Judgment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961). See also Muzafer Sherif, Carolyn Sherif, and Roger Nebergall, *Attitude and Attitude Change: The Social Judgment-Involvement Approach* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1965). For a brief overview of the theory, see Muzafer Sherif, *Social Interaction—Process and Products* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), chaps. 16–18. Several secondary sources are also available; see, for example, James B. Stiff, *Persuasive Communication* (New York: Guilford, 1994), 138–42; Leonard Martin and Abraham Tesser, eds., *The Construction of Social Judgments* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992); Daniel J. O'Keefe, *Persuasion: Theory and Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 29–44.

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53. Nadine Gordimer, *July's People* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981).

54. Marsha Houston, "When Black Women Talk With White Women: Why the Dialogues Are Difficult," in *Our Voices*, 4th edition, 2004, 98–104; and Marsha Houston and Olga Idriss Davis, ed., *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002), 205.

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58. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1989). See also David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender, and Identity: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002). An entire scholarly tradition related to performed identity is emerging and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 11. For an overview of the current state of performance studies in communication, see D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

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66. Leora Auslander, "Do Women's + Feminist + Men's + Lesbian and Gay + Queer Studies = Gender Studies?" *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1997): 11.

67. David J. Halperin, *St. Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

68. This point is developed in Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, 49.

69. Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, v.

70. These issues are discussed by Bryant Alexander, "Querying Queer Theory Again (or Queer Theory as Drag Performance)" in *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)*, ed. Gust A. Yep, Karen E. Lovaas, and John P. Elia (New York: Harrington Park Press/Haworth Press, 2003), 349–52.

71. For elaborations of this critique, see Bettina Heinz, "Sounds Queer to Me: The Politics of Disillusionment," in *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)*, ed. Gust A. Yep, Karen E. Lovaas, and John P. Elia (New York: Harrington Park Press/Haworth Press, 2003), 372. Giffney argues not that the term has become too broad but too narrow—that theorists want to use it again to refer simply to lesbian and gay studies. She believes the term still has performative power that is important to realize. See Noreen Giffney, "Denormatizing Queer Theory: More Than (Simply) Lesbian and Gay Studies," *Feminist Theory* 5 (2004): 73–78. Hines suggests that in discussions of transgender, the label has become too fixed, too homogenous. Queer theory, then, needs to bring to bear the differences that were central to its original meaning and develop those as part of the framework used to understand transgendered experience. See Sally Hines, "What's the Difference?: Bringing Particularity to Queer Studies of Transgender," *Journal of Gender Studies* 15 (2006): 49–66.

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73. This literature is reviewed by James Price Dillard and Linda J. Marshall, "Persuasion as a Social Skill," in *Handbook of Communication and Social Interaction Skill*, ed. John O. Greene and Brant R. Burleson (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003), 479–513.
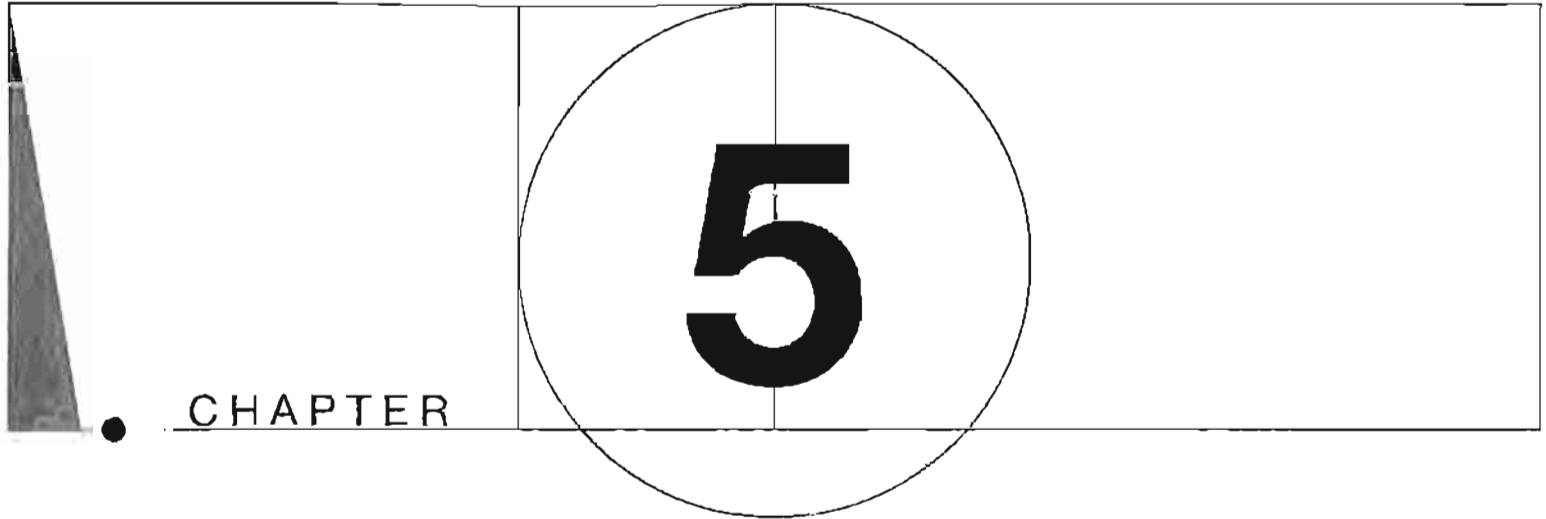
5

THE MESSAGE

Imagine that you would like to borrow $100 from your roommate to pay for a limousine for a special date. Your reason for needing the money is not all that great, but you think your roommate will go along. How, exactly, will you ask for this loan? You will probably give some thought to the language you use — the words and phrases. How will you deliver the message? What nonverbal cues and behaviors will go along with your words? While you may not be conscious of all that you take into account as you consider asking your roommate for a loan, you are engaged in a complicated process of message design.

In this example, as in much human communication, your words have a function beyond mere transfer of information. Your message has value as an act — a request to be exact — and your roommate will recognize this for what it is. So a particular type of interaction is involved. There is an additional level of functioning involved as you strategize how to make the request in a way that accomplishes several goals simultaneously. Clearly, you want money, but you probably have other goals too. You may want to save your roommate embarrassment, or, better, you might even want this person to feel good about giving you the money. It might be important for you to maintain a good relationship with your roommate, and your request could help or hurt in this regard, depending upon your strategy. All of these things will need to be integrated into your message.

Topics Addressed	Semiotic Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Sociopsychological Theories	Phenomenological Theories
Signs and symbols	Symbol theory of Susanne Langer			
Language	Classical Foundations			
Nonverbal behavior	Nonverbal codes Kinesics Proxemics			
Speech acts		Speech act theory		
Action assembly			Action-assembly theory	
Strategy choice			Compliance-gaining strategies Constructivism Politeness theory	
Message design		Burke's theory of identification Feminine style	Planning theory Message-design logics	
Interpreting messages		Muted-group theory	Semantic-meaning theory	Paul Ricoeur Stanley Fish Hans-Georg Gadamer

Once you make your request, your roommate will receive it and must do a bit of interpreting. What will your request mean? Will he see it as appropriate? Will he appreciate your request? Will your roommate understand that you are acting in friendship and hope to reciprocate sometime? In other words, your roommate will listen to what you say and how you say it and interpret the meaning of the message. Even if you decide to ask for the money indirectly rather than directly, your roommate will probably see right away that this is a request for money, but what else will he read into your message?

Notice that all of these questions focus on aspects of the message—how it will be structured and delivered, what symbols and words it will include, and how it will be interpreted. These are the kinds of questions addressed in this chapter, and a great deal of theory has been created to explain this process. The chapter map on page 104 provides a list of the several traditions and topics addressed.

◖ THE SEMIOTIC TRADITION

Semiotics has been especially important in helping us understand what goes into a message—its parts—and how these are organized structurally. These theories also help us understand how the message comes to have meaning. If you give a speech, for example, the members of your audience tune into the words you select, your grammar, your tone of voice and gestures, your eye contact, and the way you position yourself in regard to the audience. Semiotic theories would be less concerned with your characteristics as a communicator, the audience response to your message, or the social and cultural situation in which the speech is delivered, although semiotic theories certainly recognize that the meaning that you and your audience assign to the words and gestures of your speech depend upon all of these things. Here we will include three types of semiotic theories—symbol theory, theories of language, and theories of nonverbal behavior.

Symbol Theory: Susanne Langer

A prominent and useful theory of symbols was created by Susanne Langer, whose *Philosophy in a New Key* has received considerable attention by students of symbolism.[1] Langer's theory is useful because it defines several concepts and terms

that are commonly used in the communication field. As such, this theory provides a kind of touchstone for the semiotic tradition in communication studies.

Langer, a philosopher, considers symbolism to be the central concern of philosophy because it underlies all human knowing and understanding. According to Langer, all animal life is dominated by feeling, but human feeling is mediated by conceptions, symbols, and language. Animals respond to signs, but humans go far beyond simple signs by making use of symbols. A *sign* is a stimulus that signals the presence of something else. For example, if you train your dog to roll over when you give the appropriate command, the word *roll* is a sign to the dog to turn over. Thus a sign corresponds closely to the actual signified action. Clouds can be a sign of rain, laughter a sign of happiness, and an orange "workers ahead" sign evidence of upcoming construction. These simple relationships are called *signification*. Because of signification, you will slow down when you see an orange construction sign.

Symbols, in contrast, operate in a more complex way by allowing a person to think about something apart from its immediate presence. A *symbol* is "an instrument of thought."[2] Symbols are human conceptualizations about things; a symbol stands for something else. While laughter is a sign of happiness, we can turn the laughter into a symbol as well and make it mean a lot

of different things apart from its direct reference. It can mean enjoyment, fun, mocking, derision, tension release, among many other things. Symbols, then, are central to human life, and the process of symbolization is as important to humans as eating and sleeping. We orient to our physical and social worlds through symbols and their meanings, and the meanings we give things are often far more important than the actual object or experience to which they refer.

A symbol or set of symbols works by communicating a *concept,* a general idea, pattern, or form. According to Langer, the concept is a meaning shared among communicators. The shared, agreed-upon meaning is the denotative meaning, and the personal image or meaning, in contrast, is the connotative meaning. For example, if you were to look at a painting by Vincent van Gogh, you would assign a meaning shared with virtually all other viewers—a denotative meaning. The painter himself had his own personal meaning or *connotation* for what the painting means, however.

> In van Gogh's painting, *Still Life with Open Bible,* for instance, you would see a large Bible sitting next to a candle. Next to the Bible is a small copy of a novel, and if you looked closely, you would see that it is Emile Zola's *The Joy of Living.* The painting, then, denotes a Bible, candle, and book. However, for van Gogh himself, the painting had a much more personal connotation, symbolizing the life and death of his father, a minister. The Bible, therefore, is a symbol of the father. His death is symbolized by the candle, which casts a light on a passage from Isaiah about the suffering servant. The title of the smaller book symbolizes the elder van Gogh's life.[3]

Langer sees *meaning,* then, as the complex relationship among the symbol, the object, and the person, involving both denotation (shared meaning) and connotation (private meaning).

Abstraction, a process of forming a general idea from a variety of concrete experiences, builds on the denotations and connotations of symbols. Langer notes that humans possess a built-in tendency to abstract. It is a process of leaving out details in conceiving of objects, events, or situations in ever more general terms. For example, the word *dog* refers denotatively to a four-legged animal, but this is never the entire

picture; any level of detail or abstraction always leaves something out. The more abstract the symbol, the sketchier the conception: A *dog* is a *mammal,* which is an *animal;* an animal is an *organism,* which is a *living thing.* Each successive term in this series leaves out more details and is therefore more abstract than the previous term.

Although denotations usually leave out a lot of detail, connotations can include a great deal of detail about what the symbol means to the individual. The connotations you have for *dog* can get quite specific, as you think about the dog you had as a child, a dog that bit you once, or the dog your neighbor has that barks all night long. Neither connotative nor denotative conceptions completely capture what a *dog* is.

Human symbol use, then, is complicated by the fact that there is no direct relationship between a symbol and an actual object. It is made even more complicated by the fact that we use symbols in combination. The real significance of language is in *discourse,* in which we tie words together into sentences and paragraphs. Discourse expresses *propositions,* which are complex symbols that present a picture of something. The word *dog* brings up a conception, but its combination with other words provides a unified picture: *The little brown dog is nestled against my foot.* The potential for combination and organization in language makes language a truly rich and indispensable tool for human beings. With language we think, we feel, and we communicate. Langer calls this capacity *discursive symbolism.*

Langer also discusses the importance of nondiscursive, or *presentational,* symbols. Some of the most important human experiences are emotional and are best communicated through forms such as worship, art, and music. Indeed, van Gogh's painting is a presentational symbol. We will now turn to theories that add to Susanne Langer's ideas about both linguistic and nonverbal forms of symbols.

Classical Foundations of Language

The study of language has been heavily influenced by semiotics and vice versa.[4] In this book, we do not have sufficient space to elaborate on

linguistic theories per se, but it is important to know something about the structure of language as it influences messages. The modern founder of structural linguistics was Ferdinand de Saussure, who made substantial contributions to the structural tradition in communication. Saussure teaches that signs, including language, are arbitrary.[5] He notes that different languages use different words for the same thing and that there is usually no physical connection between a word and its referent. Therefore, signs are conventions governed by rules. Not only does this assumption support the idea that language is a structure, but it also reinforces the general idea that language and reality are separate. Saussure, then, sees language as a structured system representing reality.

Saussure believes that linguistic researchers must pay attention to language forms, such as speech sounds, words, and grammar, because although language structure is arbitrary, language *use* is not. It requires established conventions. In other words, you cannot choose any word you wish to express meaning nor can you rearrange grammar at a whim if you wish to be understood.

Language described in structural terms, then, is strictly a system of formal relations without substance. Only when meanings are attached to the structural features of language does it come to represent something. The key to understanding the structure of the system, for Saussure, is *difference*. The elements and relations embedded in language are distinguished by their differences. One sound differs from another (like the sounds of *p* and *b*); one word differs from another (like the words *pat* and *bat*); one grammatical form differs from another (like the constructions *has run* and *will run*). This system of differences constitutes the structure of the language. Both in spoken and written language, distinctions among signified objects in the world are identified by corresponding distinctions among linguistic signs. No linguistic unit has significance in and of itself; only in contrast with other linguistic units does a particular structure acquire meaning.

Saussure believes that all a person knows of the world is determined by language. Unlike most other semioticians, Saussure does not see signs as referential. Signs do not *designate* objects but rather *constitute* them. There can be no object apart from the signs used to designate it. This connects clearly to Langer's idea that our worlds consist of the meanings attached to important symbols in our lives.

Saussure makes an important distinction between formal language, which he calls *langue*, and the actual use of language in communication, which he refers to as *parole*. These two French terms correspond in English to *language* and *speech* respectively. Language (*langue*) is a formal system that can be analyzed apart from its use in everyday life. Speech (*parole*) is the actual use of language to accomplish a purpose. Individual communicators do not create the rules of language. These rules are worked out over a long period and "given" to us when we are socialized into a language community. In contrast, communicators do create forms of speech all the time.[6] In other words, you don't sit around with your friends and invent new grammatical forms to designate past, present, and future; but you do, through interaction, make use of these forms in quite creative and constantly changing ways. This is the difference between *language* and *speech*.

A good example of the highly flexible and changing nature of speech is the shift in how the terms "to be" and "like" are used in much American parochial speech. The following could never be predicted from formal rules of grammar, and yet most Americans will easily understand this:

> I was, like, *How could you do this to me?* And he was, like, *What do you mean?* Like he couldn't admit what he had done, right? So, I was, like, like, *Oh, playing dumb now are we?* [laugh] And he was, all, you know, like, you know, *What, what?* So I was, like, *Oh, whatever.*

Linguistics, to Saussure, is the study of *langue*, not *parole*: "Taken as a whole, speech [*parole*] is many-sided and heterogeneous; straddling several areas simultaneously . . . we cannot put it into any category of human facts, for we cannot discover its unity. Language [*langue*], on the

contrary, is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification."[7] We cannot, then, have speech without language, but speech is less regular and more variable than the formal system of language from which it derives. In other words, when you speak you are using language, but you are also adapting it—using speech—to enable you to achieve communication goals.

Influenced by the work of Saussure, structural language theorists developed the standard model of sentence structure between 1930 and 1950.[8] Basically, this model breaks a sentence down into components in hierarchical fashion. Sounds and sound groups combine to form word parts, which in turn combine to form words, then phrases. Phrases are put together to make clauses or sentences. Thus, language can be analyzed on various levels, roughly corresponding to sounds, words, and phrases. Structural analysis by itself, however, did not prove powerful in explaining human use of language. Consequently, linguists have moved beyond the structural approach and more commonly today embrace a different approach called *generative grammar*.

Primarily attributed to the work of Noam Chomsky and his colleagues, generative grammar is actually more akin to the sociopsychological tradition than to the semiotic one. As a young linguist in the 1950s, Chomsky parted company with the classical theorists to develop an approach that since has become the mainstay of contemporary linguistics.[9] This branch of linguistics is more concerned with the human cognitive system—how rules of language are embedded in the human mind and how these mental resources enable us to generate spoken language. Like any theoretical tradition, generative grammar now has several positions within it that go well beyond the scope of this book. Communication scholars have been less interested in the structure of language and mental linguistic rules and more interested in how people actually bring language and behavior together in discourse to accomplish goals. An important aspect of this process is that we integrate verbal, or linguistics, and nonverbal elements, and it is to these theories that we now turn.

Theories of Nonverbal Coding

Communication scholars recognize that language and behavior more often than not work together, so theories of nonverbal signs are an important element within the semiotic tradition. Scholars disagree about what nonverbal communication is, as Randall Harrison points out:

> The term "nonverbal communication" has been applied to a bewildering array of events. Everything from the territoriality of animals to the protocol of diplomats. From facial expression to muscle twitches. From inner, but inexpressible, feelings to outdoor public monuments. From the message of massage to the persuasion of a punch. From dance and drama to music and mime. From the flow of affect to the flow of traffic. From extrasensory perception to the economic policies of international power blocks. From fashion and fad to architecture and analog computer. From the smell of roses to the taste of steak. From Freudian symbol to astrological sign. From the rhetoric of violence to the rhetoric of topless dancers.[10]

Making the question of nonverbal communication even more challenging, research on this subject is extensive and comes from many fields.[11] Various topics relevant to nonverbal communication are covered later in the book; here we will concentrate on structural approaches to nonverbal coding, which is central to the semiotics of communication.

Nonverbal Codes.   Nonverbal codes are clusters of behaviors that are used to convey meaning. Judee Burgoon characterizes nonverbal code systems as possessing several structural properties. First, nonverbal codes tend to be *analogic* rather than digital. Whereas digital signals are discrete, like numbers and letters, analogic signals are continuous, forming a spectrum or range, like sound volume and the brightness of light. Therefore, nonverbal signals such as facial expression and vocal intonation cannot simply be classified into discrete categories but rather need to be seen as gradations.

A second feature found in some, but not all, nonverbal codes is *iconicity*, or resemblance. Iconic codes resemble the thing being symbolized

(as when you depict the shape of something with your hands). Third, certain nonverbal codes seem to elicit *universal meaning*. This is especially the case with such signals as threats and emotional displays, which may be biologically determined. Fourth, nonverbal codes enable the *simultaneous transmission* of several messages. With the face, body, voice, and other signals, several different messages can be sent at once. Fifth, nonverbal signals often evoke an *automatic response*—stepping on the brake at a red light. Finally, nonverbal signals are often emitted *spontaneously*, as when you let off nervous energy by playing with your hair or jiggling your foot.

Nonverbal codes have semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic dimensions. *Semantics* refers to the meanings of a sign. For example, two fingers held up behind someone's head is a way of calling him a "devil." *Syntactics* refers to the ways signs are organized into systems with other signs. One might, for example, hold up two fingers behind someone's head, laugh, and say "Joke's on you!" Here a gesture, a vocal sign (laughing), facial expressions, and language combine to create an overall meaning. *Pragmatics* refers to the effects or behaviors elicited by a sign or group of signs, as when the "devil" sign is taken as a joke rather than an insult. Not unlike verbal forms, the meanings attached to nonverbal forms are context bound or determined in part by the situation in which they are produced. Both language and nonverbal forms allow communicators to combine relatively few signs into an almost limitless variety of complex expressions of meaning.

Nonverbal code systems are often classified according to the type of activity used in the code. Burgoon suggests seven types: kinesics (bodily activity); vocalics or paralanguage (voice); physical appearance; haptics (touch); proxemics (space); chronemics (time); and artifacts (objects).[12] Of these, kinesics and proxemics have been studied most extensively.

Kinesics. Ray Birdwhistell is considered the originator of the field of kinesics.[13] An anthropologist interested in language, Birdwhistell uses linguistics as a model for his kinesics work.

So strong is this connection, in fact, that the popular term for kinesics is *body language*. In his book, *Kinesics and Context*, Birdwhistell lists seven assumptions on which he bases his theory of body language.[14]

1. All body movements have potential meaning in communicative contexts. Somebody can always assign meaning to any bodily activity.
2. Behavior can be analyzed because it is organized, and this organization can be subjected to systematic analysis.
3. Although bodily activity has biological limitations, the use of bodily motion in interaction is considered to be a part of the social system. Different groups will therefore use gestures—and any other movement of the body—differently.
4. People are influenced by the visible bodily activity of others.
5. The ways in which bodily activity functions in communication can be investigated.
6. The meanings discovered in research on kinesics result from the behavior being studied as well as the methods used for research.
7. A person's use of bodily activity will have idiosyncratic features but will also be part of a larger social system shared with others.

Building on Birdwhistell's work, Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen collaborated on research that led to an excellent general model of kinesic behavior, concentrating their work on the face and hands.[15] Their goal was ambitious: "Our aim has been to increase understanding of the individual, his feelings, mood, personality, and attitudes, and to increase understanding of any given interpersonal interaction, the nature of the relationship, the status or quality of communication, what impressions are formed, and what is revealed about interpersonal style or skill."[16] These authors analyzed nonverbal activity three ways: by origin, by coding, and by usage.

Origin is the source of an act. A nonverbal behavior may be *innate* (built into the nervous system); *species-constant* (universal behavior required for survival); or *variant* across cultures, groups, and individuals. As examples, one could speculate that eyebrow raising as a sign of

surprise is innate, that marking territory is species-constant, and that shaking the head back and forth to indicate *no* is culture-specific.[17]

Coding is the relationship of the act to its meaning. An act may be *arbitrary*, with no meaning inherent in the sign itself. By convention in U.S. culture, for example, we agree that nodding is an indication of yes, but this coding is purely arbitrary and in many cultures means exactly the opposite. Other nonverbal signs are *iconic* and resemble the thing being signified. For instance, we often draw pictures in the air or position our hands to illustrate what we are talking about. The third category of coding is *intrinsic*. Intrinsically coded cues contain their meaning within them and are themselves part of what is being signified. Crying is an example of intrinsic coding. Crying is a sign of emotion, but it is also part of the emotion itself.

The third way to analyze a behavior is by *usage.* Usage includes the degree to which a nonverbal behavior is intended to convey information. A *communicative act* is used deliberately to convey meaning. *Interactive acts* actually influence the behavior of the other participants. An act is both communicative and interactive if it is intentional and influential. For example, if you deliberately wave to a friend as a sign of greeting and the friend waves back, your cue is communicative and interactive. Some behaviors are not intended to be communicative but nevertheless provide information for the perceiver. Such acts are said to be *informative.* On a day when you are feeling less than friendly, you may duck into a hallway to avoid meeting an acquaintance coming your way. If the other person sees the avoidance, your behavior has been informative even though you did not intend to communicate.

According to Ekman and Friesen, all nonverbal behavior can be classified as one of five types, depending on origin, coding, and usage. The first type is the *emblem.* Emblems can be verbally translated into a rather precise meaning. They are normally used in a deliberate fashion to communicate a particular message. The "V" for victory sign and the black power fist are examples. Emblems emerge out of cultures, and emblems may be either arbitrary or iconic.

Illustrators are the second kind of nonverbal cues. Illustrators are used to depict what is being said verbally. They are intentional, though we may not always be directly aware of them, and include such things as pointing or drawing a picture in the air. Illustrators are learned nonverbals that may be informative or communicative in use; occasionally they are interactive as well.

The third type of nonverbal behavior is the *adaptor*, which serves to facilitate release of bodily tension. Examples are hand wringing, head scratching, or foot jiggling. *Self-adaptors* are directed at one's own body. They include scratching, stroking, grooming, and squeezing. *Alter-adaptors*, like slapping someone on the back, are directed to another's body. *Object-adaptors,* such as twisting a paper clip, are directed at things. In any case, adaptors can be iconic or intrinsic. Rarely are they intentional, and one is usually not aware of one's own adaptive behaviors. Although they are rarely communicative, they are sometimes interactive and often informative.

Regulators, the fourth type of behavior, are used to control or coordinate interaction. For example, we use eye contact to signal speaking and listening roles in a conversation. Regulators are primarily interactive. They are coded intrinsically or iconically, and their origin is cultural learning.

The final category of behavior is the *affect display.* These behaviors, which may be in part innate, involve the display of feelings and emotions. The face is a particularly rich source for affect display, although other parts of the body may also be involved. Affect displays are intrinsically coded. They are rarely communicative, often interactive, and always informative.[18]

Proxemics.   A second category of nonverbals that has been studied extensively in communication is proxemics. Specifically, *proxemics* refers to the use of space in communication. It is the study of how humans structure microspace in the practice of their daily lives. Edward Hall, the founder of proxemics, describes it as the distances between people in the "conduct of daily transactions, the organization of space in . . .

houses and buildings, and ultimately the layout of . . . towns."[19]

According to Hall, the way space is used in interaction is very much a cultural matter. Different senses are important to different cultures. In some countries, such as the United States, sight and hearing predominate; in other places, such as Arab cultures, smell is also important. And some cultures rely on touch more than others. In general, the predominant senses of a culture partially determine the ways in which space is used within that culture. Cultures also have different definitions of the self, which also affect how space is defined and used. People in most Western cultures learn to identify the self through the skin and clothes. Arabs, however, place the self deeper in the middle of the body.

Hall defines three basic types of space. *Fixed-feature space* consists of unmovable things such as walls and rooms. *Semi-fixed-feature space* includes movable objects like furniture. *Informal space* is the personal territory around the body that travels with a person and determines the interpersonal distance between people. Anglo-American culture, for example, uses four discernible distances: intimate (0 to 18 inches), personal (1 to 4 feet), social (4 to 12 feet), and public (more than 12 feet).

Hall also delineates eight factors that may affect how space is used when people interact in conversation:

1. *Posture—sex factors:* These include the sex of the participant and the basic body position (standing, sitting, lying).
2. *Sociofugal-sociopetal axis:* The word *sociofugal* means discouragement of interaction, and *sociopetal* implies encouragement. Axis is the angle of the shoulders relative to the other person. The speakers may be facing each other, may be back to back, or may be positioned toward any other angle in the radius. Thus, some angles, like face to face, encourage interaction, while others, like back to back, discourage it.
3. *Kinesthetic factors:* This is the closeness of the individuals in terms of touch. Individuals may be in physical contact or within close

distance, they may be outside body contact distance, or they may be positioned anywhere in between these extremes. This factor also includes the positioning of body parts as well as which parts are touching.
4. *Touching behavior:* People may be involved in caressing and holding, feeling, prolonged holding, pressing against, spot touching, accidental brushing, or no contact.
5. *Visual code:* This category includes the manner of eye contact ranging from direct (eye to eye) to no contact.
6. *Thermal code:* This element involves the perceived heat from the other communicator.
7. *Olfactory code:* This factor includes the kind and degree of odor perceived in the conversation.
8. *Voice loudness:* The loudness of speech can affect interpersonal space.

Notice that all of the theories in this section—theories of symbols, language, and nonverbal communication—share the idea that messages consist of certain parts and features, including verbal (linguistic) and nonverbal (behavioral), to which communicators assign meaning. This idea is the essence of semiotic thinking, but it only makes up a very small part of the large tapestry of communication.

The study of language can relate to a number of traditions, depending on the focus. Studies that look at the relationship of language to power will reflect something of the critical tradition, studies that examine the use of language by various cultural groups will reflect the sociocultural, and studies that look at how we interpret the language of texts will clearly reflect the phenomenological. Yet, the study of the structure of language is inherently semiotic because it treats signs as a bridge between the world of experience and the world of understanding. Language, then, is a place where the traditions can and do come together, with many critical, sociocultural, and phenomenological theories having a semiotic base.

Studies of nonverbal communication can also be a nexus of traditions. For example, nonverbal behavior is at once semiotic and cultural. When

the two are brought together in a single view, the semiotic and sociocultural traditions merge. You can look at nonverbal behavior as a kind of individual behavior as well, which can bring together the semiotic and sociopsychological traditions. In fact, many nonverbal communication theories do take a distinctly psychological approach and are, in other chapters of this book, classified with the latter tradition. To continue our exploration of the message, let us now turn to the sociocultural tradition.

◖ THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

The semiotic tradition in communication theory is helpful for showing us the structural components and organization of a message, but communication is a great deal more than the structure of a message. Important too is the question of what we do with words and nonverbal codes. To answer this question, we move now to the sociocultural tradition. This tradition moves us away from individual differences and cognitive processing to social linkages, groups, and meanings that are worked out through interaction. Here we look at theories of speech acts, identification, and language and gender.

Speech-Act Theory

If you make a promise, you are communicating an intention about something you will do in the future, and you are expecting the other communicator to realize from what you have said what your intention is. If you say, "I promise to pay you back," you assume the other person knows the meaning of the words. Knowing the words is not enough. Knowing what you intend to accomplish by using the words is vital. Speech-act theory, most notably attributed to John Searle, is designed to help us understand how people accomplish things with their words.[20]

Whenever you make a statement like, "I will pay you back," you are accomplishing several things. First, you are producing a piece of discourse. This is called your *utterance act*, a simple

pronunciation of the words in the sentence. Second, you are asserting something about the world, or performing a *propositional act*. In other words, you are saying something either you believe to be true, or you are trying to get others to believe to be true. Third, and most important from a speech-act perspective, you are fulfilling an intention, which is called an *illocutionary act*. The illocutionary act is so central to this theory that we will spend some time with it in this chapter. Before we do, however, let's look at the fourth possible accomplishment of a message. This is the *perlocutionary act*, which is designed to have an actual effect on the other person's behavior.

Let's say that your friend sends you an e-mail that says, "I want to go out tonight." Your friend's English sentence is an *utterance act*, not unusual or problematic. Second, she expressed a *proposition* or truth statement that means something about what she wants to do, but again, in this case, it is hardly worth mentioning because it is so obvious. Third, your friend's message is an *illocutionary act* because it makes what you interpret to be an offer or invitation—asking you to go out with her. Fourth, she is trying to get you to actually do something, and if you accept her invitation, she has completed a successful *perlocutionary act.*

These distinctions are more important than they sound. Let's begin with the difference between illocution and perlocution. An illocution is an act in which the speaker's primary concern is that the listener understand the *intention*—to make a promise, an invitation, a request, or whatever. A perlocution is an act in which the speaker expects the listener not only to understand the intention but to act on it. If you say, "I am thirsty," with the intention of having your brother understand that you need something to drink, you are performing an illocutionary act. If you also want him to bring you a Diet Coke®, you are delivering a perlocutionary act. In the speech-act literature, this example is called an indirect request, and it is both illocutionary and perlocutionary.

Now let's look at the distinction between propositional and illocutionary acts. A proposition, as one aspect of the content of a statement,

designates some quality or association of an object, situation, or event. "The cake is good," "Salt is harmful to the body," and "Her name is Marta" are all examples of propositions. Propositions can be evaluated in terms of their truth value, but—here is where speech-act theory has been so important—you almost always want to communicate something more than just the truth of a proposition: You want to do something else with your words.

In speech-act theory, truth is not considered terribly important. Instead, the real question is what a speaker intends to do by uttering a proposition. For Searle, then, propositions must always be viewed as part of a larger context—the illocution. Some examples are: I *ask* whether the cake is good; I *warn* you that salt is harmful to the body; I *state* that her name is Marta. What the speaker is doing with the proposition is the speech act— in these examples, *asking*, *warning*, and *stating*.

The meaning of a speech act is its *illocutionary force*. For example, the statement, "I'm hungry," could count as a request if the speaker's intent is to have the listener offer food. On the other hand, it could count as an offer, if the speaker means to say that he is going to start making dinner; or, it might simply have the illocutionary force of a statement designed just to convey information and nothing more. We know the intention behind a certain message, according to Searle, because we share a common language game, consisting of a set of rules that helps us define the illocutionary force of a message.

Searle states fundamentally that "speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behavior."[21] Two types of rules are important—constitutive and regulative. *Constitutive rules* actually create games; that is, the game is created, or "constituted," by its rules. For example, the game of football exists only by virtue of its rules. The rules make up the game. When you observe people following that set of rules, you know the game of football is being played. These rules therefore tell you what to interpret as football, as opposed to baseball or soccer. In speech acts, constitutive rules tell you what to interpret as a promise as opposed to a request or a command.

Your intention is largely understood by another person because of the constitutive rules; they tell others what to count a particular kind of speech act as.

For example, how do you know a promise when you hear one? Promising involves five basic rules: First, it must include a sentence indicating the speaker will do some future act. Second, the utterance only counts as a promise if the listener prefers that the speaker do the act rather than not do it. In other words, in the context of the interaction, the listener is expecting a promise. Third, a statement is a promise only if done outside the normal course of events. If you do what you normally would do, a promise is not needed. Fourth, the speaker must intend to do the act. Finally, a promise involves the establishment of an obligation for the speaker to do the act. These five rules "constitute" a sufficient set of conditions for a speech act to count as a promise.

Although many speech acts are direct and involve the use of an explicit statement of intent, other speech acts are indirect. To request that his family come to the table for dinner, a father might say, "Is anybody hungry?" On the face this appears to be a question, but in actuality it is an indirect request and may even be a command.

Searle outlines five types of illocutionary acts. The first he calls *assertives*. An assertive is a statement that commits the speaker to advocate the truth of a proposition. It includes such acts as stating, affirming, concluding, and believing. The second are *directives*—illocutions that attempt to get the listener to do something. They are commands, requests, pleadings, prayers, entreaties, invitations, and so forth. *Commissives*, the third type, commit the speaker to a future act. They consist of such things as promising, vowing, pledging, contracting, and guaranteeing. The fourth, *expressives*, are acts that communicate some aspect of the speaker's psychological state, such as thanking, congratulating, apologizing, consoling, and welcoming. Finally, a *declaration* is designed to create a proposition that, by its very assertion, makes it so. Examples include appointing, marrying, firing, and resigning. To illustrate, you are not married until an

authorized person actually says the words, *I pronounce you husband and wife.*

Any illocutionary act must adhere to a basic set of constitutive rules in order to count as an illocution. The *propositional content rule* specifies some condition of the referenced object. In a promise, for example, the speaker must state that a future act will be done—to repay a debt perhaps. *Preparatory rules* involve the presumed preconditions in the speaker and hearer necessary for the act to take place. For example, in a promise, the utterance has no meaning unless the hearer would rather the future act be done than not be done. In our earlier illustration, the hearer wants to get repaid. The *sincerity rule* requires the speaker to mean what is said. You must truly intend to repay the debt for the statement to count as a promise. The *essential rule* states that the act is indeed taken by the hearer and speaker to represent what it appears to be on the face. In other words the promise establishes a contractual obligation between speaker and hearer. These types of constitutive rules are believed to apply to a wide variety of illocutionary acts, such as requesting, asserting, questioning, thanking, advising, warning, greeting, and congratulating.

The second kind of rule required for an illocutionary act is regulative. *Regulative rules* provide guidelines for acting within a game. The behaviors are known and available before being used in the act, and they tell us how to use speech to accomplish a particular intention. For example, if I want something, I make a request. When I request something of you, you are obligated either to grant the request or to turn it down.

Speech acts are not successful when their illocutionary force is not understood, and they can be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they employ the rules of that speech act. Whereas propositions are evaluated in terms of truth or *validity*, speech acts are evaluated in terms of *felicity*, or the degree to which the conditions of the act are met. The felicity of a promise is whether the essential rules for executing a promise have been met.

We include classical speech-act theory in this chapter because it focuses on the elements of a message that constitute particular speech acts.

Speech-act theory identifies what it takes to make a successful statement, to have an intention understood. But speech acts are rarely isolated; they are usually part of ongoing conversations. How we organize conversations is important to communication theory, and we take up this subject in detail in Chapter 6.

Kenneth Burke's Theory of Identification

Searle's work helps us understand how communicators assign meaning to a speech act, but what do speech acts actually do in terms of helping communicators bridge differences among them? Kenneth Burke's work helps us answer this question. Kenneth Burke is a giant among symbol theorists.[22] He wrote over a period of 50 years, and his theory is one of the most comprehensive of all symbol theories. In surveying Burke's communication theory, we will begin with a summary of his concept of action. We then will turn to his central ideas on symbols, language, and communication.

Burke starts with the distinction between action and motion.[23] *Action* consists of purposeful, voluntary behaviors; *motions* are nonpurposeful, nonmeaningful ones. Objects and animals possess motion, but only human beings have action. Burke views the individual as a biological and neurological being, distinguished by symbol-using behavior or the ability to act. People are symbol-creating, symbol-using, and symbol-misusing animals. They create symbols to name things and situations; they use symbols for communication; and they often abuse symbols by misusing them to their disadvantage.

Burke's view of symbols is broad, including an array of linguistic and nonverbal elements as well. People filter reality through a symbolic screen. Burke agrees that language functions as the vehicle for action. Because of the social need for people to cooperate in their actions, language shapes behavior. Especially intriguing for Burke is the notion that a person can symbolize symbols. One can talk about speech and can write about words. History itself is a process of writing about what people have already spoken and

written in the course of events, thus adding another layer of symbols to the actual events.

Language, as seen by Burke, is always emotionally loaded. No word can be neutral. As a result, your attitudes, judgments, and feelings invariably appear in the language you use. Language is by nature selective and abstract, focusing attention on particular aspects of reality at the expense of other aspects. Language is economical, but it is also ambiguous. Language can bring us together or divide us—and this paradox plays an important role in Burke's theory. When symbols bring people together into a common way of understanding, *identification* is said to occur. The opposite, *division* or separation, can also happen; language can promote identification, or it can promote separation and division.[24]

When you and a friend are relaxing next to the swimming pool on a warm summer morning, you communicate with each other in a free and easy manner because you share meanings for the language in use. You are, in Burke's terms, experiencing *consubstantiality*. On the other hand, when you are trying to order rice in a remote Indonesian restaurant, you may feel frustration because of your lack of shared meaning with the waiter. Consubstantiality is one way *identification* is created between people. In a spiraling fashion, as identification increases, shared meaning increases, thereby improving understanding. Identification thus can be a means to persuasion and effective communication, or it can be an end in itself. Identification can be conscious or unconscious, planned or unplanned.

Three overlapping sources of identification exist, according to Burke. *Material identification* results from goods, possessions, and things, like owning the same kind of car or having similar tastes in clothes. *Idealistic identification* results from shared ideas, attitudes, feelings, and values, such as being a member of the same church or political party. *Formal identification* results from the arrangement, form, or organization of an event in which both parties participate.[25] If two people who are introduced shake hands, the conventional form of handshaking causes some identification to take place. Identification is not an either/or occurrence but a matter of degree.

Some consubstantiality will always be present merely by virtue of the shared humanness of any two people. Identification can be great or small, and it can be increased or decreased by the actions of the communicators.

People of lower strata in a hierarchy often identify with people at the top of the hierarchy, despite tremendous differences or division. This kind of identification can be seen, for example, in the mass following of a charismatic leader. In such a situation, individuals perceive in others an embodiment of the perfection for which they themselves strive. Second, the mystery surrounding the charismatic person simultaneously tends to hide the division that exists. Burke refers to this phenomenon as *identification through mystification*.[26]

Burke introduces another term that helps explain how identification works. This is the concept of *guilt*. This term is Burke's all-purpose word for any feeling of tension within a person—anxiety, embarrassment, self-hatred, disgust, and so forth. For Burke, guilt is a condition caused by symbol use. He identifies three related sources of guilt, the first of which is the *negative*. Through language, people moralize by constructing myriad rules and proscriptions. These rules are never entirely consistent, and in following one rule, you necessarily are breaking another, creating guilt. Religions, professions, organizations, families, and communities all have implicit rules about how to behave. We learn these throughout life and therefore judge almost any action as good or bad. Such judgments are a source of guilt as well.

The second reason for guilt is the *principle of perfection*.[27] People are sensitive to their failings. Humans can imagine (through language) a state of perfection. Then, by their very nature, they spend their lives striving for whatever degree of this perfection they set for themselves. Guilt arises as a result of the discrepancy between the real and the ideal. A peace activist might be motivated by this kind of guilt, for example, when speaking at a rally. The activist declares that war is a barbaric and inappropriate method of resolving conflict in the 21st century. This speaker can imagine a world without war and is motivated to speak out because of the principle of perfection.

A third reason for guilt is the *principle of hierarchy*. In seeking order, people structure society in social pyramids or hierarchies (social ratings, social orderings), a process which is done with symbols. Competitions and divisions result among classes and groups in the hierarchy, and guilt results. Ethnic strife is a perfect example. Burke, then, places strong emphasis on the role of language and symbols in bringing people together or driving them apart.[28] He shows that we can develop strategies for doing either.

Although Burke's theory is hard to place in this book, we see it primarily as a theory of the message because Burke is concerned with the ways in which messages can be structured to create identification or division. Burke observes that communicators develop *strategies* for identification and division. In preparing a speech, for example, you may want to bring certain audiences into your way of thinking through identification, while distancing yourself from other audiences by creating division. Politicians do this all the time. Message strategies, then, make use of forms of identification that will create commonality with certain listeners. Such strategies will almost certainly involve guilt (in the Burkean sense). Burke's intention was not to provide a list of ready strategies but to present a set of ideas that speakers can use to determine in a particular case the unique forms of identification (and perhaps division) that might be used in the message.

Burke wrote throughout the middle of the 20th century, but his ideas anticipated a whole movement in communication research around message strategies, which, ironically, were produced not within Burke's tradition at all but from a psychological perspective. We present some of these theories that deal with message strategy later in the chapter. For now, let's move to the role of language and gender, an area of investigation that, like Burke, takes seriously the linguistic nature of the world.

Language and Gender

In the past 30 years, a great deal of work has been produced on communication and gender. In this section we look at theories that relate gender to the sociocultural tradition. All of these theories are concerned with how gender impacts language and in turn constructs a particular social world. The first theory we examine is that of Cheris Kramarae.

Language as Gendered.   Like Burke, Cheris Kramarae believes that a primary feature of the world is its linguistic nature, and the words and syntax within messages structure people's thinking and interaction and have a major impact on how we experience the world.[29] The gendered implications of language are of primary concern to Kramarae, as she explores the ways in which messages treat women and men differently. No human experience is free from the influence of language. Even the categories of *male* and *female* are largely linguistic constructions. In other words, we are "trained to see two sexes. And then we do a lot of work to continue to see only these two sexes."[30]

Kramarae not only notes the importance of language in interpreting experience; she also addresses the dimension of power. Any language system has power relations embedded in it, and those who are part of the dominant linguistic system tend to have their perceptions, experiences, and modes of expression incorporated into language. In the case of English, Kramarae believes that it is a "man-made language"[31] and thus embodies the perspectives of the masculine more than the feminine. The perceptions of white middle-class males, in particular, are normalized in standard linguistic practice. Men are the standard, for instance, in many occupational terms, and women are the aberrant category: *waiter* versus *waitress*, *actor* versus *actress*. *Mr.* as a title of address does not contain information about marital status, whereas the terms *Miss* and *Mrs.* do provide information that is more useful to men than to women. Not only language itself but the instruments of language—dictionaries—feature white men's viewpoints, as do the societal structures and institutions that derive from language, such as educational institutions, technology, and the like.[32]

The idea that social power arrangements are largely embedded in language also means that

language and the world it creates often silences women in profound ways. On the latter point, Kramarae incorporates the work of anthropologists Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener on muted-group theory.[33] Edwin Ardener observed that anthropologists tend to characterize a culture in terms of the masculine, suggesting that ethnography is biased toward observation of males in a culture. On closer examination, however, it appeared to Ardener that the actual language of a culture has an inherent male bias, that men created the meanings for a group, and that the feminine voice is suppressed, or "muted." This silencing of women, in Ardener's observation, leads to the inability of women to express themselves eloquently in the male parlance.

Shirley Ardener added to the theory by suggesting that the silence of women has several manifestations and is especially evident in public discourse. Women are less comfortable and less expressive in public situations than are men, and they are less comfortable in public situations than they are in private. Consequently, women monitor their own communications more intensely than do men. Women watch what they say and translate what they are feeling and thinking into male terms. When masculine and feminine meanings and expressions conflict, the masculine tends to win out because of the dominance of males in society. The result is that women are muted.

Kramarae expands the Ardeners' work by integrating it with the results of research on women and communication. Kramarae is especially concerned with the ways women must translate their own perceptions and meanings into the terms of the male worldview in order to participate in public life. For one, women sometimes express themselves with more difficulty than do men. A common female experience is to lack a word for an experience that is typically gendered feminine, apparently because men, who do not share that experience, have not developed a term for it. At the same time, however, women understand men's meanings more easily than men understand women's because they need to know the practices of the dominant system.

From the Source . . .

There is nothing simple about silence. It isn't always a problem that needs to be "solved." There are silences of meditation; reprieve from noisy urban life; respect for ourselves or others; communal feelings when experienced with others; rest from compulsion to speak. Silence can also be a protection, which should not be talked away by well-wishing others.

— Cheris Kramarae

Furthermore, Kramarae notes that because they are verbally muted, women rely more on nonverbal expression and use different nonverbal forms than do men. Some research has shown, for example, that facial expressions, vocal pauses, and bodily gestures are more important in women's discussions than they are in men's. Women also seem to display a wider variability of expression in their speech. As a consequence of being muted, women respond in various ways. One response is that women create their own forms of expression outside the dominant male system. Consciousness-raising groups and other forms of "girls' night out" allow women the space and time to spend with other women on terms of their own making.

The creation of alternative forms of expression is typical of all muted populations. During the days of the Underground Railroad, certain quilts were hung in yards to "air out" for the day; in fact, they were signals to fugitive slaves that this was a safe house. Even the patterns on the quilts themselves provided guidance for the slaves. When the Monkey Wrench pattern was displayed, it meant slaves should begin packing the tools they would need for the trip; when the Tumbling Boxes pattern appeared, it meant it was time to leave; and the "Dresden" quilt pattern indicated that slaves should head to Dresden, Canada.[34] But because quilts were seen as insignificant by the dominant culture, they could function as a message form that was typically not even "seen" by slave catchers.

As a contemporary example, Foss and Foss interviewed a number of women and examined their forms of communication. Their book, *Women Speak: The Eloquence of Women's Lives,* challenges a number of assumptions about what constitutes eloquent communication, showing that many of the forms of communication used by women have value in their own right, despite not being considered significant in the masculine, public world.[35] The book makes this kind of work more public in an attempt to give voice to women normally muted in society.

Kramarae is a strong advocate of having women take control of their worlds by making communication forms that are more comfortable and hospitable to them. She would like to see women make a world that is safe for the free and critical exploration of ideas. This can happen when people reject all forms of oppression, including arrogant language forms. She wants to see a world that makes connections rather than separations and a world that respects, rather than rejects, differences. She wants a world in which information is freely accessible to everyone.

For Kramarae, to realize this kind of world means taking control of language and becoming emancipated from patriarchal domination. Analyzing and understanding the sometimes subtle forms of linguistic domination is one way of achieving this goal. Second, it is important to study women's communication and the communication of other marginalized groups to learn more about alternative forms of communication. Finally, new forms must be created and used.

Kramarae herself, along with colleagues Paula Treichler and Ann Russo, has written *A Feminist Dictionary,* which is one way of creating new meanings and helping construct a world in which women have a larger say.[36] This work attempts to capture the features of a *feminist universe of discourse* by including words with special meaning for women as well as definitions that are consistent, not with men's, but with women's experience. In addition, the dictionary includes numerous and often contrasting definitions for a word, suggesting that a word might indeed mean different things in different con-

texts, at different times, and to different individuals. For example, *birth name* is "a term used by feminists as a more accurate label for the name received at birth than the older term *maiden name,* which has sexual double standard implications."[37] *Hysterical* is "an alternative role option for middle class Victorian women faced with conflicting expectations (to be a 'lady,' to manage a house, to endure frequent childbirth)."[38] *Home* is "a comfortable concentration camp," "where the revolution begins," and "the location of both work and recreation for women with small children."[39]

The work on language and power illustrates one way that feminist scholars work—to raise consciousness about power relations and suggest strategies for increasing the power of women. Another, and somewhat different, kind of feminist work involves the recognition of strategic forms of communication that are more feminine in nature than those that already exist in language. We turn now to a theory of this type.

Feminine Style. The theory of feminine style, first suggested by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and elaborated by Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn, elaborates on Kramarae's efforts to understand the gendered aspects of language.[40] Central to the theory is that a feminine style exists that originally was linked to what Campbell calls "craft learning." By this Campbell means not only literally crafts traditionally associated with housewifery and motherhood (the feminine role), such as sewing, needlework, cooking, and gardening, but also emotional crafts such as nurturance, empathy, and concrete reasoning.[41]

Campbell suggests that while this style is not exclusive to women, either as speakers or audience members, it emerged out of the experiences of the home and thus produces a certain kind of message: "Such discourse is personal in tone (crafts are learned face-to-face from a mentor), relying heavily on personal experience, anecdotes, and other examples. It will tend to be structured inductively (crafts are learned bit by bit,

instance by instance, from which generalizations emerge). It will invite audience participation, including the process of testing generalizations or principles against the experiences of the audience. Audience members will be addressed as peers, with recognition of authority based on experience."[42] One of the strategies of early women orators was to use this style to appear more "womanly" on the public platform, and women continue to be socialized to communicate in ways that correspond to the traditionally private sphere of women.

Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn extend the work on feminine style, suggesting it remains an effective strategy by which contemporary women speakers can gain access to the political system. They use the speeches of former Texas Governor Ann Richards to show the existence of a feminine style in mainstream political discourse and to show how it functions as a strategy for audience empowerment. They found that Richards based her claims on experience, citing letters from constituents, for example, to privilege the concrete over abstract reasoning. She also used a personal, self-disclosive tone in her speeches, and a context of care, connection, and relationship in such a way to empower her audience to trust their own perceptions and judgments. At the same time, the way in which she made her points—with humor, the personal story, and anecdote—made her discourse more acceptable to audiences unused to a woman in high political office. Dow and Tonn suggest that Richards's feminine style goes beyond simply *"adaptation* to obstacles posed by patriarchy . . . *to offer alternatives* to patriarchal modes of thought and reasoning." They label this alternative worldview a "feminist counter-public sphere."[43]

Jane Blankenship and Deborah Robson examined women's public-policy discourse between 1991 and 1994 to determine whether a feminine style could be said to exist in contemporary political discourse. They concluded that it does in fact exist and is characterized by five overlapping properties: (1) concrete experience as a basis for political judgments; (2) inclusivity and connection; (3) public office conceptualized as a place to "get things done" and empower others; (4) a holistic approach to policy formation; and (5) bringing women's legislation to the forefront.[44] What remains to be seen, according to Blankenship and Robson, is whether the feminine style makes or reflects a difference in the process or outcome of public policy.

With the sociocultural tradition, we move from elements of the message to larger concerns about the ways in which messages create connections across individuals in social groups and cultures. As we move to the sociopsychological tradition, you will see a shift from the message itself to psychological processes involved in the production and reception of those messages.

THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

Theories of the sociopsychological tradition focus on how individual communicators manage messages. Consistent with work throughout social psychology, this line of research and theory tends to be cognitive in orientation and explains how people integrate information and plan messages accordingly. These theories look at individual choices and strategies for achieving internally established goals for a message. Several of these theories look at individual differences in how people orient to message planning and design. Here we look at four lines of work— action-assembly theory, strategy-choice models, message-design models, and semantic-meaning theory.[45]

Action-Assembly Theory

We begin this section with a general cognitive theory that explains what humans actually go through to produce communicative action. Developed by John Greene, action-assembly theory examines the ways we organize knowledge within the mind and use it to form messages.[46] According to this theory, you form messages by using *content knowledge* and *procedural knowledge.* You know *about* things, and you know *how to do*

things. In action-assembly theory, procedural knowledge takes center stage.

To get an idea of what your procedural knowledge looks like, imagine that your memory is full of connected elements. Each element of memory is a *node*, and the nodes are connected to one another, much like the way websites are linked in the Internet. Specifically, procedural knowledge consists of associated nodes related to behavior, consequences, and situations. For example, you probably smile when you greet someone, and say something like, "Hi; how are you?" Then, the other person smiles back and says, "Fine. How are you?" You hold this in your memory as a set of associated nodes in which links are made between the situation of greeting someone, smiling, using certain words, with the result of having the greeting returned.

Although this example is very simple, your actual network of associated nodes is a constantly changing, complex system. However, it is not an unorganized system. At any given time, the associations that have been most frequently or most recently activated are stronger, so that certain nodes tend to cluster together into modules, which Greene calls *procedural records*. The smiling-greeting ritual is a simple example of a procedural record. However, procedural records are not distinct with firm boundaries. Because the elements—smiling, greeting, asking about health, and so on—are also associated with other things, procedural records are imprecise.

A procedural record, then, is a set of links among nodes in a network of action. Some of these are just automatic associations. Because you have done certain things together over and over, they have become associated, like removing one foot from the gas and pushing in the clutch with your other foot. Other records actually contain information, or meaning—like knowing that the foot routine with the gas and clutch is a part of changing gears, necessary for driving a car with a stick shift.

Whenever you act, you must "assemble" appropriate procedures, or behaviors. Out of all the actions in your procedural memory, you must select the most appropriate ones for the situation in order to accomplish the consequences you

wish. You do this by selecting an action sequence. The word *selecting*, however, belies the complexity of what is really happening behind the scenes within your mind. According to this theory, whenever you act, you must assemble associated behaviors from appropriate procedural records.

Some sets of assembled action are so strongly entrenched and so frequently used that you often rely on them as preformed or programmed actions. Called *unitized assemblies*, these highly efficient routines require little effort. You don't have to think much about what to do because the whole sequence is already there in your memory. Greeting rituals are a good example of unitized assemblies as is the clutch-and-gas routine, once you've learned to drive a stick shift.

Often, however, situations require you to do some cognitive work. A number of outcomes may be desired, including achieving an objective with another person, expressing information, managing conversations, producing intelligible speech, and other results. When introducing yourself, for example, you may want to meet the other person, make yourself look good, and have a good time, all in one set of actions. You essentially assemble the procedures necessary to accomplish these objectives, and the result is a mental representation for a coordinated set of actions. This mental model is called *output representation*; it is the "plan" your mind holds about what you will do within the situation you face.

Let's say, for example, that you see a friend walking toward you. You are suddenly filled with dread because you know that your friend's mother has just died, and you will need to say and do something appropriate. How will your mind handle this difficult situation? First, the situation will trigger, or activate, a host of nodes on such topics as death, friend, greeting, feeling, speaking, gesturing, and so on. Each of these activated nodes is part of a variety of procedural records. These come together into what Greene calls a *coalition*. So at the time you see your friend, your mind will pull together a coalition of possible procedural records, but you cannot use them all. From the coalition, your mind will quickly and simultaneously piece together a set

of actions ranging from very low level (such as uttering words) to high level (such as accomplishing a goal). This is the *output representation*: everything you need to remember in order to act in an appropriate and coordinated way. All of the actions—from remembering how to pronounce certain words to how to express sympathy—are tightly associated at this moment. At that instance, other associations that are part of less-relevant procedural records fade away in a process called *decay*, leaving a coherent output representation for this particular situation.

No single action, then, can stand by itself. Every action implicates other actions in one way or another. To introduce yourself, you have to use a variety of actions from moving your vocal chords to using certain words and gestures. To write a paragraph, you must combine a variety of actions, from coordinating knowledge, to using language, to writing, or keyboarding. Actions, then, are integrated into a network of knowledge. Each piece of knowledge in the overall routine is a representation of something that needs to be done. Higher-order goals (such as making an introduction) and lower-level routines (such as smiling) are integrated into an output representation that guides your communication actions.

The action-assembly process requires not only knowledge and motivation but also the ability to retrieve and organize the necessary actions efficiently and quickly. If you make a mistake or have trouble doing something, even when you have the correct knowledge and motivation, it means you are not able to put together the best routine, for any number of reasons. For example, you may not be practiced in doing it, you may be unable to pay attention to important aspects of the situation, you may be relying too much on unitized routines, or you may experience other problems in the action-assembly process.

Action assembly takes time and effort. The more complex the assembly task, the more time and effort it takes. Introducing yourself is usually not as difficult as expressing sympathy in an unexpected situation. Even though communicators seem to respond to a situation immediately

without effort, research shows that every response does take time, if only a fraction of a second. Complex tasks take more time than simple ones. You know from your own experience that you think through and struggle with communicating in unfamiliar situations. When people take a long time to say something, pause and stutter, or generally seem confused, they may be having difficulty in integrating procedural knowledge and formulating an action. When people respond quickly and fluently, they are demonstrating that the task is relatively easy for them in this situation.

Action-assembly theory is what we might call a microcognitive theory because it deals with very specific cognitive operations. The other theories in this section, by contrast, are macrocognitive theories; they look at how we put messages together on a higher level. Barbara O'Keefe identifies two approaches to theorizing about message production, which she terms the *strategy-choice* and *message-design* models.[47] Strategy-choice models look at how communicators select from among various message strategies to accomplish a goal, and the message-design model concentrates on how communicators actually construct messages to meet their goals.[48] As we continue this section on the sociopsychological tradition, we will first discuss theories that use strategy-choice models and then move to those that focus on message design.

Strategy-Choice Models

Compliance Gaining. Gaining the compliance of another person is one of the most common communication goals. It involves trying to get other people to do what you want them to do, or to stop doing something you don't like. Compliance-gaining messages are among the most researched areas in the communication field.[49] The prolific research program on compliance-gaining strategies received its impetus from the groundbreaking studies of Gerald Marwell and David Schmitt.[50] These researchers isolated 16 strategies commonly used in gaining the compliance of other people, as outlined in Table 5.1.

T A B L E **5.1**

Marwell and Schmitt's Compliance-Gaining Strategies

1. *Promising.* Promising a reward for compliance
2. *Threatening.* Indicating that punishment will be applied for noncompliance
3. *Showing expertise about positive outcomes.* Showing how good things will happen to those who comply
4. *Showing expertise about negative outcomes.* Showing how bad things will happen to those who do not comply
5. *Liking.* Displaying friendliness
6. *Pregiving.* Giving a reward before asking for compliance
7. *Applying aversive stimulation.* Applying punishment until compliance is received
8. *Calling in a debt.* Saying the person owes something for past favors
9. *Making moral appeals.* Describing compliance as the morally right thing to do
10. *Attributing positive feelings.* Telling the other person how good he or she will feel if there is compliance
11. *Attributing negative feelings.* Telling the other person how bad he or she will feel if there is noncompliance
12. *Positive altercasting.* Associating compliance with people with good qualities
13. *Negative altercasting.* Associating noncompliance with people with bad qualities
14. *Seeking altruistic compliance.* Seeking compliance simply as a favor
15. *Showing positive esteem.* Saying that the person will be liked by others more if he or she complies
16. *Showing negative esteem.* Saying that the person will be liked less by others if he or she does not comply

Marwell and Schmitt use an exchange-theory approach as the basis for their compliance-gaining model. A person will comply in exchange for something else supplied by the other person: if you do what I want, I will give you something in return—esteem, approval, money, relief from obligations, and good feelings, among other things. The exchange approach, which is frequently used in social theory, rests on the assumption that people act to gain something from others in exchange for something else. This model is inherently power oriented. In other words, you can gain the compliance of others if you have sufficient power in terms of resources and can provide or withhold something they want.

One of the most important theoretical questions about compliance-gaining tactics has been how to reduce the list of all possible tactics to a manageable set of general strategies or dimensions. A long list of how people persuade others does not tell you much more than you already know. A shorter list would crystallize the tactics into essential qualities, functions, goals, or some other set of dimensions that would help explain what people are actually accomplishing when they try to persuade other people.

In an attempt to create such a set of principles, Marwell and Schmitt asked subjects to apply the 16 items in Table 5.1 to various compliance-gaining situations. Five general strategies, or clusters of tactics, emerged. These included *rewarding* (which includes, for example, promising), *punishing* (for instance, threatening), *expertise* (as in displaying knowledge of rewards), *impersonal commitments* (examples would include moral appeals), and *personal commitments* (such as debts).

Although the work of Marwell and Schmitt was foundational, it is limited in its ability to explain compliance-gaining messages, and much work has been done to expand our understanding of this process. One of the most comprehensive analyses of the compliance-gaining literature is that of Lawrence Wheeless, Robert Barraclough, and Robert Stewart, who review and integrate the variety of compliance-gaining schemes.[51] These researchers believe that compliance-gaining

messages are best classified according to the kinds of power employed by communicators when attempting to gain the compliance of another individual. Power is access to influential resources. It is a result of interpersonal perception, since people have as much power as others perceive that they have.

The Wheeless group isolated three general types of power. The first is the perceived ability *to manipulate the consequences* of a certain course of action. Parents often use this kind of power when punishing and rewarding their children. If you tell your children that you will buy them a video game if they get good grades, you are using this source of power.

The second kind of power is the perceived ability to determine one's *relational position* with the other person. Here the powerful person can identify certain elements of the relationship that will bring about compliance. For example, if your girlfriend thinks you are not all that committed to the relationship, you may be able to get a lot of cooperation because she may be afraid you will want to end the relationship.

The third type of power involves the perceived ability to *define values* or *obligations*, or both. Here one person has the credibility to tell the other what norms of behavior are acceptable or necessary. Returning a favor, behaving kindly, and being sensitive to others' needs is another example. In each case, one communicator defines what is right and good, and the other person complies by behaving in accordance with this standard.

In a compliance-gaining situation, then, you assess your power and choose tactics that invoke that power. Wheeless and his colleagues list a number of tactics associated with the three classes of power. For example, the ability to affect another person's expectations and consequences may lead you to use tactics like promises, threats, and warnings. The ability to manipulate the relationship may lead you to choose such tactics as saying you like the other person, attributing positive or negative esteem, engaging in emotional appeals, flattering, and so on. The third category of power—defining values and obligations—may lead you to use moral appeals, debt, guilt, and other similar techniques.

The compliance-gaining literature is dominated by lists of possible strategies that people can use, but most of these studies do little to help us understand the basis for strategy choice. The following theory of constructivism steps in to fill this void.

Constructivism. Constructivism, a theory developed by Jesse Delia and his colleagues, has had immense impact on the field of communication.[52] The theory says that individuals interpret and act according to conceptual categories in the mind. Reality does not present itself in raw form but must be filtered through a person's own way of seeing things.

Constructivism is based partially on George Kelly's theory of personal constructs, which proposes that persons understand experience by grouping and distinguishing events according to similarities and differences.[53] Perceived differences are not natural but are determined by sets of opposites within the individual's cognitive system. Opposite pairs like tall/short, hot/cold, and black/white, which are used to understand events and things, are called personal constructs. This notion is the source of the name of Kelly's theory—*personal construct theory.*

An individual's cognitive system consists of numerous distinctions. By classifying an experience into categories, the individual gives it meaning. So, for example, you might see your mother as tall and your father as short, coffee as hot and milk as cold, your favorite jacket as black and a favorite hat as white. Constructs are organized into interpretive schemes, which identify something and place the object in a category. With interpretive schemes, we make sense out of an event by placing it in a larger category.

Interpretive schemes develop as you mature, by moving from relative simplicity and generality to relative complexity and specificity. Thus, very young children have simple construct systems, while most adults have much more sophisticated ones. When you were young, for example, you might have placed all people into two types: big and little. Now, on the other hand, you have an immense number of constructs with

which to distinguish among different people. Also, different parts of your construct system differ in complexity, so that you might have elaborate thoughts about music but simple ideas about international relations.

Because cognitive complexity plays an important role in communication, this concept is a mainstay of constructivism.[54] Complexity or simplicity in the system is a function of the relative number of constructs and the degree of distinctions you can make. You do not have a consistent level of cognitive complexity but think at different levels of sophistication on different topics. The number of constructs you use on a particular topic is called cognitive differentiation. Cognitively sophisticated people can make more distinctions than cognitively uncomplicated people. Many of us go to a tax accountant every year because we do not have sufficient cognitive complexity in this subject.

Delia and his colleagues have shown that messages vary according to complexity. Simple messages address only one goal, complex messages separate goals and deal with each in turn, and the most sophisticated messages actually integrate several goals in one message.[55] We often attempt to accomplish more than one thing by a single action, and our messages vary in the extent to which they can achieve multiple, sometimes conflicting, objectives simultaneously. Cognitive differentiation thus affects how complex messages can be.

Further, the simplest persuasive messages only address your own goals without considering the other person's needs, whereas more adaptive, complex persuasive messages are designed to meet your needs and the needs of the other person. For example, if you want to get a person to change a behavior—to stop smoking perhaps—you might want to do it in a way that would help the other person save face. This would require you to achieve at least two objectives in the same message: Deliver a nonsmoking message and protect the other person's ego. Simple messages cannot do this, but more complex messages can be employed precisely for this purpose. Constructivists have found that the tendency to help the other person save face is directly related to cognitive complexity.

Interpersonal constructs are especially important because they guide how we understand other people. Individuals differ in the complexity with which they view others. If you are cognitively simple, you will tend to stereotype other people, whereas if you have more cognitive differentiation, you will make subtler and more sensitive distinctions. Generally, cognitive complexity leads to greater understanding of others' perspectives and better ability to frame messages in terms understandable to other people. This ability, called *perspective taking*, seems to lead to more sophisticated arguments and appeals.[56] Adjusting one's communication to others is referred to as *person-centered communication*, and people vary in their use of person-centered messages.

Constructivism recognizes that constructs have social origins and are learned through interaction with other people. Consequently, culture seems especially significant in determining the meanings of events. Culture can influence the way communication goals are defined, how goals should be achieved, as well as the types of constructs employed in the cognitive schema.[57]

Compliance gaining is one of several types of communication that have been studied from a person-centered perspective.[58] Persuasive messages range from the least to the most person centered. On the simplest level, for example, one could attempt to achieve the single objective of compliance by commanding or threatening. On a more complex level, one might also try to help a person understand why compliance is necessary by offering reasons for complying. On an even higher level of complexity, a communicator could try to elicit sympathy by building empathy or insight into the situation. As one's messages become more complex, they necessarily involve more goals and are more person centered.

Comforting messages have also been studied from a constructivist perspective. People try to provide social support to others in a variety of ways, and some of these methods are more sophisticated than others. Research on comforting messages generally supports the view that cognitively complex individuals produce more sophisticated messages than less complex individuals, that sophisticated messages are more

person centered than less sophisticated ones, and that more sophisticated messages are more effective in eliciting comfort than less sophisticated ones.[59]

As an example of person-centered communication, consider the study of Susan Kline and Janet Ceropski on doctor–patient communication.[60] This study involved 46 medical students who completed a variety of tests, participated in videotaped interviews with patients, and wrote statements on what they considered to be the purpose of medical interviews. The interviews were then carefully examined by the researchers and classified according to how person centered they were.

The person-centered messages used by the medical students were found to be more complex than messages that did not have this quality. The researchers found that many, but not all, medical students were person centered when they talk to patients. Some, for example, explained why following directions is necessary. Others seemed good at handling patients' distress by acknowledging rather than denying feelings, helping patients understand their discomfort, and giving advice. Many student doctors also used person-centered communication to gather information. These students asked more detailed questions, and they gave patients more leeway in telling their stories. This research confirms that those who use person-centered strategies have complex cognitive schemas for understanding other people and are better able to take the perspective of and empathize with their patients.

As sophisticated as it is, constructivism is still basically a strategy-choice theory. Constructivist-research procedures usually ask subjects to select different message types and classify these in terms of strategy categories. The following theory applies this idea of strategy choice to a particularly interesting aspect of social life.

Politeness Theory.   As constructivism shows, we often try to accomplish several things at once, and politeness, or protecting the face of the other person, is often one of the goals we aim to

achieve. The best-known sociopsychological treatment of politeness and face is that of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson.[61] This theory states that in everyday life we design messages that protect face and achieve other goals as well.

Brown and Levinson believe that politeness is often a goal because it is a culturally universal value. Different cultures have different levels of required politeness and different ways of being polite, but all people have the need to be appreciated and protected, which these researchers call *face needs*. *Positive face* is the desire to be appreciated and approved, to be liked and honored. *Positive politeness* is designed to meet these desires. Showing concern, complimenting, and using respectful forms of address are examples. *Negative face* is the desire to be free from imposition or intrusion, and *negative politeness* is designed to protect the other person when negative face needs are threatened. Acknowledging that you are imposing when making a request is a common example: "I'm sorry to bother you, but could you tell me where the closest bank is?"

Politeness is especially important whenever we must threaten another person's face, which happens frequently in our relations with others. We commit *face-threatening acts* (FTAs) whenever we behave in a way that could potentially fail to meet positive or negative face needs. Face threatening is normal and not itself a problem, but it must be handled in certain ways to mitigate potential problems that could result. There are many ways to handle FTAs, and we do not always handle them in the same way. Whether we deliver an FTA, how we do so, and what forms of politeness are used depend on a variety of factors.

Face-threatening acts assume five possible forms. We can (1) deliver the FTA baldly or directly, without polite action; (2) deliver the FTA along with some form of positive politeness; (3) deliver the FTA along with some form of negative politeness; (4) deliver the FTA indirectly, off the record; or (5) not deliver the FTA at all. These five choices are arranged in order from the most to the least face threatening.

Suppose that you want to ask your professor to reconsider an exam grade. This is a face issue for the professor because the professor has

already declared what your grade is and could be made to feel inadequate by the request. How will you do it? One approach is to deliver the bald FTA, "I would like you to reconsider my grade," period. You probably would not choose this approach because it would not be very polite. A slightly less threatening method would be to combine the request with positive politeness, something like this: "I would appreciate it if you could look at my grade again. Other students have said you're really nice about doing that." Here we have a request (FTA) combined with a compliment.

Even less threatening would be to combine the FTA with negative politeness: "I'm really sorry. I know you're very busy, but could I have a moment of your time? I would really appreciate it if you could look at my grade again." Notice that this message meets negative face needs by acknowledging and apologizing for the imposition. Number 4 is particularly interesting and complex. An "off-the-record" FTA is one that is indirect and ambiguous, which enables you to deny having meant the statement as an FTA. For example, you might ask to borrow your friend's car by saying, "I wonder how I will get to town this afternoon to pick up my laundry?" You hope your friend will get the hint and say, "Oh, why don't you use my car?" But if your friend says, "Well, you can't use *my* car," you can always reply, "Oh, I wasn't asking for it." In requesting that your professor reconsider your grade, you might say something like, "Gosh, I didn't think I had done this badly on the exam." You hope she will reply, "Well, why don't I read it again?" — but if she looks at you funny, you can always deny that you were requesting a reconsideration.

According to Brown and Levinson, which of these strategies we choose to use depends on a simple formula: $Wx = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + Rx$. This formula means that the amount of work (W) one puts into being polite depends on the social distance (D) between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H), plus the power (P) of the hearer over the speaker, plus the risk (R) of hurting the other person.

Let's consider two examples. Imagine that you want to ask your brother for a simple, non-

threatening favor—to drop you off at the mall. You and your brother have the same status—he does not have any special power over you, and the request is not threatening. You will probably put little work into being polite. On the other hand, suppose you want to get a loan from your parents. Because you consider your parents somewhat higher in status than you are and they have considerable power over your finances, you will probably be quite polite in your request.

There are, of course, a variety of levels of politeness between these extremes. One variable can counteract another. For example, there may be little social distance but quite a bit of power disparity. Or perhaps the distance and power don't matter much because the FTA is so minor. Each of the theories in this section looks at message strategies we might select under different conditions. The next group of theories looks at how we actually design messages.

Message-Design Models

As we saw in the previous section, strategy-choice models assume that communicators select strategies for accomplishing their communication goals. In contrast, theories of message design imagine a more complex scenario, in which communicators actually design messages that are in line with their intentions within the situations they face. The difference is the same as that between selecting a home from five different floor plans versus custom designing a house to meet your family's particular needs. Like the specially designed house, the form of the message matches its function. Here we look at three theories within this tradition.

Planning Theory.   A well-known theory of planning in the communication field was produced by Charles Berger to explain the process that individuals go through in planning their communication behavior.[62] The study of planning is a centerpiece of cognitive science, and psychologists have given the subject considerable thought and research. Linking cognitive planning with communication behavior, however, has not

From the Source . . .

Planning theory was developed in response to the idea that communication is a goal-directed process. People do not engage in communicative activity merely for the sake of doing so; they communicate to satisfy goals. Cognitive plans provide the guidance necessary for constructing and deploying messages to reach goals. Sophisticated message plans enable communicators to reach their goals more frequently and more efficiently; thus, communication competence is vitally dependent on the quality of individuals' message plans.

—Charles R. Berger

received as much attention, and Berger's research and theory helps to close this gap.

Berger writes that plans for communication behaviors are "hierarchical cognitive representations of goal-directed action sequences."[63] In other words, plans are mental images of the steps one will go through to meet a goal. They are hierarchical because certain actions are necessary to set things up so that other actions will work. Planning, then, is the process of thinking up these action plans. Because communication is so important in achieving goals, planning messages is a critical concern. If you want to do well in a class, you probably talk to other students, friends, and even the professor to find out what might be done. Your assignments will be carefully crafted to meet requirements, and you will think consciously about what to do and how to do it.

Among the many goals we try to achieve every day, from planning meals to getting where we want to go, *social goals* are especially important. Because we are social creatures, other people are important in our lives, and we aim to influence people in a variety of ways. We can achieve many types of goals by communicating in particular ways, but communication is central to meeting social goals. Understanding something about how we plan to meet such goals, then, is an important research aim.

Studying goal behavior is no easy task. For one thing, goals tend to be complex. Goals seem to be arranged in hierarchies, and achieving certain goals first makes it possible to achieve other ones later. For example, you may find another person attractive and want to get to know this person, but you will probably have to accomplish quite a few subgoals first, such as finding a way to start a conversation with this person.

Many of our goals are actually part of the planning process itself. These *metagoals* guide the plans we make. For example, we usually want to do planning in the easiest way possible, making efficiency an important metagoal. (That's why we don't reinvent the wheel every time we take a drive.) We want to behave in socially appropriate ways, so social appropriateness is another metagoal. Yet a third metagoal might be politeness; we may wish to be polite in the process of accomplishing our communication goal.

Because we want our planning to be efficient, we often rely on *canned plans* we have used before. These are stored in *long-term memory*, and we rely on them whenever possible. Because you have started so many conversations in your life, you know how to start one without thinking too much about it, and you rely on the same methods you have used repeatedly. Canned plans don't always work, however, or can be foiled in some way. Or the goal is new and complicated and requires fresh thinking.

Let's say you need a substantial loan and think you can get the money from a close relative—say, your aunt. You have never done this before and don't know exactly how to approach it. Here you must put a new plan together in your *working memory*. The working memory is a place where you can use parts of old plans, knowledge, and creative thinking to come up with a way to approach the problem.

The strength of the goal seems to influence how complex our plans tend to be. If you want something very badly, you will probably work hard and come up with an elaborate plan. If you really need the loan, you will probably work out the plan carefully. Of course, the complexity of your plan also depends on how much knowledge

you have about loans and about your aunt as well as your knowledge of persuasion. Berger refers to information about the topic (for example, loans and relatives) as *specific domain knowledge* and information about how to communicate (for example, persuading people) as *general domain knowledge.*

Berger's theory predicts that the more you know (specific and general), the more complex your plan will be. Obviously, then, if you have a lot of motivation and knowledge, you will create a more complex plan, and if your motivation and knowledge are low, your plan will probably be underdeveloped. Naturally, however, there are limits on how complicated a plan can be. In interpersonal communication, this is especially so because of the metagoals of efficiency and social appropriateness. You can't do just anything you want because of the effort it would take and because some actions are not socially appropriate. For example, you probably would not make up a 100-point plan to get money from your aunt because that would take too much effort, and you certainly would not include the socially unacceptable strategy of insulting her to secure the loan.

What happens if your attempt to achieve a goal is thwarted? If the goal is important, you will probably persist, but you will probably try a different strategy. One course of action would be to try different specific actions, which Berger calls *low-level plan hierarchy alterations*, or you could adjust more general actions (*abstract alterations*). People tend to make lower-level adjustments first. For example, say you decide to broach the subject of the loan by just mentioning that your tuition is due. Suppose that your aunt replies, "Boy, I bet you're glad you had such a high-paying job last summer!" You don't get the reaction you expected, so you try a different message, something like, "Right, and that did help, but my books were so expensive and my apartment rent is out of sight." This is an example of a low-level alteration.

Sometimes, though, the situation calls for alteration of a higher level of strategy. For example, if your aunt were to say, "Yes, money can sure be a problem. My assets are all tied up in a big investment deal right now, and I am also having a little cash-flow problem myself," you would probably reconsider what you were trying to accomplish. Instead of asking for the loan now, you might change your goal a little and decide to wait a few weeks or to ask someone else for the money. Berger's theory suggests that whether you make low- or high-level adjustments depends largely on how motivated you are to achieve the goal. If the goal is very important, you will tend to make higher-level adjustments, and you will do so sooner than you would if your motivation is low.

Planning and goal achievement are very much tied into our emotions.[64] If our goals are thwarted, we tend to react negatively. On the other hand, if our plans go well, we often feel uplifted. The negative feelings we experience when we fail to meet a goal depend on how important the goal is. They also are determined in part by how hard we have worked to achieve the goal and how close to the goal we actually got. If you worked really hard to get the loan from your aunt, and she led you on so you were pretty optimistic about getting it, you would be really upset if the final answer was, "Sorry, but no."

Berger has said that social appropriateness is an important metagoal. We normally act in socially appropriate ways, but there are exceptions. Because of the negative emotions we often feel when goals are thwarted, we often act in socially unacceptable ways when this happens. This is especially true if our important goals are repeatedly thwarted. Something else will happen at times like this too: we keep trying to get to the goal, but out of desperation, we tend to use simpler and simpler plans. For example, if you keep trying to show your boyfriend that you love him but he never seems to acknowledge it, you might decide just to tell him right out, "I love you."

Even if we try to maintain a complex plan, we may falter and have trouble invoking it. The ease with which we follow a plan is called *action fluidity*, and people find that they sometimes have great fluidity and sometimes not. The more complex a plan and the more emotional we get, the less fluid our actions become. For example, in an

experiment conducted by Berger and his colleagues, subjects were asked to present arguments to another person supporting their positions on a controversial campus issue.[65] Some of the subjects were given no time to plan their arguments, others were given some planning time, and others were given planning time and invited to prepare contingency plans as well.

The person to whom the subjects gave their arguments was actually a confederate of the experimenter and was instructed to resist the arguments, thereby frustrating the subjects. The experimenters then counted the number of disruptions in the subjects' speech as a measure of fluidity. The subjects who had to develop alternative plans were less fluid, in general, than those who were not. This result was probably caused by the fact that this group had to devise plans that were more complex. How we approach a message plan, then, can be a complex set of concerns. It will be affected in part by the logic we employ, as the following theory shows.

Message-Design Logic. Barbara O'Keefe began her work as a constructivist but has expanded the theoretical orientation to incorporate a message-design model. Her thesis is that people think differently about communication and messages, and they employ different logics in deciding what to say to another person in a given situation. She uses the term *message-design logic* to describe the thought processes behind the messages we create.[66]

O'Keefe outlines three possible message-design logics that range from least person centered to most person centered. What O'Keefe calls *expressive logic* is communication for the self-expression of feelings and thoughts. Messages in this mode are open and reactive in nature, with little attention given to the needs or desires of others. In this regard, the expressive logic is self-centered, but it is not other or *person centered* in the parlance of constructivism. An example of a message resulting from this logic would be an angry response to a friend who forgot to get tickets to a concert.

Conventional logic sees communication as a game to be played by following rules. Here communication is a means of self-expression that proceeds according to accepted rules and norms, including the rights and responsibilities of each person involved. This logic aims to design messages that are polite, appropriate, and based on rules that everyone is supposed to know. For example, in the ticket situation, you might remind the other person that they had a responsibility and had agreed to get the tickets.[67]

O'Keefe's third form—*rhetorical logic*—views communication as a way of changing the rules through negotiation. Messages designed with this logic tend to be flexible, insightful, and person centered. They tend to reframe the situation so that various goals—including persuasion and politeness—are integrated into a seamless whole. An example would be politely suggesting ways in which your friend could solve the problem of the concert tickets.

O'Keefe has noticed that in certain situations, messages are pretty much the same, but in other situations, they are different. For example, if you asked 10 friends to describe their apartments, they would do so in essentially the same way. On the other hand, if you asked them to evaluate your work on a team project, they probably would do so in rather different ways. This example illustrates *message diversity*. In some situations, there is little diversity, and in others there is a great deal. If the goals of the communication are fairly simple and face is not much of an issue, each design logic will lead to essentially the same message form. On the other hand, if goals are numerous and complex and face is an issue, the different design logics will lead to different message forms.

The theories discussed in this section tell us how messages are formed, but they do not say much about how messages are received or understood. The following theory, now a classic in the field, addresses this very issue.

Semantic-Meaning Theory

Interpretation is a term for how we understand our experience. Charles Osgood, a well-known social psychologist of the 1960s, developed one

of the most influential theories of meaning. In those days, psychology was dominated by behaviorism, but cognitive approaches were just beginning to become popular; his theory actually has a foot in both traditions. Osgood's theory deals with the ways in which meanings are learned and how they relate to thinking and behavior.[68] Now considered a classic, Osgood's theory is a useful place to begin thinking about how audience makes sense of messages.

Let's begin with a simple example and see how Osgood would work with it. What associations do you have for the word *flying*? Perhaps you see flying as a fun, efficient way to travel, or maybe you see it as rough, dangerous, and frightening. Whatever your associations, these are your *connotations* for the term. Osgood's theory attempts to explain these connotations and where they come from. In other words, the theory helps us see how messages are understood.

Osgood's theory begins with how individuals learn—that we respond to stimuli in the environment, forming a stimulus–response relationship. He believes that this learned S–R association is responsible for the establishment of meaning, which is an internal, mental response to a stimulus. When you see an airplane, hear flying discussed in a conversation, or think about flying, an internal association will appear in your mind for *flying*, and this association constitutes your meanings for those concepts.

Your meaning, then, lies between the physical stimulus—the act of flying—and your behavioral response to that stimulus. How you respond, in other words, is mediated by internal representations in your mind. The outward stimulus leads to an internal meaning, which leads to an outward response. The internal meaning itself can be broken down into two parts: an internal response and an internal stimulus. The whole chain, then, consists of the following: (1) physical stimulus; (2) internal response; (3) internal stimulus; and (4) outward response. A person who is afraid of flying, for example, has an internal response (fear) to the airplane, and this fear leads to an avoidance tendency, which is an internal stimulus for the outward response of not boarding the plane. Figure 5.1 illustrates this process.

In addition to responding to physical objects or experiences—like an airplane or the act of flying—we also can respond to words and gestures. In other words, when the sign is paired with the meaning, that sign comes to elicit the same or a similar response. This is why the mere mention of flying frightens some people. Even if they are not actually scared at the mention of an airplane, they will tell you that they would prefer not to fly because they know what their actual response would be.
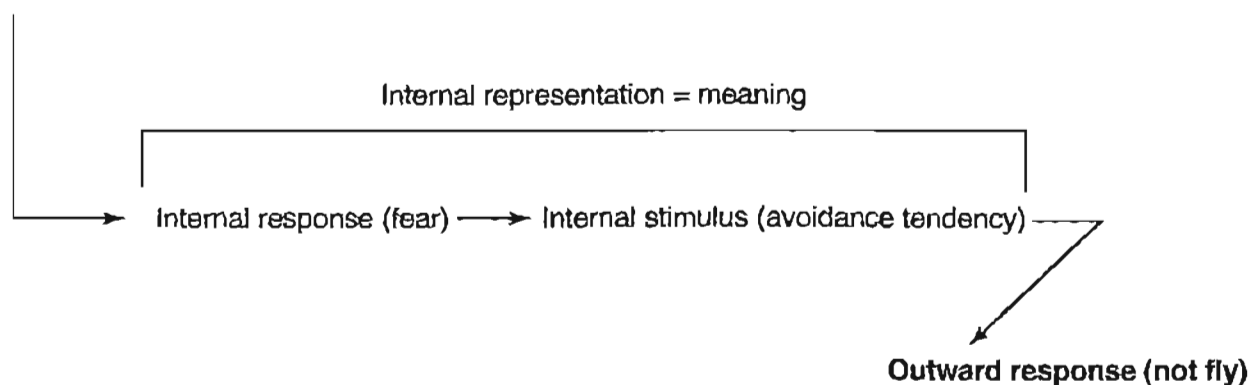
Physical stimulus (airplane)

Internal representation = meaning

Internal response (fear) ⟶ Internal stimulus (avoidance tendency) ⟶

Outward response (not fly)

FIGURE **5.1**

Meaning as Internal Representation

Meaning, because it is internal and unique to the person's own experience with the natural stimulus, is said to be *connotative*. If you are afraid of spiders, a spider elicits an escape response. When the word *spider* is associated with the object as it might have been when you were a small child, a portion of your response (fear) becomes associated with the word itself. This internal meaning mediates your response to the word, even when the actual object is not present.[69]

Most meanings are not learned as a result of direct experience with the natural stimulus but are learned by an association between one sign and another, a process that can occur in the abstract, out of physical contact with the original stimulus. Here the meaning of one concept "rubs off" by association with another. To continue our example, imagine that as a child you had already established internal responses to the words *spider*, *big*, and *hairy*. Let's say you listened to a story about a tarantula, characterized as a "big, hairy spider." Through association you would now have a meaning for the new word *tarantula*, which may also carry some mixture of the connotations earlier attached to the other words because of its association with these words. If you associated *spider* with *fear*, *big* with *dangerous*, and *hairy* with feeling *creepy*, then you might well react to a real or imagined tarantula by running away. The examples of the fear of flying and the fear of spiders are negative, but all meanings—including positive and neutral ones—are learned the same way.

One of Osgood's major contributions is his work on the measurement of meaning. He developed the *semantic differential*, a measurement tool that assumes that one's meanings can be expressed by the use of adjectives.[70] The method begins by finding a set of adjectives that could be used to express your connotations for any stimulus, including a sign. These adjectives are set against one another as opposites, such as good/bad, high/low, slow/fast. You are given a topic, word, or other sign and are asked to indicate on a 7-point scale how you associate the sign with the adjective pairs. A scale looks like this: good __:__:__:__:__:__:__ bad. The subject

places a check mark on any space between these adjectives to indicate the degree of good or bad associated with the stimulus. The subject may fill out as many as fifty such scales for each stimulus, each with a different set of bipolar adjectives (fast/slow, active/inactive, and so on). You might be presented with a word like *airplane* or *spider* and asked to fill out this set of scales.

Osgood then uses a statistical technique called *factor analysis* to find your basic dimensions of meaning. His findings in this research have led to the theory of *semantic space*.[71] Your meaning for any sign is said to be located in a metaphorical space of three major dimensions: evaluation, activity, and potency. A given sign, perhaps a word or concept, elicits a reaction in the person, consisting of a sense of *evaluation* (good or bad), *activity* (active or inactive), and *potency* (strong or weak).

Your connotative meaning will lie somewhere in this hypothetical space, depending on your responses to the three factors. *Airplane*, for example, might be viewed as good, active, and strong. Or it might be seen as bad, active, and strong. A *spider* might be perceived as bad, passive, and strong, or perhaps good, active, and weak. Figure 5.2 illustrates the semantic space.

Osgood and others have done semantic-differential research on a variety of types of concepts, including words, music, art, and even sonar
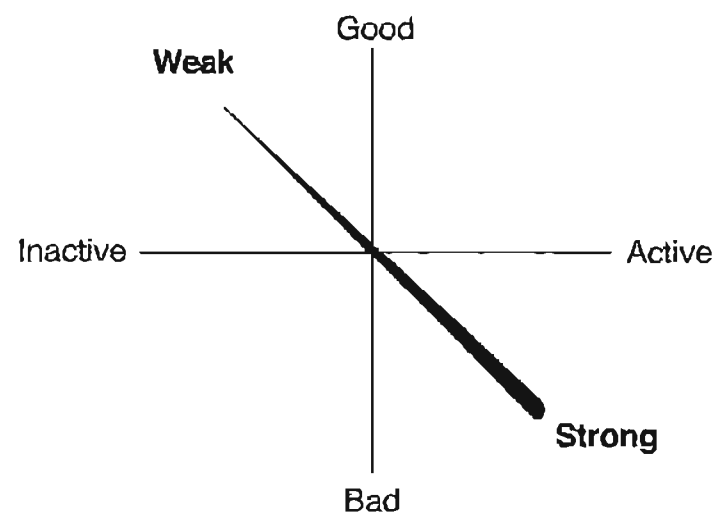

FIGURE **5.2**

Three-Dimensional Semantic Space

sounds; they have examined this concept across a wide range of cultures as well.[72] Osgood believes that the three factors of meaning—evaluation, activity, and potency—apply across all people and all concepts.[73] If these dimensions are as universal as Osgood believes they are, he has significantly advanced our understanding of meaning.

All of the theories in this section are clearly psychological in orientation; all are influenced heavily by work in social psychology, relying on individualistic, experimental data. This area has contributed substantially to communication theory, bridging the individual and the message. The question of how individuals generate messages has been an important consideration in the communication field for at least 4 decades. The phenomenological tradition in message theory, which we examine next, is also somewhat individualistic, but it is informed by a different set of assumptions and relies on a very different kind of data.

◖ THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION

The phenomenological tradition emphasizes processes of interpretation, but in a very different way than Osgood did. Osgood's theory—clearly based on the sociopsychological tradition—sees interpretation as an intuitive, unconscious, cognitive, and behavioral process. Phenomenological theories, in contrast, see interpretation as a conscious and careful process of understanding. Phenomenology literally means the study of conscious experience, in which interpretation takes a central role.

Hermeneutics, defined as the careful and deliberate interpretation of texts, is the basis for the phenomenological tradition in the study of messages. Hermeneutics arose as a way to understand ancient texts such as the Bible that can no longer be explained by the author. The Supreme Court uses hermeneutics to interpret the U.S. Constitution. Today, virtually any text is open for interpretation, and whether the author is alive to explain what he or she meant is not considered relevant. The text itself speaks to us; it

has meanings of its own apart from what any author, speaker, or audience member might mean by it. The challenge of hermeneutics, then, is to ascertain the meanings of the text.

Modern hermeneutics began in the early 19th century with Friedrich Schleiermacher.[74] Schleiermacher attempted to establish a system for discovering what authors meant in their writings. He used a scientific approach to text analysis, which he believed would be the key to authors' original meanings and feelings. Later in the century, Schleiermacher's biographer, Wilhelm Dilthey, was strongly influenced by these ideas.[75] For Dilthey, however, hermeneutics is the key to all of the humanities and social sciences; he believed that we come to understand all aspects of human life, not by scientific method but through subjective interpretation. For Dilthey, the human world is social and historical and requires understanding in terms of the community in which human actors live and work. Human works, then, are not fixed and cannot be known objectively. Dilthey therefore promoted a kind of historical relativism common in the social sciences today.

There are several branches of hermeneutics, including interpretation of scripture (exegesis), interpretation of literary texts (philology), and interpretation of human action (social hermeneutics).[76] Within the first two branches, scholars use hermeneutics to understand biblical and literary texts, respectively, and this is the tradition most associated with Schleiermacher. Scholars in what is called the social- or cultural-hermeneutic tradition—which relies on the perspective developed by Dilthey—use hermeneutics as a tool for interpreting actions.[77] In this chapter, we cover text hermeneutics in this section and cultural hermeneutics in the following one.

Generally speaking, *texts* are any artifacts that can be examined and interpreted.[78] Although hermeneutics is usually applied to the written word, it is not limited to it. A text is essentially a recording of an event that has taken place at some time in the past—sometimes the immediate past—whether written, electronic, photographic, field notes, or preserved by some other means. Even actions can be viewed as texts, but more often, the term designates written

documents and other records.[79] The problem remains the same: How do we interpret a message that is no longer part of an actual live event?

Although little agreement exists on specific techniques of interpretation, almost all schools of thought rely on a common notion of its general process, called the *hermeneutic circle*. You interpret something by going from general to specific and from specific to general. You look at a specific text in terms of a general idea of what that text may mean, then modify your general idea based on the examination of the specifics of the text. Your interpretation is ongoing, as you move back and forth between specific and general. You can look at the composite meaning of a text and then examine the specific linguistic structures of that text. Then you might return to the overall meaning, only to go back to the specifics again.

Within the circle, you always relate what is seen in the object to what you already know. You then alternate between a familiar set of concepts and the unfamiliar until the two merge in a tentative interpretation. Consider the Bible as an example. The interpreters begin by relating the text to what they already understand, look for unaccounted-for details in the scripture, modify the original interpretation, reexamine the text, and so on. You can see that this is really a dialogue between the meanings in the text and present-day assumptions and understandings. Social hermeneutics works the same way. In interpreting the actions of a foreign culture, anthropologists first try to understand what is happening with familiar concepts; later the anthropologists discover how the people themselves understand their experiences and use this information to modify the categories initially employed.

There are many prominent writers on text interpretation. Three of the most prominent theories—developed by Paul Ricoeur, Stanley Fish, and Hans-Georg Gadamer—are summarized here.

Paul Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur is a major interpretive theorist who relies heavily on both the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions.[80] Although he recognizes the importance of actual speech, most important for Ricoeur is text. Once speech is recorded, it becomes divorced from the actual speaker and situation in which it was produced. Texts cannot be interpreted in the same fashion as live discourse because they exist in a permanent form. Speech is ephemeral, but texts live on. Textual interpretation is especially important when speakers and authors are not available, as is the case with historical documents. However, it need not be limited to these situations. Indeed, the text itself always speaks to us, and the job of the interpreter is to figure out what it is saying.

Ricoeur calls the separation of text from situation *distanciation*. The text has meaning irrespective of the author's original intention. In other words, you can read a message and understand it despite the fact that you were not part of the original speech event. Thus, the author's intent does not prescribe what the text can subsequently be taken to mean, nor does any reader's peculiar understanding limit what the text itself says. Once written, the text can be consumed by anybody who can read, providing a multitude of possible meanings. For these reasons the interpretation of textual material is, for Ricoeur, more complex and more interesting than that of spoken discourse.

The problem is not unlike interpreting a musical score or work of art.[81] You may not know exactly what mood and feeling Mozart had in composing and conducting the *Jupiter Symphony*. If you are an experienced musician, you might be able to produce a number of believable interpretations of your own, but those interpretations are not unlimited; they are constrained by the musical notation. A conductor carefully studies the elements of the text to determine what meanings are embedded in it and then proceeds to produce a musical interpretation. Orchestral versions will differ substantially in the interpretation performed, but you will always recognize the piece as the *Jupiter Symphony*. Similarly with a piece of art: you know the author had one set of meanings for the piece, you as a viewer have another, and the art world may offer or impose yet other meanings.

The meaning of a text, then, always refers to the overall pattern formed by all of the interpretations that are part of its meaning. To account for this, Ricoeur's version of the hermeneutic circle consists of explanation and understanding. *Explanation* is empirical and analytical: it accounts for events in terms of observed patterns among parts. In studying a book of the Bible, for example, you would carefully examine the individual words of each verse, study their etymological derivations, and note the ways they form patterns of meaning. In the analysis of a text, an interpreter might look for recurring words and phrases, narrative themes, and theme variations. Ricoeur himself is interested in particular words that have metaphorical value, words that point to meanings hidden below the surface of the writing. None of these structural elements is meaningful in and of itself; it must be put together in the understanding phase of interpretation to form some kind of meaningful pattern.

Understanding is synthetic, accounting for events in terms of overall interpretation. So in continuing your study of the Bible, you would synthesize the elements you found, looking for a holistic or general meaning of the passage under consideration. In hermeneutics, one goes through both processes, breaking down a text into its parts and looking for patterns, then stepping back and subjectively judging the meaning of the whole. You move from understanding to explanation and back to understanding again in a continuing circle. Explanation and understanding, then, are not separate but are two poles in an interpretive spectrum.

Ricoeur agrees that an intimate interaction exists between text and interpreter. The text can speak to and change the interpreter. Ricoeur refers to the act of being open to the meanings of a text as *appropriation.* If you are open to the message of a text, you appropriate it, or make it your own. Thus, interpretation begins with distanciation but ends with appropriation. To interpret the sections of the Bible, you would remove your own interests from your study of the intrinsic meanings in the text, but then you would apply those meanings to your own situation.

An example of a Ricoeurian interpretation is Barbara Warnick's study of the Gettysburg Address.[82] In a careful examination of the text, Warnick looks at expressions of agent, place, and time. *Agents* include "our fathers," "those who have given their lives," "we," and the people of the future. *Place* references include our nation "upon this continent" and "a great battle-field." *Time* references include the far past ("four score and seven years"), the near past, a frozen present, and a possible future. The text can transcend the immediacy of the present situation by cycling back and forth from the present to other times, from immediate agents to other agents in past and future, and from this place to other places. In so doing, the text tells a story of birth, adversity, recognition of values, rebirth, and perpetuation of treasured values.

In an example of appropriation, Warnick notes that this story parallels that of the Christian narrative, which appeals so deeply to many in our society. Other values of American culture are deeply embedded in the text as well. Warnick shows how the details of the text and the overall understanding of it as a projection of the American ideal go hand in hand. Warnick's overall understanding of the speech, then, is that it expresses values that are part of, but transcend, the immediate situation, and for this reason, the text is relevant to generation after generation of Americans.

Stanley Fish

Fish is a literary critic known mostly in the fields of English, literary studies, and media. He has a keen interest in literature, and much of his work centers on textual interpretation and the question of where meaning resides. Taking a distinctly different turn from Ricoeur, Fish denies that any meaning can be found in text. For him, meaning lies strictly in the reader, which leads to the name most associated with Fish's work—*reader-response theory.*[83] The proper question is not, "What does a text mean?" but "What does a text do?"

Clearly, texts do stimulate active readership, but the readers themselves, not the text, provide

the meaning. If you have ever taken a 19th-century American literature course, you probably spent some time talking about the meaning of *Moby Dick*. You may have discovered that different students saw different things in the text. Perhaps you spent time trying to figure out what the true meaning of the text is, and you probably used hermeneutics to do it. Fish would say that *Moby Dick* as a text means nothing, but readers will take it to mean many things.

Fish is clear, however, that assigning meaning is not an individual matter. You do not arbitrarily decide what meaning to assign to a text, nor is your meaning idiosyncratic. Following a social-constructionist approach, Fish teaches that readers are members of *interpretive communities*—groups that interact with one another, construct common realities and meanings, and employ these in their readings. So meaning really resides in the interpretive community of readers.

In your literature class, then, you may come to share a common reading of *Moby Dick*. This will happen because of your common identity as English students, as well as discussions in class, sharing a common textbook, completing the same assignments, taking the same tests, and having the same professor. It is likely that the class will become an interpretive community with very similar meanings for the novel. Indeed, your class will become linked with other classes, in prior and future semesters, and because your professor reads the same journals as professors in other universities and attends conferences on 19th-century literature, it is very possible that you will become a member of a huge interpretive community of the American novel.

Of course, if you subscribe to Fish's theory, you will not search for a single meaning. There is no correct or objective reading of a text. The matter is entirely dependent on the audience's interpretation. Needless to say, this is a highly controversial idea in literary studies, as much of literary criticism looks at the intention of the author and how the author communicates that intention through every aspect of content and form.

Ricoeur and Fish agree, then, that the author of the text is not the source of meaning. Where they very much disagree is in the role of the text. Both Ricoeur and Fish use the hermeneutic circle, but they emphasize somewhat different things in doing so. For Ricoeur, the readers are always testing their interpretations by looking at features of the text so as to find the meanings that lie there. For Fish, readers always project their own meanings into features of the text and only come up with their own meanings in the end. For Ricoeur, the text is like a template; for Fish it is like a Rorschach test. Distanciation, the principle that is so important to Ricoeur, is senseless to Fish because readers can never be distanced from the text; they are always embedding their own meanings in it. In contrast to both of these approaches, we turn now to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who gives value to both text and reader.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer, a protégé of Martin Heidegger, teaches that individuals do not stand apart from things in order to analyze and interpret them; instead, we interpret naturally as part of our everyday existence.[84] We cannot be human without interpreting. That means that our experience and the world we interpret are so closely intertwined that they are virtually the same thing.

The central tenet of Gadamer's theory is that one always understands experience from the perspective of presuppositions or assumptions. Our experiences, histories, and traditions give us ways of understanding things, and we cannot divorce ourselves from those interpretive frames. Observation, reason, and understanding are never objectively pure; they are colored by our experiences. Further, history is not to be separated from the present. We are always simultaneously part of the past, in the present, and anticipating the future. In other words, the past operates on us now in the present and affects our conceptions of what is yet to come. At the same time, our present notions of reality affect how we view the past.

Over time, then, we become distanced from the events of the past. Our way of seeing things

in the present time creates a temporal distance from an object of the past, such that artifacts have both a strangeness and a familiarity. If you find your grandmother's old dress in a dusty trunk in the attic, it will look somewhat familiar but strange at the same time. We understand an artifact because of what we have learned from history, which is a residue of highly relevant, but essential, meanings. For example, you recognize your grandmother's dress because of its "dressness": even though the dress might be very old, you still recognize buttons, lace, and other features that make this a dress. You know this is a dress from having viewed old pictures and from reading and hearing about fashion trends of the previous century.

For Gadamer, interpretation of historical events and objects, including written texts, is enhanced by historical distance. He suggests that understanding a text involves looking at the enduring meanings of that text within a tradition and apart from the original communicators' intentions. So texts from the past become contemporaneous and speak to us in our own time. The Gettysburg Address, for example, was originally a piece of spoken discourse designed to achieve a certain effect during the Civil War. Once spoken, however, the text lived on as an object of its own, rife with internal meaning. Unessential details—that it was written on the back of an envelope on the train by a tall, lanky president—drop away as the text itself reveals its meanings to us in our own time. We understand the Gettysburg Address through the lens of the past and the benefit of historical perspective as well as the fact that the essential meaning of the words lives on into the present.

The meaning we get from a text, then, is a result of a dialogue between our own present-day meanings and those embedded in the language of the text. You do recognize and understand an old dress because of its features that still have meaning, but, at the same time, you also apply your own current ideas about the dress—that it is inconvenient, hot, heavy, and impractical but gorgeous nevertheless. You understand the words and meanings of the Gettysburg Address because those words live on, but at the same

time, your interpretation is influenced by your own background and experience of today.

This interpretive process is paradoxical: we let the text speak to us, yet we cannot understand it apart from our own prejudices and presuppositions. Because change results from the dialogue between the prejudices or biases of the present and the meanings of the text, prejudice is a positive force, to be acknowledged and used productively in our lives. As one observer has noted, "The problem for the study of communication is not the existence of prejudices but the unawareness of their presence and subsequent inability to separate appropriate from inappropriate ones."[85]

Hermeneutics is not only a process of questioning the meaning of the text but also of allowing the text to question us. What questions does the text itself suggest, and when we ask those questions, what answers does the text offer? What, for example, can we learn about ourselves from the Gettysburg Address? What can we learn about war, about oppression, and about division and polarization?

Ultimately, then, Gadamer believes that experience is inherently linguistic. We cannot separate our experience from language. The perspectives of tradition, from which we always view the world, are in the words. Note how this conception differs from the structural view of language summarized earlier in this chapter, in which language is seen as an arbitrary tool for expressing and referring to an objective reality. Gadamer's view is also different from the interactionist notion (even Fish's), which suggests that language and meaning are created through social interaction. Gadamer's point is that language itself prefigures all experience. The world is presented to us through language. Thus, in communication, two people are not using language to interact with each other; rather, communication involves a triad of two individuals and a language.[86]

To get this idea across, Gadamer uses the analogy of the game. A game has its own existence apart from individual players. The basic structure of the game will be the same whether it is being played or not and regardless of who is

playing. Poker is poker, whether played in 1920 by four old Italian men or in 2006 by college students playing Texas Hold 'Em in a dorm room. Just like poker, which comes to us preformed, with certain rules, so does our world come to us prefigured by language: "The world is already meaningful. That is, the world which comes to us in the only way that the human world can come to us, through language, is an already meaningful world."[87] By making both experience and language equally crucial to his process of interpretation, Gadamer brings phenomenology and hermeneutics together in one process.

The phenomenological tradition is unlike any of the other traditions featured in this chapter. Its contribution is special and important in that it provides a perspective and power that the other traditions cannot. How do you come to understand the intent of an ancient text? How do texts and traditions interact with one another? Where is meaning—in the text, the reader, or the author? These questions can only be answered by phenomenological inquiry.

Interestingly, however, as we move from the confines of a strictly message-oriented focus to broader concerns, as we will in upcoming chapters, phenomenology begins to support and even merge with certain other traditions such as the sociocultural and critical. We will see, for example, that understanding culture within the sociocultural tradition is not unlike reading a text. We will see, too, that critical theory relies heavily on hermeneutic data produced in a process very similar to the interpretation of texts.

A P P L I C A T I O N S & I M P L I C A T I O N S

When you first thought seriously about communication, you probably focused on the message. You may have been in a course like public speaking or television production, where producing messages was your immediate concern. Actually, throughout life, you will be confronted with the question of how to create effective messages, whether you are disciplining a child, conducting a performance review of a subordinate at work, or persuading a group to support a political initiative. Unfortunately, this overemphasis on message effectiveness belies the complexity of communication and the importance of conversations, relationships, and contexts for the production and reception of messages. Still, a respectable body of research and theory has focused on the message, and this material is important as a significant part of communication theory. The following five points are central to the study of messages:

1. Symbol use is central to human life.

Messages are important for transmitting information and influence, but they are much more than this. Human beings by nature must communicate. We must have the means for abstracting, capturing what is important to us, and expressing our experience to others and to ourselves. From Langer to Gadamer, the theories in this chapter drive this point home again and again. Semiotic theories address signs and symbols as the way in which we represent reality. Language theory, especially, demonstrates how human beings manipulate complex codes to express and understand their experience; and theories of nonverbal communication show that language and behavior go together in the creation of meaning.

The centrality of communication to human life does not just come from the fact that we use language to structure meanings. John Stewart writes that

language is "constitutive articulate contact." By this he means that the very process of using language with other people constructs the very categories and logics by which we understand the world.[88] In other words, language constitutes the world. Scholars like Stewart believe that language and communication cannot be separated in the way that Saussure explains in his *langue-parole* distinction, because communication is the mechanism by which language and signs are created, maintained, and changed.[89] In other words, symbols do more than represent things. They do more than communicate meaning. Symbols make our social worlds.

2. The meaning of a message depends upon structural features and interpretive processes.

As a group, the theories of this chapter show that the impact of a message — its meaning and effects — are determined in part by the actual signs, symbols, words, and actions in the message, and in part by the interpretive processes used by the receiver. To understand a message is to understand meaning, and both of these elements are critical when we apply the theories of this chapter.

The key to structural meaning is the rule, or guideline, about what a certain structure of symbols should be taken to mean. The rules of grammar, for example, tell us whether an action is being done by one person or several (plurality); whether it happens in the past, the present, or the future (tense); and whether the subject is acting or being acted on (voice). Further, rules of semantics tell us what the symbols should be taken to represent. All literate speakers of English will know how to interpret the sentence, "I am hungry," because they all share an understanding of the semantic and syntactic rules of the language, but they will know more than the literal meaning of the sentence. From context, they may also know what the speaker intends to accomplish by uttering this sentence. It is not surprising, then, that many listeners would respond to this sentence by saying something like, "Can I get you something to eat?" Here the first sentence counts as a request, and the second as an offer.

Although messages do have certain structural features, you cannot legitimately separate the message from the communicators who send and receive it. Structural features of the message certainly reflect rules of interpretation, but these rules emerge from social interaction within groups and communities, and they are part of the cognitive resources that each person carries around. Also, we will have different connotations for the symbols used in messages. Although we may agree on the literal meaning, even the illocutionary force, of the message, our connotations are bound to differ, at least a little. A contribution of Osgood's semantic meaning theory is that individuals may have rather different reactions to the evaluation, potency, and activity of a concept.

To see the interaction between the structure of the text and the interpretive scheme of the receiver, take a look at the following sentence: *A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.* This is the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and its meaning is very much in dispute. Does this amendment mean that every individual has the right to carry a gun? You could read it that way. Or does the amendment mean that guns may be kept in the armory for use by law enforcement agencies and the National Guard in times of

threat? The language of the amendment does give you some clues, but your interpretation will probably depend on your own point of view as well. Some take the term *people* to mean "citizens as a group," while others take this term to mean "each and every individual." Some people say that the first phrase, referring to the militia, should tell us how to interpret "the right of the people." Others say that the term *well regulated* casts light on the meaning of *keep and bear.* Still others say that the meaning of the main clause is self-evident: ". . . the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." As you ponder the meaning of the Second Amendment, you have to rely in part on the structure of the message and in part on the interpretive categories of your culture, community, and the era in which you live. This is exactly why unanimous decisions of the Supreme Court are rare.

Notice that different theories stress different aspects of the interpretive process. Ricoeur stresses the content of the message, but Fish claims that it is all in the reader. Gadamer balances both of these, claiming that interpretations are an outcome of a dialogue between the text and the interpreter. Charles Osgood takes yet another view, which is that our understandings are colored by universal categories of mind, and that your interpretation of the Second Amendment will be greatly influenced by whether you think that guns are good or bad, strong or weak, active or inactive.

How can you understand a novel by Charles Dickens if you can't have a dialogue with Dickens to find out what he meant? Even after 200 years, you can still understand the novel quite well. You may enhance your understanding by talking about the book with others or consulting historical documents, but you cannot deny that there was meaning in the text. Textual interpretation is the topic of hermeneutics, and we see in this chapter that readers are able to look carefully at the text, compare it with their own experiences, and generate an increasingly refined meaning for what the text is saying. Of course, your meaning for a passage in a Dickens novel is never entirely determined by the text itself. Your own experience and era give you an interpretive frame, and your "final" reading of the text is an outcome of the interaction between your contemporary experience and the structure of the message itself, which leads to our next point.

3. We communicate with complex message codes.

Interpreting texts, or written discourse, is hard enough, but in the flux and flow of everyday communication, we are challenged by a complexity of language and behavioral codes. We fuse symbols, each with rich denotations and connotations, into sentences and paragraphs according to the rules of grammar and deliver these simultaneously in a performance, often along with other presentational symbols (such as graphics, sound, and music) and other contextual features. Where we stand, how we look, what we do with our eyes — a mix of codes — all shape the message.

Typical of much of communication theory, this chapter tends to chop up the topic of messages into types and parts. In communication theory, we face a paradox. To understand communication, we must look at it piece by piece, but doing so distorts the actual process itself. This difficulty is not unlike studying music. Music theory focuses on the parts of the music — tone, scale, tempo, key, etc. Although music can be divided into these parts, a performance is an

integration of parts into a whole. The difference between learning to play the piano and being a virtuoso is precisely this: the beginner is stringing together individual finger strokes of varying duration, tempo, etc. The virtuoso does not think of finger strokes but looks at the musicality of the whole piece. Messages are the same way — verbal and nonverbal components merge seamlessly as a performance.[90]

4. Message production is made possible by microcognitive and macrocognitive processes.

Given the strong psychological orientation of Western society, it is not surprising that much communication theory has focused on the cognitive processes used by individuals to plan messages to achieve their individual goals. The focus of these theories is on people making rational decisions about what they want to accomplish and then actively planning strategies for doing so. Some of the processes — from macrocognitive theory — appear very conscious, while other behind-the-scenes processes — microcognitive processes — are almost automatic and certainly out of awareness. This is like the difference between a driver and a car engine. The driver makes conscious plans and drives the car to get to a particular destination, while the engine is operating simultaneously under the hood to make it possible for the conscious plan to be followed. The driver may decide to make a turn to go to the store on the way and never thinks about the braking, accelerating, and turning systems of the car that "follows his orders" once the decision is made to turn.

A decision that serious students of cognition come to make is this: Am I more interested in the driver, the driver's plans, and the driver's actions, or am I more interested in the engine that lies under the hood? The kind of research and theory you end up producing will depend in part on the answer to this question. If you are interested in the driver, you will probably end up looking at overt, conscious planning processes, but if you like engines, you will be attracted to microprocesses behind message behavior. John Greene's action-assembly theory is a theory about the engine, while Charles Berger's theory of planning addresses concerns of the driver.

Both strategy-choice and message-design models give individual communicators quite a bit of power in preplanning their messages. This is probably not a very good representation of how communication actually takes place, however. Although the cognitive processes that occur before interaction takes place are important, Burgoon and her colleagues have consistently found in their research that the actual behavior encountered in interaction has far more power to influence what a communicator does than any preplanning efforts.[91] Most of the cognitive work of interaction is probably done moment to moment as communicators adjust and adapt to one another.

Obviously, the boundary between Chapter 4 (The Communicator) and Chapter 5 (The Message) is fuzzy. To get the most from these chapters, we encourage you to hold them up side by side, to look at each in light of the other. An important interface between communicator and message lies in the question, "How can communicators effectively produce and receive messages?" Effective communication involves creating and tracking goals, looking for connections between your goals and those of the receiver, developing messages that are both

efficient and socially appropriate, being adaptable in modifying plans and messages, being sensitive to timing issues, becoming knowledgeable about the topic of conversation, and understanding what others wish to accomplish with their messages and how this affects us.[92]

5. Messages are created to meet multiple goals and designed to achieve several levels of meaning.

Consider the number of accomplishments that a simple message can achieve. It can get across a denotation or representational meaning, it can express feelings and connotations, it can fulfill an intention, it can elicit a response, it can save face, it can achieve compliance, it can build identification and division, or it can accomplish a plan or goal. In other words, communicators use messages to manage meaning on many levels at the same time.

The theories of this chapter, taken together, not only can help us understand the component parts of messages but can broaden our view of communication at the same time. We can see the many dimensions, the complexity, and the power of communication reflected in the message. We understand that the messages we construct are much more than simply conveying information; they tell others about ourselves, our past, our culture, and our expectations for the future.

◖ NOTES

1. Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942). See also *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967, 1972, 1982). A good secondary source is John Stewart, *Language as Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 92–101.
2. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 63.
3. This semiotic analysis of van Gogh's work was done by Mark Roskill, "'Public' and 'Private' Meanings: The Paintings of van Gogh," *Journal of Communication* 29 (1979): 157–69.
4. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, *Semiotics and Communication: Signs, Codes, Cultures* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993),13. For good brief overviews of the study of language, see Donald G. Ellis, *From Language to Communication* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999); Scott Jacobs, "Language and Interpersonal Communication," in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, ed. Mark L. Knapp and Gerald R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 199–228; Irwin Weiser, "Linguistics," in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, ed. Theresa Enos (New York: Garland, 1996), 386–91; David Graddol, Jenny Cheshire, and Joan Swann, *Descriptive Language* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1994), 65–101; Adrian Akmajian, Richard A. Demers, Ann K. Farmer, and Robert M. Harnish, *An Introduction to Language and Communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 123–92.
5. Ferdinand de Saussure's primary work on this subject is *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Peter Owen, 1960). Excellent secondary sources include Stewart, *Language as Articulate Contact*, 81– 87; Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); and Fred Dallmayr, *Language and Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).
6. One difference between langue and parole, according to Saussure, is stability. Language is characterized by synchrony, meaning that it changes very little over time. Speech, on the other hand, is characterized by diachrony, meaning that it changes constantly from situation to situation.
7. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 9.
8. The major writings of this period include Leonard Bloomfield, *Language* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1933); Charles Fries, *The Structure of English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952); and Zellig Harris, *Structural Linguistics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). An excellent summary and critique of this period can be found in J. A. Fodor, T. G. Bever, and M. F. Garrett, *The Psychology of Language: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics and Generative Grammar* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

9. See, for example, Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975).

10. Randall Harrison, *Beyond Words: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 24–25. Conceptual issues are discussed in Judee K. Burgoon, "Nonverbal Signals," in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, ed. Mark L. Knapp and Gerald R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 229–85; see also Mark L. Knapp and Judith Hall, *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1992).

11. For a broad overview of research, see Judee K. Burgoon and Aaron E. Bacue, "Nonverbal Communication Skills," in *Handbook of Communication and Social Interaction Skills*, ed. John O. Greene and Brant R. Burleson (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003), 179–219.

12. Burgoon, "Nonverbal Signals," 232.

13. Birdwhistell's major works include *Introduction to Kinesics* (Louisville, KY: University of Louisville Press, 1952); and *Kinesics and Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970).

14. Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context*, 183–84.

15. Ekman and Friesen's major works include "Nonverbal Behavior in Psychotherapy Research," in *Research in Psychotherapy*, ed. J. Shlien (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1968), 3: 179–216; "The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding," *Semiotica* 1 (1969): 49–98; *Emotion in the Human Face: Guidelines for Research and an Integration of Findings* (New York: Pergamon, 1972); *Unmasking the Face* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

16. Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen, "Hand Movements," *Journal of Communication* 22 (1972): 353.

17. The distinction between biologically determined and socially determined signal systems is explored by Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, *Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006); Ross Buck and C. Arthur VanLear "Verbal and Nonverbal Communication: Distinguishing Symbolic, Spontaneous, and Pseudo-Spontaneous Nonverbal Behavior," *Journal of Communication* 52 (2002): 522–41.

18. More recent evidence suggests that affect displays are not necessarily as informative as Ekman and Friesen indicate. Interpretation of affect displays in actual interaction has been found not to be very accurate and may serve more as a nonverbal interjection than a display of emotion. See Michael T. Motley, "Facial Affect and Verbal Context in Conversation," *Human Communication Research* 20 (1993): 3–40; Michael T. Motley and Carl T. Camden, "Facial Expression of Emotion: A Comparison of Posed Expressions Versus Spontaneous Expressions in an Interpersonal Communication Setting," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 52 (1988): 1–22.

19. Edward T. Hall, "A System for the Notation of Proxemic Behavior," *American Anthropologist* 65 (1963): 1003. Edward Hall's major works include *The Silent Language* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1959); and *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Random House, 1966).

20. John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 22. See also François Cooren, "The Contribution of Speech Act Theory to the Analysis of Conversation: How Pre-sequences Work," in *Handbook of Language and Social Interaction*, eds. Kristine L. Fitch and Robert E. Sanders (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 21–40; Deborah Cameron, *Working with Spoken Discourse* (London: Sage, 2001), 68–75.

21. Searle, *Speech Acts*, 22.

22. See, for example, Bernard L. Brock, "Evolution of Kenneth Burke's Criticism and Philosophy of Language," in *Kenneth Burke and Contemporary European Thought: Rhetoric in Transition*, ed. Bernard L. Brock (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 1–33; Herbert W. Simons and Trevor Melia, eds., *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Although in the communication field Burke is most often considered a symbol theorist, he is also a major social critic. For a discussion of this aspect of his work, see Omar Swartz, *Conducting Socially Responsible Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 68–90.

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24. For Burke's notion of identification and division, see Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California, 1969), 21–23.

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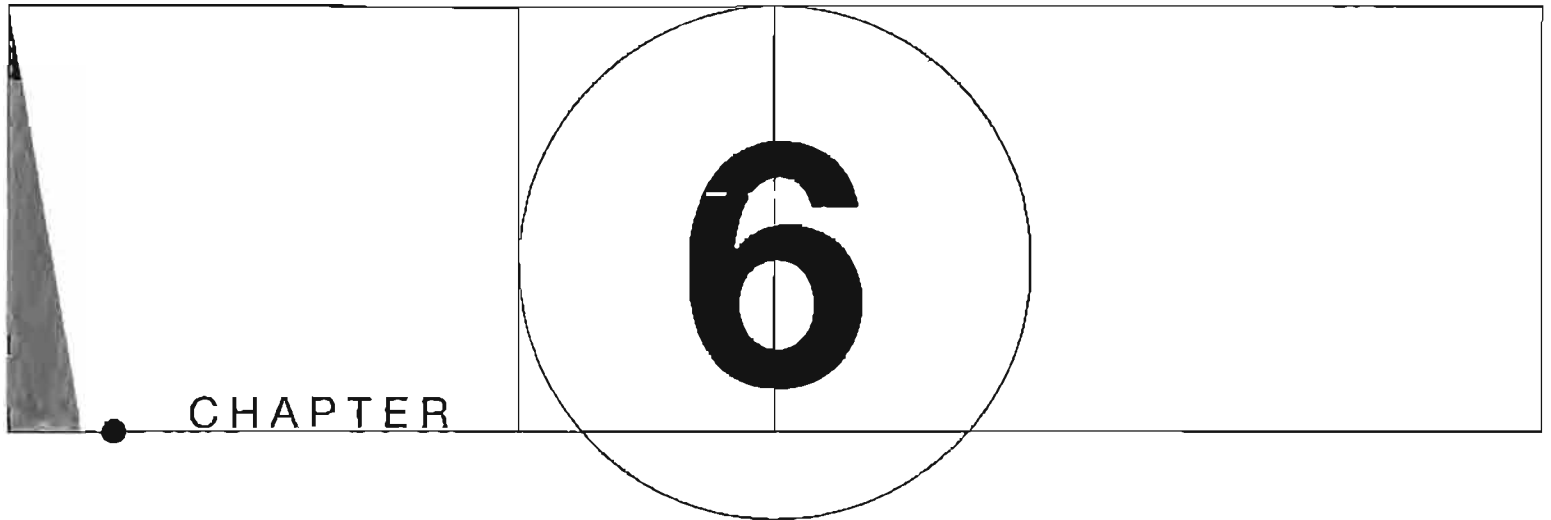
THE CONVERSATION

For most people, conversations are informal, everyday interactions, but in communication theory, the term has a special meaning. A conversation is an interaction sequence with a defined beginning and end, turn taking, and some sort of purpose or a set of goals.[1] Conversations are also governed by rules; they have structure and display coherence and sense. Conversations include all types of interaction, including social talk as well as debates and arguments, problem-solving efforts, conflict episodes, romantic exchanges, and any other type of discourse in which communicators use language and nonverbal communication to interact with one another. Examples include family talks, dinner with a friend, business meetings, telephone conversations, Internet chats and e-mail exchanges, and any other well-defined period of interaction. When you think about it, conversations are really the heart of communication, and for this reason conversations are an important subject of communication theory.

Whenever you enter a new situation or encounter people with whom you may need to interact, you begin to think about conversation. If you are on your way to a party that will have many guests you don't know, you might think about how to begin conversations and integrate into the party. If you have scheduled a business meeting with someone you haven't met before, you will be thinking about what you want to accomplish with this person, what the person is like, and how you will get

Topics Addressed	Sociopsychological Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Cybernetic Theories	Critical Theories
Uncertainty management	Uncertainty reduction theory Anxiety-Uncertainty Management Theory Accommodation Theory			
Adaptation	Interaction-Adaptation Theory Expectation-Violations Theory Interpersonal-Deception Theory			
Meaning in Interaction		Symbolic interactionism Symbolic-convergence theory Conversation analysis Face-negotiation theory	Coordinated management of meaning	
Culture				Language-centered perspective Co-cultural theory Invitational rhetoric

the meeting started. Each of these situations creates uncertainty and perhaps even anxiety for you, and part of what you do, as you prepare for an interaction, is to try to reduce this uncertainty in some way. As we will see, both uncertainty and anxiety reduction are part of what has been studied about the conversation.

Once the conversation begins — once people start talking — stand back for a few minutes and watch people interact. You will see a curious dance going on, in which individuals use many nonverbal behaviors — eye contact, body posture, body orientation — to interact with one another. What you will see is a dynamic and complex process of interpersonal adaptation, and this topic has not escaped the attention of communication theorists either.

But what gets made in all of this dancing and uncertainty reduction? As the chapter moves on, you will gain insight into the larger outcomes of social interaction in terms of relationships, social institutions, and goal accomplishment. We see, too, how people operate from socially negotiated rules to determine how to "read" social situations and actions and how to respond to others in conversations. Larger institutions as well as power arrangements are constructed in a history of conversations within society over time. Conversations matter, and in this chapter, we will have a chance to look at this topic from many angles. The chapter map on page 148 shows the landscape we will traverse here.

◖ THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

Sociopsychological theories have concentrated on identifying variables that affect our behavior in interaction. Two major themes have emerged in this literature. First, researchers have focused on the conditions in which individuals manage uncertainty about other people, including how they go about getting information about others, how uncertainty and anxiety are related to one another, and how uncertainty-reduction processes are related to culture. The second theme prevalent in the sociopsychological work on conversation involves the organization, coordination, and meshing of behavior in interactional episodes. These theories tells us a great deal about how we match our behaviors to those of others, how and when our behaviors diverge, what happens when our expectations are violated, and how we come to detect deception based on the behavior of others.[2]

Managing Uncertainty and Anxiety

The first theme in the conversation literature—managing uncertainty—emerged in large part from the work of Charles Berger, William Gudykunst, and their colleagues. This line of theory deals with the ways we gather information about other people, why we do so, and what results we obtain when we do.[3] In other words, the focus is on the ways individuals monitor their social environments and come to know more about themselves and others through interaction. Berger's theory is referred to as *uncertainty reduction theory* (URT) and Gudykunst's extension of Berger's work is called *anxiety uncertainty management* (AUM).[4]

Uncertainty Reduction Theory.   This theory addresses the basic process of how we gain knowledge about other people.[5] When we encounter a stranger, we may have a strong desire to reduce uncertainty about this person. In such a situation, we tend to be uncertain about the other's ability to communicate goals and plans,

feelings at the moment, and the like. Berger proposes that people have a difficult time with uncertainty, they want to be able to predict behavior, and therefore they are motivated to seek information about others. Indeed, this kind of uncertainty reduction is one of the primary dimensions of a developing relationship.

As we communicate, according to Berger, we are making plans to accomplish our goals. We formulate plans for our communications with others based on our goals as well as the information we have about the others involved. The more uncertain we are, the more vigilant we become, and the more we rely on data available to us in the situation. At highly uncertain moments, we become more conscious or mindful of the planning we are doing. When we are very uncertain about another person, we tend to be less confident in our plans and make more contingency plans, or alternative ways of responding.

Attraction or affiliation seems to correlate positively with uncertainty reduction. For example, nonverbal expressiveness seems to reduce uncertainty, and reduction in uncertainty seems to increase nonverbal expressiveness. Higher levels of uncertainty seem to create distance, but reduced uncertainty tends to bring people together. As communicators discover similarities between them, their attraction to one another goes up, and their apparent need for more information goes down.

Often, the behavior of the other person immediately leads to a reduction in your uncertainty, and you do not feel the need to get additional information. This is especially true when your involvement with the other person is limited to a particular situation, and you have all the information you need to understand that person's behavior in this situation. However, under other circumstances, you have a heightened need to know. Such circumstances include abnormal behavior on the part of the other person, the expectation that you will be communicating with the other person in the future, or the prospect that the encounter will be especially rewarding or costly. Under these conditions, you will probably take action to get more information about the other person.

From the Source . . .

Even routine encounters with people we know well may be fraught with uncertainty. While conversing, it is impossible to know with complete certainty the beliefs, attitudes, values, and current emotional states of co-interlocutors, whether the conversation is face-to-face or through some medium such as e-mail or mobile phone. Because all conversations are infused by some measure of uncertainty, when we write, speak, and act, we risk saying or doing something that may produce unintended consequences.

— Charles R. Berger

For example, if you hired a plumber to fix a leak in your house, you would probably not have a very great need to learn more about this contractor, assuming you would not see this person again. On the other hand, if the plumber noticed that you had a "Room for Rent" sign in your window and expressed an interest in finding a new place to live, you would suddenly be motivated to get more information about this person. In particular, you would be interested in reducing *predictive uncertainty* about this individual, so that you would have a better idea of what to expect about this person's behavior, and you would want to reduce *explanatory uncertainty*, so that you could better understand your possible tenant's behavior. In initial interactions, then, people tend to talk more in order to get information; as uncertainty is eliminated, questioning and other information-seeking strategies decline.

Berger suggests a variety of ways we go about getting information from others. *Passive strategies* are observational, whereas *active* ones require the observer to do something to get the information. *Interactive strategies* rely directly on communication with the other person.

The first passive strategy is *reactivity searching*. Here the individual is observed actually doing something—reacting in some situation. For

example, if you were interested in dating a classmate, you might observe this person discreetly for a period of time. You might watch the way the classmate reacts to events in the class—questions from the instructor, class discussions, and so forth. Observers generally prefer to see how a person reacts when communicating with another person, so you might listen in on conversations this person is having with other people in class. *Disinhibition searching* is another passive strategy in which people are observed in informal situations, where they are less likely to be self-monitoring and are behaving in a more natural way. You might therefore be especially interested in observing your classmate outside of class in settings such as at a local coffee shop or in the residence hall.

Active strategies of information involve asking others about the target person and manipulating the environment in ways that set the target person up for observation. You might, for example, try to get assigned to a project group with this classmate. Or you might ask a mutual friend to invite both of you to a party. A common way of finding out about someone these days is to "Google" them—see what you can find out about them by surfing the Internet.

Interactive strategies include interrogation and self-disclosure. Self-disclosure, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, is a significant strategy for actively obtaining information, because if you disclose something about yourself, the other person is likely to disclose in return. Once in the project group, for instance, you could talk to this other person, ask questions, and make disclosures in order to encourage the person to disclose information as well.

To discover the ways strangers get information about one another, Charles Berger and Katherine Kellermann videotaped about 50 conversations in their laboratory.[6] The pairs in the study were told to get varying amounts of information from their conversational partners. Some participants were told to get as much information about the other person as possible, others were told to get as little as possible, and a third group was not given any instructions along these lines. Also, the dyads themselves were mixed: some consisted of pairs in which both had been asked to get a great deal of information, some consisted of pairs in which both had been asked to get little information, and some included one person from each category.

The videotaped conversations were coded by judges in a variety of ways. The researchers were interested chiefly in finding out what the communicators actually did to get or to resist getting information. Predictably, the most common strategy for getting information was to ask questions, but some other strategies were also used, such as putting the other person at ease and using self-disclosure. Even the low-information seekers used questions, but their questions tended to be innocuous inquiries into the weather and other noninformative topics.

Individuals who were trying to get a great deal of information asked significantly more questions than the low-information subjects. Those who were not given any instructions asked about the same number of questions as those who were told to get a great deal of information, which suggests that we normally tend to ask many questions when talking with strangers. This hypothesis was supported because the low-information seekers in this experiment had a harder time trying to keep from getting a lot of information than did the high-information seekers and normal subjects. As expected, high-information seekers asked more open-ended questions, requiring explanation, than did low-information seekers.

Anxiety-Uncertainty Management.   William Gudykunst and his colleagues have extended Berger's work in important ways, especially by looking at uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural situations. They have found that all cultures seek to reduce uncertainty in the initial stages of a relationship, but they do so in different ways.[7] The difference can be explained by whether one is a member of a high-context culture or a low-context culture.[8] *High-context cultures* rely heavily on the overall situation to interpret events, and *low-context cultures* rely more on the explicit verbal content of messages.

Members of high-context cultures, such as the Japanese, rely on nonverbal cues and information about a person's background to reduce uncertainty, but members of low-context cultures, such as the British, ask direct questions related to experience, attitudes, and beliefs.

The process of uncertainty reduction between people from different cultures is affected by additional variables as well. When you strongly identify with your own cultural group and you think the other person is typical of a different group, you will probably feel a certain amount of anxiety, and your uncertainty will be great. On the other hand, your confidence in getting to know the other person will be higher and your anxiety about doing so will be lower if you expect the results to be positive. Experience and friendships with other people from different cultures may also increase your confidence when meeting a stranger from another cultural group. In addition, knowing the other person's language will help, as will a certain amount of tolerance for ambiguity. And when you are more confident and less anxious about meeting someone from a different group, you will probably do a better job of getting information and reducing uncertainty.

Ineffectiveness and lack of adaptation in intercultural situations seem to depend largely on uncertainty and anxiety. The less you know and the more anxious you are, the less effective you will probably be in intercultural situations. This makes the reduction or management of uncertainty and anxiety especially important.

There is no clear line that marks the point at which difficult or problematic communication will result. Instead, different individuals have different thresholds for uncertainty and anxiety. If your level of uncertainty exceeds your upper threshold, you will not feel very confident, and if the level of anxiety is too high for you, you might avoid communication altogether. There are also low-end thresholds, below which your motivation to communicate will disappear. If you meet someone from another culture and are too uncertain about this person, you might avoid communicating with her because you feel you don't know how to manage the interaction. At

the same time, if you do not feel any uncertainty, you will not be motivated to communicate because you might feel you already know enough. If you are too anxious, you will be nervous and avoid communicating, but if you are not anxious enough, you will not care enough to try. The ideal in intergroup situations, then, is for uncertainty and anxiety to be between your upper and lower thresholds, which would lead to motivation to communicate and the adoption of uncertainty-reduction strategies.

In recent years, Gudykunst has elaborated this theory in detail, to the point that it now includes about 50 propositions related to self-concept, motivation, reactions to strangers, social categorization, situational processes, connection with strangers, and a host of other concerns dealing with anxiety and effectiveness.[9] Clearly, anxiety and uncertainty correlate with a whole host of communication traits, behaviors, and patterns, and these combinations affect what we do in conversation with those we don't know.

Accommodation and Adaptation

If you observe interaction closely, you will notice that speakers frequently adjust their behaviors to one another. For example, two speakers may adjust their accents to sound more alike, may begin to speak at the same speed, or may use mirror-like gestures. Sometimes speakers do just the opposite and actually exaggerate their differences. Researchers have also noticed these behaviors and have studied them in a variety of ways. Here we look at four landmark projects that address this issue—accommodation theory, interaction-adaptation theory, expectancy-violations theory, and interpersonal-deception theory.

Accommodation Theory. This theory is one of the most influential behavioral theories of communication. Formulated by Howard Giles and his colleagues, accommodation theory explains how and why we adjust our communication behaviors to the actions of others.[10] Have you ever noticed, for example, that two people in a conversation will both have their arms crossed? Giles and his colleagues have confirmed the

common observation that communicators often seem to mimic one another's behavior. They call this *convergence,* or coming together. The opposite—*divergence*—or moving apart, happens when speakers begin to exaggerate their differences. Accommodation in both of these forms has been seen in almost all imaginable communication behaviors, including accent, rate, loudness, vocabulary, grammar, voice, gestures, and other features.

Convergence or divergence can be *mutual,* in which case both communicators come together or go apart, or it can be *nonmutual,* in which one person converges and the other diverges. Convergence can also be *partial* or *complete.* For example, you might speak somewhat faster so that you are a little closer to another person's speech rate, or you might go all the way and speak just as fast as this person does.

Although accommodation is sometimes done consciously, the speaker is usually unaware of doing so. The use of accommodation is similar to any number of other functional but subconscious processes that are scripted or enacted without having to attend to all the details of each behavior. You are probably more aware of divergence than convergence because differences become more noticeable in the process.

Accommodation researchers have found that accommodation can be important in communication. It can lead to social identity and bonding or disapproval and distancing. For instance, convergence often happens in situations in which you seek the approval of others. This can occur in groups that are already alike in certain ways because such groups consist of similar individuals who can coordinate their actions. When communicators converge effectively, they may find one another more attractive, predictable, and easier to understand. They may also feel more involved with one another. Typically, some convergence is appreciated. You tend to respond favorably to someone who makes an attempt to speak in your style, but you will probably dislike too much convergence, especially if you think it is inappropriate. For example, people sometimes converge not with the other person's actual speech but with a stereotype, such as when a nurse speaks to an elderly patient using baby talk or when someone speaks loudly and slowly to a blind person. People tend to appreciate convergence from others that is accurate, well intended, and appropriate in the situation, and tend to be irritated by the convergence effort if it is not.

How you evaluate convergence depends in part on motivation—why you think others are copying you. Studies have shown that when listeners perceive that the speaker is intentionally speaking in a style close to the listeners' own, they will tend to like it. But listeners will evaluate negatively any convergence move that is seen as inappropriate in the situation or done out of ill will. This includes, for example, mocking, teasing, insensitivity to social norms, or inflexibility.

Of course, you do not always match the behavior of others in order to seek their approval. Often higher-status speakers will slow their speech or use simpler vocabulary to increase understanding when talking with a person who has lower status. In contrast, lower-status communicators will sometimes upgrade their speech to match the higher-status person because they want that person's approval.

Although the rewards of speech convergence can be substantial, so are the costs. Convergence requires effort, and it may mean the loss of personal identity if taken to extremes. Sometimes it is even viewed as abnormal and may be frowned on. We probably all have known someone who adapts her views to the views of the person being spoken to; eventually, you stop taking what this person says seriously because you don't really know what she thinks or believes.

Sometimes, instead of converging, you choose to maintain your own style or actually move in the opposite direction of your conversational partner's style. You may work to maintain your own style when you want to reinforce your identity. This would be the case, for example, among members of an ethnic group with a strong accent, who work to perpetuate the accent in the face of homogenizing influences of a dominant culture. We have a friend who was

born and grew up in Germany, and even though she hasn't lived there for 50 years, she works hard to maintain a strong German accent. She admits to this because she wants to keep her German identity, even though her brother doesn't show even a hint of a German accent.

Sometimes members of a group will accentuate their speech characteristics in a strange community to elicit sympathy from the host group. Speaking French slowly while in Paris, for example, in an effort to get the French to treat you kindly and forgive your linguistic errors is one case of this behavior. This is a kind of self-handicapping method that frees speakers from responsibility. The speaker is excused from being fluent in French, for violating certain conversational norms with which they may not be familiar, and so on. Sometimes, too, speakers will diverge from the style of other speakers in order to affect the others' behavior in some way. Teachers may deliberately talk over the heads of students in order to challenge the students to learn. You might speak extra slowly when talking with a very fast speaker in order to get him or her to slow down. To learn more about these processes, we turn to the work of Judee Burgoon and her colleagues.

Interaction-Adaptation Theory. Accommodation theory lays the basic groundwork for identifying various types of accommodation and their correlates, but this phenomenon is actually part of a much more complex process of adaptation in interaction—the topic of the interaction-adaptation theory of Judee Burgoon and her associates.[11] These researchers noticed that communicators have a kind of *interactional synchrony* or coordinated back-and-forth pattern. If you were to videotape a conversation between yourself and a friend, you would probably notice this effect. At some moments you might see the two of you behaving in a similar way, mirroring or converging in a *reciprocal* pattern. At other moments, you might see yourselves sort of backing away or diverging in a pattern of *compensation*. Using the lens of interaction-adaptation theory, you would begin to notice your behaviors are

influencing each other, creating the pattern, rather like a dance.

According to Burgoon and her associates, when you begin communicating with another person, you have a rough idea about what will happen. This is your *interaction position*, the place where you will begin. It is determined by a combination of factors that the theorists cleverly named *RED*, which stands for *requirements, expectations*, and *desires*. Your *requirements* are the things you really need in the interaction. These may be biological, as in talking loud enough to be heard, or they may be social, such as a need for affiliation, continued friendship, or even for managing a smooth interaction. Your *expectations* are the patterns you predict will happen. If you are not that familiar with the other person, you will rely on social norms of politeness and aspects of the situation, such as the purpose of the meeting. If you know the other person well, your expectations will probably be based largely on past experience. Your *desires* are what you want to accomplish, what you hope will happen.

Your initial behaviors in the interaction consist of a combination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that reflect your interaction position, environmental factors, and skill level. However, in most interactions, your behavior will change—and so will that of your partner—as you experience mutual influence. Mutual influence can be considerable and, in most situations, can have a far greater effect than any preplanning you have done. Normally, you will *reciprocate* your partner's behavior as a kind of default response. A hug, for example, will probably be reciprocated. Humans seem to need organized patterning, which reciprocation can help achieve. This tendency to reciprocate may be caused by a combination of biological and socially conditioned factors. This does not mean that we always reciprocate, however. Sometimes the reciprocal pattern is disrupted or disabled, leading to a second kind of response—*compensation*.

If you like your partner's behavior more than you thought you would, you will probably reciprocate, or converge, making your behavior more like that of your partner. If it turns out that your partner's behavior is more negative than

you thought it would be, you will probably engage in a pattern of compensation, maintaining your own style and maybe even exaggerating what you would have initially done. Let's say, for example, that you feel very close to your friend and would like to get a hug, but you don't really expect to. Surprisingly, however, he comes up and puts his hand on your shoulder, so you reciprocate by putting your arm around his waist. That's an example of positive evaluation and reciprocation.

On the other hand, assume that you hope to get a hug but are disappointed when your partner fails to touch you. In this situation, you would probably compensate by walking over and giving him a hug. On the other hand, if you expected a hug but didn't want one, his failure to touch you would be a good thing, and you would reciprocate that by backing off or maintaining some distance. Human interaction is complex and involves a mix of motives and patterns. You can actually reciprocate some behaviors and compensate others at the same time. Burgoon and her colleagues have discovered that the ways in which we adapt to other people depend in large measure on the extent to which other people violate our expectations for behavior. Burgoon and her colleagues explore this hypothesis in greater detail in expectancy-violations theory.

Expectancy-Violations Theory. As a natural extension of their work on interaction adaptation, Burgoon and her colleagues, among others, have explored the ways in which people react when their expectations are violated.[12] According to this theory, we have expectations about the behavior of another person based on social norms as well as our previous experience with the other person and the situation in which the behavior occurs. These expectations can involve virtually any nonverbal behavior, including, for example, eye contact, distance, and body angle.[13]

The common assumption is that when expectancies are met, the other person's behaviors are judged as positive, and when they are violated, the behaviors are judged as negative.

Burgoon and her colleagues found, however, that this is not always the case. Violations are often judged favorably. This may be the case because violations sometimes draw our attention to the other person's behavior, and we learn something positive we might not otherwise have noticed.

Whether judged as good or bad, violations cause the perceiver to be aroused. If someone stands too close to you or too far away, if another person's eye contact is abnormal, or if an individual violates some other set of expectations, you will feel differently. This arousal is not necessarily negative. In fact, in some cases it might feel pleasant, especially when the other person seems to like you and you like him. Sometimes, however, violations can make you feel uncomfortable. Apparently, we learn to have expectations and to detect violations early in life, even in infancy.

What seems to happen is that your attention is drawn to behavior that would otherwise go unnoticed. When your expectations are met, you don't notice the behavior, but when they are violated, you become distracted by the behavior. This distraction can certainly get your attention and lead you to begin evaluating the other person's behavior.

Imagine, for example, that you have just been introduced to an attractive person. In getting to know each other, you talk about everything from the weather to family. Suddenly you become aware that this person is standing unusually close to you. You try to back off, but the other person continues to move in. Your first tendency will be to interpret this behavior and then to evaluate it. You might interpret the behavior as a "come on." If you like this person, you probably will evaluate this move as good.

As this example shows, an important variable in the evaluation process is *reward valence*, or the degree to which you find the interaction rewarding. A conversation might be rewarding, for example, because it will lead to a positive outcome. On the other hand, valence might be negative because it entails more costs than benefits. One of the reasons sexual harassment can be such a problem is that it is a negative behavior in what

may be an otherwise rewarding setting, such as a job situation.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the violation-evaluation process. The figure shows that expectations arise from one's perception of the communicator's characteristics, the state of the relationship, and the context in which the behavior occurs.

Violations accentuate the judgments made in this process. Here the reward valence of the other communicator is especially strong: Violations cause arousal, which in turn accentuate evaluation of communication with the other person and the meaning of the message. If the exchange is valued and the behavior has a positive meaning, a positive outcome will result.

Figure 6.1 includes other possibilities as well. The meaning of the behavior may be ambiguous, and you might not know what to make of it. This theory predicts that ambiguous behavior by a valued communicator will be taken as positive, but such behavior by an unrewarding communicator will be taken as negative. Again, this effect will be accentuated in cases of a violation.

An interesting study of eye gaze shows how violations can affect judgments of behavior and communication outcomes.[14] The researchers trained four confederates to manipulate their eye behavior to effect seemingly natural violations in an interview. About 150 students in an organizational communication course volunteered to participate in the study as part of an interviewing assignment. They took the role of an employment interviewer, and each interviewed one of the confederates. In preparation for half of the interviews, the subjects were given a high-status résumé, and the other half were given a low-status one. The first group was set up to find the interview rewarding, whereas the other would obviously find it less so. Some interviewers got a confederate who gave them normal eye contact, some got a person who gave them no eye contact, and some got a confederate who gave above-normal eye contact. After the interview, each subject completed a set of scales related to the credibility of the applicant, how likely the subject would be to hire this individual, how attracted the interviewer was to this person, and other aspects of the relationship that

developed between them in the interview. The results of this experiment showed that the failure to have eye contact with the interviewer definitely hurt applicants' images, whether they were high or low status. A higher-than-normal level of eye gaze was also found to be a violation, but it was interpreted somewhat differently between the two conditions. High-status applicants with nearly constant eye contact were judged more favorably than were low-status applicants with constant eye contact.

One of the most interesting judgments we make about the behavior of others is in terms of their honesty. Over the past 20 years or so, there has been a great deal of research on deception and deception detection. As a natural extension of their work on expectancy violations, David Buller and Judee Burgoon have pulled together much of this work in a developing theory of interpersonal deception.

Interpersonal-Deception Theory. Buller and Burgoon see deception and its detection as part of an ongoing interaction between communicators involving a back-and-forth process.[15] Deception involves the deliberate manipulation of information, behavior, and image in order to lead another person to a false belief or conclusion. Typically, when a speaker deceives, that person
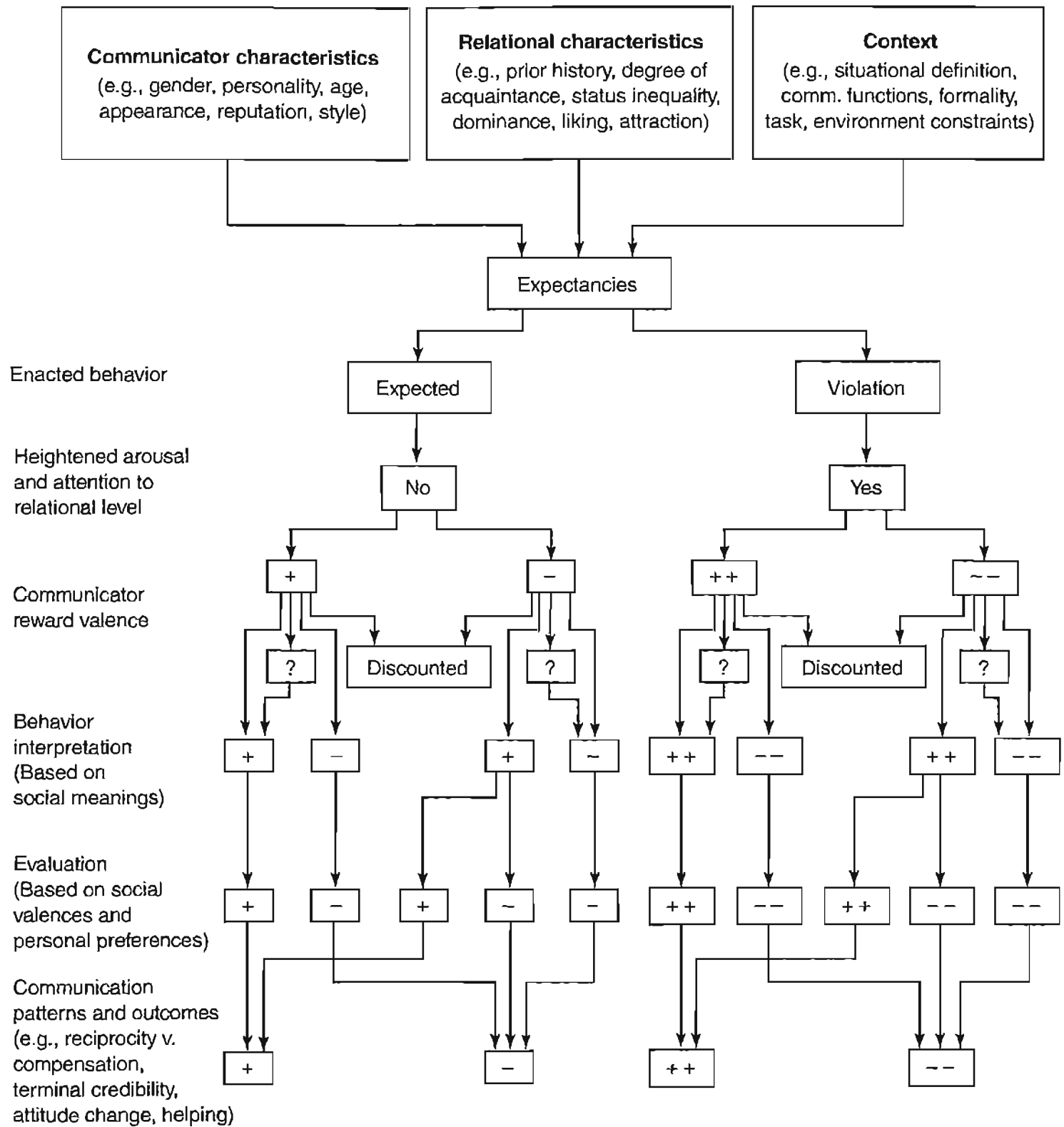
Nonverbal Expectancy Violation Model

NOTE: For simplicity, communicator reward valence, behavior interpretation, and behavior evaluation valence have been dichotomized into positive and negative but should be understood to represent continua. Double pluses and minuses denote greater magnitude of effect.

From Judee K. Burgoon and Jerold L. Hale, "Nonverbal Expectancy Violations: Model Elaboration and Application," *Communication Monographs* 55 (1988): 64. Reprinted by permission of Speech Communication Association and the authors.

engages in strategic behavior that distorts the truthfulness of the information or is incomplete, irrelevant, unclear, or indirect. Speakers may even disassociate themselves from the deceptive information. Listeners often detect the use of these strategies and can become suspicious that they are being deceived.

The deceiver may experience a certain amount of apprehension about being detected, and the receiver may experience a certain amount of suspicion about being deceived. These internal thoughts can often be seen in outward behavior. This being so, receivers look for signs of lying, and liars look for signs of suspicion. Over time, in this back-and-forth process, the sender may come to perceive that the deception was successful or not, and the receiver may come to see that the suspicion was warranted or not.

Deception apprehension and suspicion can come out in strategically controlled behaviors, but they are more apt to show up in nonstrategic behaviors, or behaviors that are not being manipulated. This is a process called *leakage*. You might be suspicious that you are being lied to because of behaviors that the other person is not aware of, and if you are trying to deceive another person, you may experience apprehension based on the fact that the receiver could detect it through some behavior you are not controlling. For example, you might have perfect control of your voice and face, but movements of your feet or hands give you away.

As we learned previously, communicators' expectations are significant anchors with which to judge behavior. So expectations play a definite role in deception situations. When receivers' expectations are violated, their suspicions may be aroused. Likewise, when senders' expectations are violated, their deception apprehension may also be aroused.

Many factors affect this ongoing process—for example, the degree to which the communicators can actually interact fully. This variable is called *interactivity*. Talking face-to-face is more interactive than talking on the telephone, which in turn is more interactive than communicating by e-mail. Interactivity can increase *immediacy*, or the degree of psychological closeness between

the communicators. When we have high immediacy, we pay close attention to a variety of live cues. We may stand closer, look more attentively at what is going on, and generally avail ourselves of a richer set of actions. You might predict that the more access communicators have to one another's behavior, the more cognitive data they have to assess one another's intentions or suspicions. Research seems to indicate, however, that the opposite can also happen. Immediacy and relational closeness can cause you to feel more engaged with others and less suspicious.

When we are relationally close, we have a degree of familiarity between us. In a close relationship, we have certain biases or expectations about what we are going to see. A *truth bias* makes us less inclined to see deception. Most married couples, for example, don't expect, and thus don't see, deception. This may explain why learning about an extramarital affair or other deception is especially devastating. In a positive relationship, communicators more or less assume that they are telling one another the truth. Under these conditions, we will not be very suspicious about lying and may not pay close attention to behavioral deception cues. On the other hand, a *lie bias* may accentuate our suspicions and lead us to think people are lying when they may not be. If someone repeatedly lies to you, you are likely to take everything that person says with a grain of salt.

Our ability to deceive or detect deception is also affected by *conversational demand*, or the amount of demands made on us while we are communicating. If several things are going on at once or if the communication is complex and involves numerous goals, we cannot pay as close attention to everything as we would if the situational demands were light.

Two other factors that affect the deception-detection process are the level of motivation to lie or to detect lying and the skill in deception and deception detection. Where motivation is high, our desire to deceive may override our apprehension about being caught. At the same time, if the receiver knows that our motivation is high, his suspicions will be increased. Some people are more skilled at deceiving than others because

they have a larger range of behaviors they can perform. This could be counteracted, however, by the other person's ability to detect deception.

Remember, however, that communicators engage in both strategic and nonstrategic behaviors. When we lie, we typically exert a great deal of control over how we manage information, behavior, and image (all strategic behaviors); at the same time, some of our behavior that is not being controlled (nonstrategic) is sometimes detected by others, depending on their motivation and skill. In highly interactive situations—those in which we are fully engaged with one another—we often pay more attention to otherwise nonstrategic behaviors, which in some situations could make it harder to detect the deception.

The purpose of deception also seems to enter the formula. Senders deceiving for personal gain may have a harder time hiding it than senders who deceive for more altruistic purposes. Of course, the results of deceptive behavior depend in part on how motivated the receivers are to detect deception. If the receivers are suspicious and particularly bothered by this particular lie, they will probably put considerable effort into detecting the it. Many professors, for example, are extremely bothered by student deception about absences, missed assignments, and the like. In these cases, they will probably scrutinize students very carefully in an effort to detect a lie.

Traditionally, there have been two strong trends in the sociopsychological tradition—the behavioral and the cognitive. Understanding individual communicators and how they process messages has been seen as the key to understanding how individuals relate in conversation. It is no wonder, then, that the theories in this section have featured the careful examination of human behavior in social situations. Even though interpersonal behavior is carefully considered by these theories, they still say more about what individuals do than about what is created or made in the process of interaction between individuals. In the following section, we see a shift from the individual to the social in how conversations are framed, as we begin to take sociocultural factors into account.

◖ THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

Sociocultural theories of the conversation take us in a very different direction from the work summarized in the previous section. Here we encounter explanations of what gets made or constructed in conversations, how meaning arises in conversation, and how symbols come to be defined through interaction. These theories tell us about what themes of conversation bring people together and how participants come to share meaning, and they focus, too, on how communicators work together in a structured way to organize their talk. Four areas are covered—symbolic interactionism, symbolic-convergence theory, conversation analysis, and face-negotiation theory.

Symbolic Interactionism

We introduced symbolic interactionism in Chapter 4 to describe the process by which the self is developed. Symbolic interactionism, a movement within sociology, focuses on the ways in which people form meaning and structure in society through conversation. Barbara Ballis Lal summarizes the premises of this movement:[16]

- People make decisions and act in accordance with their subjective understandings of the situations in which they find themselves.
- Social life consists of interaction processes rather than structures and is therefore constantly changing.
- People understand their experience through the meanings found in the symbols of their primary groups, and language is an essential part of social life.
- The world is made up of social objects that are named and have socially determined meanings.
- People's actions are based on their interpretations, in which the relevant objects and actions in the situation are taken into account and defined.
- One's self is a significant object and, like all social objects, is defined through social interaction with others.

In this chapter we concentrate on classical symbolic interactionism, the basic ideas of the movement, and the theoretical extensions most recognized in the communication field.

George Herbert Mead is usually viewed as the founder of the symbolic interactionist movement, and his work certainly forms the core of the Chicago School.[17] Herbert Blumer, Mead's foremost apostle, invented the term *symbolic interactionism*, an expression Mead himself never used. Blumer refers to this label as "a somewhat barbaric neologism that I coined in an offhand way. . . . The term somehow caught on."[18]

The three cardinal concepts in Mead's theory, captured in the title of his best-known work, are society, self, and mind.[19] These categories are different aspects of the same general process called the *social act*, which is a complete unit of conduct that cannot be analyzed into specific subparts. An act may be short and simple, such as tying a shoe, or it may be long and complicated, like the fulfillment of a life plan. Acts relate to one another and are built up throughout a lifetime. Acts begin with an impulse; they involve perception and assignment of meaning, mental rehearsal, weighing of alternatives, and consummation.

In its most basic form, a social act involves a three-part relationship: an initial gesture from one individual, a response to that gesture by another, and a result. The result is what the act means for the communicator. Meaning does not reside solely in any one of these things but in the triadic relationship of all three.[20] In a holdup, for example, the robber indicates to the victim what is intended. The victim responds by giving money or belongings, and thus the result (a holdup) has occurred.

Even individual acts, such as solitary walks or reading a book, are interactional because they are based on gestures and responses that occurred many times in the past and that continue in the mind of the individual. One never takes a walk by oneself without relying on meanings and actions learned in social interaction with others. From the very early days of the toddler, parents take the child by the hand, use words to describe what is happening, express encouragement, and frame and discuss what is happening.

Walking is a social act because of the meanings associated with the symbolic interaction of walking that are learned over the course of a lifetime.

The *joint action* between two or more people, such as occurs in marriage, trade, war, or church worship, consists of an *interlinkage* of smaller interactions. Blumer notes that in an advanced society the largest portion of group action consists of highly recurrent, stable patterns that possess common and established meanings for their participants. Because of the frequency of such patterns and the stability of their meanings, scholars have tended to treat them as structures, forgetting their origins in interaction. Blumer warns us not to forget that new situations present problems requiring adjustment and redefinition. In a recent discussion of SI, Donald Ellis writes, "that macrotopics of sociology (e.g., ethnicity) are never actually seen but exist in and through the activities of individuals in microsituations."[21]

Even in highly repetitious group patterns, nothing is permanent. Each case must begin anew with individual action. No matter how solid a group action appears to be, it is still rooted in individual human choices: "It is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life."[22]

Interlinkages may be pervasive, extended, and connected through complicated networks: "a network or an institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system requirements: it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called on to act."[23] With this idea of social acts in mind, then, let us look more closely at the first facet of Meadian analysis—society.

Society, or group life, consists of the cooperative behaviors of society's members. Human cooperation requires that we understand others' intentions, which also entails figuring out what we will do in the future. Thus, cooperation consists of "reading" other people's actions and intentions and responding in an appropriate way.

Meaning is an important outcome of communication. Your meanings are the result of interaction

with others. So, for example, although you may never have heard of a "toilet telephone," prison inmates know it well; they have learned that they can communicate by listening to voices traveling through the pipes in the prison. We use meanings to interpret the events around us. Interpretation is like an internal conversation: "The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his actions."[24] Clearly, we could not communicate without sharing the meaning of the symbols we use.[25]

Mead calls a gesture with shared meaning a *significant symbol*. Here the term *gesture* refers to any act that comes to have meaning. Usually, this is verbal, or language oriented, but it can be a nonverbal gesture as well. Once there is shared meaning, the gesture takes on the value of a significant symbol. Society is made possible by significant symbols. Because of the ability to vocalize symbols, we literally can hear ourselves and thus can respond to the self as others respond to us. We can imagine what it is like to receive our own messages, and we can empathize with the listener and take the listener's role, mentally completing the other's response. Society, then, consists of a network of social interactions in which participants assign meaning to their own and others' actions by the use of symbols.[26] Even the various institutions of society are built up by the interactions of people involved in those institutions.

Consider the court system in the United States as an example. The courts are nothing more than the interactions among judges, juries, attorneys, witnesses, clerks, reporters, and others who use language to interact with one another. *Court* has no meaning apart from the interpretations of the actions of those involved in it. The same can be said for school, church, government, industry, and any other segment of society.

This interplay between responding to others and responding to self is an important concept in Mead's theory, and it provides a good transition to his second concept—the *self*.[27] You have a self because you can respond to yourself as an

object. You sometimes react favorably to yourself and feel pride, happiness, and encouragement. You sometimes become angry or disgusted with yourself. The primary way you come to see yourself as others see you is through *role taking* or assuming the perspective of others, and this is what leads you to have a self-concept. Another term for self-concept is *generalized other*, a kind of composite perspective from which you see yourself. The generalized other is your overall perception of the way others see you. You have learned this self-picture from years of symbolic interaction with other people in your life. *Significant others*, the people closest to you, are especially important because their reactions have been very influential in your life.

Consider, for example, the self-image of adolescents. As a result of their interactions with significant others such as parents, siblings, and peers, teenagers come to view themselves as they think others view them. They come to take on the persona that has been reflected to them in their many interactions with other people. As they behave in ways that affirm this image, it is strengthened, and others respond accordingly in a cyclical fashion. So, for example, if young people feel socially inept, they may withdraw, further reinforcing the image of being inadequate.

The self has two facets, each serving an essential function. The *I* is the impulsive, unorganized, undirected, unpredictable part of you. The *me* is the generalized other, made up of the organized and consistent patterns shared with others. Every act begins with an impulse from the *I* and quickly becomes controlled by the *me*. The *I* is the driving force in action, whereas the *me* provides direction and guidance. Mead used the concept of *me* to explain socially acceptable and adaptive behavior and the *I* to explain creative, unpredictable impulses.

For example, many people will deliberately change their life situations in order to alter their self-concepts. Here, the *I* moves the person to change in ways that the *me* would not permit. Such a change might have occurred, for example, when you went to college. Many high-school students decide that they will use college to establish a new *me* by associating with a new

group of significant others and by establishing a new generalized other.

Your ability to use significant symbols to respond to yourself makes thinking possible. Thinking is Mead's third concept, which he calls *mind*. The mind is not a thing but a process. It is nothing more than interacting with yourself. This ability, which develops along with the self, is crucial to human life, for it is part of every act. *Minding* involves hesitating (postponing overt action) while you interpret the situation. Here you think through the situation and plan future actions. You imagine various outcomes and select and test possible alternatives.

People use significant symbols to name objects. You always define something in terms of how you might act toward it. You might have a friend, for instance, for whom you are starting to have romantic feelings. You will act differently toward this person depending on whether you see that person as a friend or as a romantic partner. Objects become the objects they are through our symbolic minding process; when we envision new or different actions toward an object, the object itself is changed because we see it through a different lens.

For Blumer, who followed Mead in developing this line of thought, objects are of three types—physical (things), social (people), and abstract (ideas). People define objects differently, depending on how they act toward those objects. A police officer may mean one thing to the residents of an inner-city ghetto and something else to the inhabitants of a posh residential area; the different interactions among the residents of these two vastly different communities will create different meanings for the label *police officer*.

Blumer's second type of object is what he calls the *social*. A fascinating study of marijuana use by Howard Becker illustrates the concept of social object very well.[28] Becker found that marijuana users learn at least three things through interaction with other users. The first is to smoke the drug properly. Virtually everyone Becker talked to said that they had trouble getting high at first until others showed them how to do it. Second, smokers must learn to define the sensation produced by the drug as a "high." In other

words, the individual learns to discriminate the effects of marijuana and to associate these with smoking. Becker claims that this association does not happen automatically and must be learned through social interaction with other users. In fact, some experienced users reported that novices were absolutely stoned and didn't know it until they were taught to identify the feeling. Finally, users must learn to define the effects as pleasant and desirable. Again, this is not automatic; many beginners do not find the effects pleasant at all until they are told that they should consider them so.

As a social object, then, the meanings of marijuana are created in the process of interaction. How people think about the drug (mind) is determined by those meanings, and the assumptions of the group (society) are also a product of interaction. Although Becker does not report information about self-concept specifically, it is easy to see that part of the self may also be defined in terms of interactions in the marijuana-smoking community.

Symbolic interactionism as a movement is devoted to studying the ways in which people come together, converge, or come to share meaning. In the following section, we look at a popular theory from the communication literature that centers on one significant way in which this convergence happens.

Symbolic-Convergence Theory

Symbolic-convergence theory, often known as *fantasy-theme analysis*, is a well-developed theory by Ernest Bormann, John Cragan, and Donald Shields dealing with the use of narrative in communication.[29] The starting point for the theory is that individuals' images of reality are guided by stories reflecting how things are believed to be. These stories, or fantasy themes, are created in symbolic interaction within small groups, and they chain out from person to person and group to group to create a shared worldview.

Fantasy themes are part of larger dramas that are longer, more complicated stories called rhetorical visions. A *rhetorical vision* is a shared view of how things have been, are, or will be. In

large measure, these visions form the assumptions on which a group's knowledge is based, structuring a sense of reality. Fantasy themes, and even the larger rhetorical visions, consist of characters, plot line, scenes, and sanctioning agent. The *characters* can be heroes, villains, or other supporting players. The *plot line* is the action or development of the story. The *scene* is the setting, including location, properties, and sociocultural milieu. Finally, the *sanctioning agent* is a source that legitimizes the story. This source may be an authority who lends credibility to the story or authorizes its telling. It might be a common belief in God, a commitment to justice or democracy, or even a belief in a shared enemy.

Imagine a group of executives gathering for a meeting. Before, during, and after the meeting, members will share experiences and stories—fantasy themes—that bring the group together. Some of these will be stories heard again and again about the organization and its members. Each story will have a cast of characters, a plot, a scene, and sanctioning agents. In many cases the sanctioning agent will be the company itself. The telling and retelling of these stories create and maintain cohesion within the group.

You can recognize a rhetorical vision because it is repeated again and again. In fact, some themes are so frequently discussed and so well known within a particular group or community that the members no longer tell the whole episode, but abbreviate it by presenting just a "trigger" or *symbolic cue*. This is precisely what happens with an inside joke. An executive might say, for example, "Yeah, that's just like the *Frasier* episode!" and everyone will laugh, knowing just what she is referring to. When the group one of us hung out with in college gets together, rhetorical visions can be quickly triggered by phrases like "French Pete," "Sweet Red Grape," and "Fifth Floor Boynton." These undoubtedly have no meaning to you, but they refer to specific shared fantasy themes among that particular group of college students.

Fantasy themes that develop to a high degree of familiarity are known as *fantasy types*—stock situations told over and over within a group. Often these retold stories relate to personal, group,

or community achievements and take on the form of a *saga*. You probably have sagas within your family and your work organization, and you have certainly heard many national and societal sagas such as George Washington and the cherry tree, why John Hancock signed the Declaration of Independence in such large handwriting, and even the story of the rise of Bill Gates.

As people come to share fantasy themes, the resulting rhetorical vision pulls them together and gives them a sense of identification with a shared reality. In this process, people converge or come to hold a common image as they share their fantasy themes. In fact, shared rhetorical visions—and especially the use of fantasy types—can be taken as evidence that convergence has occurred.

As rhetorical visions get established through the sharing of fantasy themes within a group, they fulfill a consciousness-creating function. They make people aware of a certain way of making sense of things. In other words, they build or maintain a group or community's *shared consciousness*. There seems to be a critical mass of adherence at which widespread dissemination of the rhetorical vision takes place. After this happens, the rhetorical vision begins to fulfill a *consciousness-sustaining* function. Here the fantasy themes serve to maintain commitment. In a company, a shared consciousness or rhetorical vision can engender loyalty, pride, and commitment. You adopt the rhetorical vision, and this

means you buy the themes, values, and goals implicit in it. Rhetorical visions are not just narrative stories but have a deep structure that reflects and influences our sense of reality. The Bill Gates story, for example—depending upon which version you hear—has a deep structure of individual ingenuity, hard work, success, and doing good in the world.

Three primary deep structures have been identified; most rhetorical visions are informed by one of these three motivating sources. These include the *righteous*, in which a moral sensibility is fundamental to how the rhetorical vision functions; the *social*, which depends primarily on social interaction for the success of the rhetorical vision; and the *pragmatic*, which has a practical base as the motivating source of the vision. In other words, participants are guided by an interest in, need for, or focus on righteous, social, or pragmatic perspectives.

Clearly, fantasy themes are an important ingredient in persuasion. Public communicators—in speeches, articles, books, films, and other media—often tap into the audience's predominant fantasy themes. As we write this, the movie *Superman Returns* has just been released, with much commentary about whether the movie is a thinly veiled reference to Jesus and the resurrection. Both Superman and Christianity can be considered rhetorical visions that exist in our culture. Each consists of, and is maintained through, stories of characters, settings, and plots, and each functions to guide the behavior of each group of followers.

And while public communication is a common way to disseminate fantasy themes, public communication can also add to or modify the rhetorical vision by amplifying, changing, or adding fantasy themes. In the 2004 election, a fantasy theme that typically has been valued in our country—service in the military—was effectively reversed in the case of John Kerry, whose service was questioned in media ads. This is an example of public communication causing a shift in existing fantasy themes. One way to evaluate the use of fantasy themes, then, is to look at their effectiveness as they play out in public discourse. If a speaker taps into fantasy

themes shared by audience members, you might say that the speech was effective. Hitler was a master at tapping into fantasy themes of Aryan superiority; he created a rhetorical vision that aided his rise to power and was able to get others to accept his vision. A speaker who is especially creative can give fantasy themes a renewed power that reinvigorates them. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech is an example. The idea of a dream as a metaphor for future hopes is not new, but King reinvigorated the rhetorical vision in the course of that speech.

Fantasy themes are one of the many things that are created and reproduced within conversations. When you listen to a conversation, you will be able to hear fantasy themes in action; but if you listen even more carefully, you will also hear other microactions taking place. Many communication researchers are very interested in these finite, coordinated actions that bring a conversation together. Let's take a look at conversation analysis as a way of examining coordinated stories.

Conversation Analysis

One of the most interesting and popular lines of work in communication is conversation analysis.[30] This is part of a branch of sociology called *ethnomethodology*, which is the detailed study of how people organize their everyday lives.[31] It involves a set of methods for looking carefully at the ways people work together to create social organization.[32]

A conversation is viewed as a social achievement because it requires that we get certain things done cooperatively through talk.[33] Conversation analysis (CA) attempts to discover in detail exactly what those achievements are by carefully examining transcriptions of conversations. CA, therefore, is characterized by the careful examination of actual sequences of talk. The analyst looks at a segment of conversation for the kinds of actions that are accomplished within the talk, examining what the speakers seem to be doing as they communicate. They are probably doing many things at once—possibly asking and answering questions, managing turn

taking, and protecting face. Most important is *how* these things are done *in language*. What devices and forms are used in the interaction between the parties to accomplish action?

Unlike cognitive theory, featured in the sociopsychological tradition, conversation analysis (firmly within the sociocultural tradition) deals not with individual differences or hidden mental processes but with what is going on in the language, in the text, or the discourse. CA focuses on interaction in discourse—the back-and-forth, turn-taking moves that communicators make—and how they manage to organize their sequences of talk, as manifest in actual behavior.[34]

Of utmost importance in conversation analysis are the ways in which communicators create stability and organization in their talk. Even when conversations look sloppy on the surface, there is an underlying organization and coherence to talk, and the participants themselves actually create it as they go along. The analyst works inductively by first examining the details of actual conversations—many conversations—and then generalizing possible principles by which the participants themselves structure their talk.

As an example, consider the simple task of telling a story. When you tell a story, it may appear that you just say it, but your story is really a joint achievement accomplished by you and your listeners. Although you probably take an extended turn, your story is made possible by the cooperation of others in carefully organized turns. First, you have to get the floor by offering to tell a story, and others acknowledge and permit you to do so. During the story itself, listeners may take various types of turns to recognize and reinforce the story, indicate understanding, give you further permission to continue talking, affect the story in some way, or correct or repair something you said. All of this requires work and organization on the part of everyone.[35]

Conversation analysis is concerned, then, with a variety of issues.[36] First, it deals with what speakers need to know to have a conversation—the rules of conversation. The features of a conversation such as turn taking, silences and

gaps, and overlaps have been of special interest. Conversation analysis is also concerned with rule violations and the ways people prevent and repair errors in talk.

Certainly the most popular, and perhaps the most significant, aspect of conversation analysis is *conversational coherence*.[37] Simply defined, coherence is connectedness and meaningfulness in conversation. A coherent conversation seems well structured and sensible to the participants. Coherence is normally taken for granted, yet the production of coherence is complex and not altogether understood. Most conversational analysts see the principles developed by H. Paul Grice as foundational to our understanding of coherence.

Conversational Maxims. Grice proposed a set of very general assumptions to which all conversationalists must subscribe in order to have a coherent conversation.[38] The first and most general assumption is the *cooperative principle*: one's contribution must be appropriate. Cooperation here does not necessarily mean expression of agreement, but it does mean that one is willing to contribute something in line with the purpose of the conversation. For example, if someone asks you a question, you should answer it or respond in some other way that at least acknowledges the question. Otherwise you will be considered rude. When others fail to complete the speech act appropriately, confusion and lack of coherence result. According to Grice, cooperation is achieved by following four maxims.

Grice's first is the *quantity maxim*: a contribution to a conversation should provide sufficient, but not too much, information. You violate the quantity maxim when your comments don't say enough or say too much. The second is the *quality maxim*: a contribution should be truthful. You violate the quality maxim when you deliberately lie or communicate in a way that does not reflect an honest intention. The third is the *relevancy maxim*: comments must be pertinent. You violate this maxim when you make an irrelevant comment. The fourth maxim is the *manner maxim*: do not be obscure, ambiguous, or disorganized in how you express what you want to say.

You are probably thinking by now that these maxims seem absurdly simple and obvious, but the associated question of how speakers actually use them and how they handle apparent violations is far more complicated and interesting. The cooperative principle and its related maxims are often violated, sometimes on purpose, but what makes them so important is that they are never violated without disrupting the flow of conversation or affecting the perceptions of others in the conversation. In other words, violations are a problem communicators must deal with, and they must do so cooperatively.

One of the most common types of violation is to say something indirectly. Indirect communication is important for a variety of social and personal reasons such as politeness. If, for example, someone asks you how much your car cost, you might say, "Oh, quite a bit." Now, on the surface, that violates the maxim of quantity and appears uncooperative, but competent conversationalists will realize that this is really an indirect statement meaning, "It's none of your business."

We manage violations by making certain interpretations, called *conversational implicatures*, to help us understand what is implied or implicated by the apparent violation.[39] To assume that the violator is living up to the cooperative principle, the listener must attribute some additional meaning that will make the speaker's contribution seem to conform to the principle. In fact, when you deliberately violate a maxim, you assume that your listener will understand that you really do intend to be cooperative. If, for example, you say, "It is raining cats and dogs," you are technically violating the quality maxim, but others know that you are speaking metaphorically. Conversational implicature, in other words, allows you to use all kinds of interesting, indirect statements to achieve your purposes, without being judged incompetent.

The study of conversational implicature is really the study of the rules people use to justify violations of other rules, and these implicatures are very important for the overall management of conversations. In fact, competence itself requires the effective use of implicature. Without it our conversations would be dull, predictable,

and lifeless. Can you imagine talking without being able to imply things, use metaphors, respond indirectly, avoid certain things to be polite, or think of new and creative forms of expression? All of these are made possible by conversational implicature.

Another way that you manage the cooperative principle is to give clues that you are violating a maxim while still intending to be cooperative. Such clues are called *licenses for violations* because they enable you to violate a maxim without objection. For example, you could say, "I might be exaggerating a little, but . . . ." Or you might end a statement by prompting, ". . . if you know what I mean." Using phrases and qualifications such as these is a way of asking for a license to violate one or more of the maxims. Here's a portion of a typical conversation:

Kay: How did you and your husband meet?

Betty: Well, that's a long story.

Kay: Okay, I'm not going anywhere, let's hear it.

When Betty says, "That's a long story," Kay takes this as a request to violate the quantity maxim.[40] There is another possible interpretation: Betty's reply may be a polite way of saying that she does not want to talk about that subject, but Kay—deliberately or not—misinterprets that request.

Traditional views assume that competent communicators at least intend to cooperate. In an interesting line of work, Steven McCornack and his colleagues question this view. In their *information-manipulation theory*, they assert that people often intentionally deceive by violating these maxims of cooperation.[41] For example, if you wanted to lie, you would violate the quality maxim by failing to be truthful. If you wanted to obscure, you would violate the quantity maxim by saying too much or too little. If you wanted to distract, you would violate the relevancy maxim by changing the topic. All of these are forms of manipulation designed to deceive the listener. Thus violations can be of two types—truthful and deceptive.

Sequencing Approaches. A variety of sequencing theories have been proposed that further explain what happens in the process of creating a coherent conversation.[42] The idea behind the sequencing approach is that a conversation consists of a series of rule-governed speech acts, and coherence is achieved by making sure that each act is an appropriate response to the previous one. For example, the question, "Hi, how are you?" is normally followed by, "Fine. How are you?" Recall from speech-act theory in Chapter 5 that when we speak, we are actually doing something with our words, like promising, requesting, demanding, or greeting. A coherent conversation is one in which the communicators' speech acts follow logically from those of the other communicators in the conversation.

Sequencing approaches focus on the *adjacency pair*, or two speech acts tied together. The *first-pair part* (FPP) is the first utterance, and the *second-pair part* (SPP) is the second one. The SPP completes the speech act. If I promise to be back by 6:00, you complete my promise by accepting or turning it down. By this approach, a conversation is coherent if proper rules of sequencing are consistently used between the FPP and the SPP. If I say, "Hi, how are you?" and you answer, "Trees are green," I might think you are crazy because I cannot see how your speech act in any way logically completes mine.

Perhaps the most influential sequencing model is that of Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson.[43] This is basically a turn-taking theory that stipulates that the next turn in a conversation must be a proper response to complete a particular adjacency-pair type. For instance, a question is to be followed by an answer, a greeting by another greeting, an offer by an acceptance, a request by an acceptance or a rejection. A number of adjacency-pair types have been discussed in the literature: assertion-assent/dissent, question-answer, summons-answer, greeting-greeting, closing-closing, request-grant/denial, insult-response, apology-acceptance/refusal, compliment-acceptance/rejection, threat-response, challenge-response, accusation-denial/confession, and boast-appreciation/derision.

In each case of sequencing, the completion of one speech act signals a turn for another speaker, who is obligated to respond according to appropriate rules. The speaker may designate who the next speaker is to be, or another speaker can appropriately take a turn, as long as a proper response is given. If no response is forthcoming, the speaker may continue talking.

In addition to requiring an appropriate response, adjacency pairs include a *preference for agreement*. In other words, the SPP is normally expected to agree with the FPP. For example, a statement is normally followed by an agreement ("Don't you just love the sun?" "Sure do.") and a request is followed by an acceptance ("Can I borrow your sunscreen?" "Of course."). This does not mean that people always agree, but disagreement calls for special action in the form of an account, excuse, or argument. ("Can I borrow your sunscreen?" "Sorry, I'm out.")

Conversation analysts recognize that people do not communicate mechanically in a series of adjacency pairs. In fact, most conversation looks untidy in this regard, so the real challenge of this line of work is to show how conversation partners are able to make sense of a series of utterances that appear on the surface to be unorganized. In examining actual tape-recorded texts, these researchers are able to show the rules that the communicators are using to assure coherence.

Some of the more common kinds of rules are the presequence, insertion, and expansion. A *presequence* is an adjacency pair whose meaning depends on another series of acts that has not yet been uttered. Here, the initial first- and second-pair parts serve as an invitation for a second set of pair parts:

FPP 1: Have you washed your hands? (*presequence*)

SPP 1: No, why?

FPP 2: 'Cause dinner's ready.

SPP 2: Okay, I'll do it.

The speaker here intends to make a request, but it cannot be understood as such without including the presequence question.

An *insertion* is an adjacency pair that is between the two parts of another pair and is subordinate to the main pair. Such insertions are necessary to clarify the intention of the initial FPP. Here is an example:

FPP1:   Would you like to go out sometime?

FPP2:   Like on a date? (*insertion*)

SPP2:   Yeah.

SPP1:   Oh, okay, I guess so.

Such a move is also an example of an *expansion*, which means that a subsequent speaker expands the sequence to include additional or subsidiary intentions. An expansion is involved whenever a segment of talk that theoretically could be accomplished in one turn, like a greeting, compliment, or request, is played out over several turns. This system enables us to parse, or separate, a conversation into parts. Table 6.1 provides an example.

The adjacency-pair idea has been useful and applies to many conversations, but conversation analysts now generally agree that coherence cannot be explained strictly by local rules such as these, in which coherence is judged by whether a move agrees with the parts that come before and after it. We turn now to how these more complicated situations are handled—by means of global rules. Global rules are those in which conversational coherence is determined by the overall purpose of the conversation.

The difference between local and global rules can be seen in an analogy to the game of basketball. In basketball, you are expected to accumulate points by making goals, and you must do this according to the rules of the game. In this game, sometimes elaborate individual and team moves and strategies are not judged rational or coherent based on whether they are consistent with the moves that came right after or before but on whether they are consistent with the

TABLE **6.1**

A Conversational Sequence

Greeting-greeting		FPP	Hi.
	FPP	SPP	Hi. Great dress.
Compliment-acceptance			
	SPP	FPP	Thanks. My mom bought it for me this weekend.
Assertion-assent			
	FPP	SPP	Yeah, it looks great on you.
Compliment-rejection			
	SPP		Well, not that great really.
		FPP	How's Terry?
Question-answer			
		SPP	He's okay, getting better and better.
		FPP	Will he be out of the hospital soon?
Question-answer			
	FPP	SPP	In about three days, I think.
Assertion-assent			
	SPP		Great.
		FPP	Well, I gotta go.
Closing-closing			
		SPP	Yeah, me too. See ya.

overall objectives of the game. Let's look more closely at what this means in communication.

Rational Approach. The rational approach, most often associated with Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs, is a second approach to conversational analysis and makes use of a global approach.[44] These scholars use the game analogy to explain how conversation works. The game itself is controlled by a set of rules, which players must know and use to achieve the objectives of the game. The game is coherent because the appropriate use of rules accomplishes rational objectives. So players must have two kinds of knowledge: they must know the rules of the game and what constitutes rational play within the parameters of the rules.

The rational approach to conversational coherence, then, assumes that conversations are practical acts that achieve goals. Achieving the goal of a conversation requires that the participants reason their way through it, thus giving it the name *rational*: "If I want such and such, I have to do thus and so." The communicators make decisions about what to say and how to achieve their intentions, and coherence is really judged in accordance with this overall reasoning. If the sequence of acts appears rational in relation to agreed-on goals, it is judged coherent.

Conversations can be complicated because, like games, they are played with other people. One person's moves must mesh with those of other players, and this requires agreement on a purpose and some reciprocity of perspective. Utterances have a force that obliges a hearer to understand the speaker's intent, and the speaker must meet certain conditions, called "felicity" conditions, in order for understanding to occur. Communicators respond not to each individual speech act but to the overall intentions of others. The coherence of a conversation is not judged by adjacency pairs but by the unfolding plan of the game.

For example, making a promise requires the speaker to follow certain rational rules, or felicity conditions. Promising involves five basic rules: First, the speaker must indicate that he or she will complete an act of some sort in the future. Second, this must be an act that the listener wants to have done. In other words, the listener must expect a promise. Third, the promise must be something that you would not have done otherwise. Fourth, the speaker must express genuine intent. Finally, the promise is taken as an obligation. A coherent conversation is one that includes one or more goals such as promising that both speaker and listener judge as rational by the rules.

Jackson and Jacobs stipulate two kinds of rules necessary for global coherence. *Validity rules* establish the conditions necessary for an act to be judged as a sincere move in a plan to achieve a goal. *Reason rules*—Jackson and Jacob's second type—require the speaker to adjust statements to the beliefs and perspectives of the other participants. This does not mean that speakers say only what listeners want to hear but that they frame their statements in a way that makes logical sense within the perspective of what the other person thinks is going on. For example, you would probably find a request to borrow money odd in a conversation about politics. You would question the person's *sincerity* and you would take the request as *invalid*.

Basically, then, these rules help communicators set up a logical system so that a conversation will feel coherent. Remember that these rules may be violated, and coherence is not always achieved. Communicators may also disagree about whether a sequence meets the required conditions of validity and reason, and such disagreement is often the basis for conflict. Because conversations are practical, goal-oriented acts, communicators must constantly judge whether the interaction is leading toward the desired goal and, if it is not, whether and what kinds of adjustments must be made in the conversational moves. This fact makes conversation a dynamic process of back-and-forth practical reasoning.

Donald Ellis proposes a *coherentist theory of meaning* that further explains this process and helps elaborate the rational tradition.[45] According to Ellis, understanding discourse is a pragmatic act in which communicators use shared meanings

to achieve coherence. Communication is possible only because communicators possess shared meanings. Ellis isolates three characteristics of discourse that make understanding possible.

The first characteristic is *intelligibility*. Discourse is intelligible if it contains or points to evidence that enables communicators to make inferences about its meaning. A father may ask his son, "Is that your coat on the floor?" The son correctly reasons that this is a request or command for him to pick up the coat. Both father and son have experience in similar situations that make it possible for them to share this meaning. The coat on the floor, the timing of the father's question, and the use of similar questions in the past are evidence that the boy can use to draw this conclusion.

The second characteristic of discourse is *organization*. Statements are part of larger organized systems of linguistic structures. You cannot assign any meaning you want to a sentence; a statement's meaning is limited, and competent communicators know what the possible range of meanings is. This quality of discourse makes rational talk possible.

Ellis's third characteristic of discourse is *verification*. In the stream of a conversation, one's statements can verify, or confirm, the meaning of other statements. When the son in our example replies, "Yeah, I'll pick it up," he is verifying the command issued by the father. Thus, participants use the give-and-take of their conversation to test meaning and reason their way to an agreed-upon conclusion.

Using global principles does not negate the value of local principles. Indeed, adjacency-pair coherence is a special case of a rational action. The FPP invites the listener to join into a kind of microplan for achieving a goal, and the SPP is coherent if it fits into that plan. A greeting invites the listener to make contact, and a returned greeting fulfills a kind of greeting contract. Responses to an FPP may simply and directly cooperate; indirectly cooperate; approximate agreement; or attempt to extend, change, or refuse the goal set up by the first utterance. Over a sequence of utterances, communicators actually negotiate a goal-achievement plan. Jackson

and Jacobs call this the *transformation of belief/want contexts*. Communicators essentially ask themselves, "What do we want to accomplish here, and what logical moves are required by each of us to accomplish this?" The conversation will be coherent if agreement is achieved and the actions seem appropriate for achieving the goals.

To see more concretely how these ideas can be applied, let's look at Jackson and Jacobs's applications of their theory to requests.[46] Actually, requests are among the most studied of all speech acts, and their theory provides an excellent extension and modification of a whole line of research.

According to Jackson and Jacobs, requests can be handled in a variety of ways. The clearer and more direct a request and the clearer and more direct the response, the more coherent the request sequence. This is because directness supports clarity and relevance. Therefore, if I say, "Please pass the butter," my goal is clear and your response, "Sure," is obviously relevant. On the other hand, if I say, "My toast is dry," my goal of getting you to pass the butter is less clear, and your response, "You should turn the toaster down a little," just frustrates me.

Jackson and Jacobs provide a list of utterance types that may be taken as a request, ranging from direct to irrelevant. "Please pass the butter" is an absolutely direct request. An indirect request would be less clear: "My toast is dry." A hint is even less direct: "Some people at this table have something I sure would like."

There are also utterances commonly found in conversations that function as prerequests. These set up the listener for a request in the future. An example is, "Could I interrupt to ask for something?" Once a request or prerequest is made, a listener can respond in a variety of direct or indirect ways. If the communicator recognizes the intent of a request, she can clarify things by responding directly. An example would be an *anticipatory move*, in which the listener recognizes the hidden or indirect request and grants it immediately. ("My toast is sure dry." "Here, have some butter.") Such moves provide coherence because they are oriented to

the apparent goals of the other communicator. Responses that misinterpret the speaker's statement are less coherent, as in the case of someone who takes an innocent statement to be a request that was never intended as such. An example would be when someone says, "It sure is hot in here" and another mistakenly assumes that is a request to open a window.

Conversational Argument. The study of conversational argument is another major application of the rational-pragmatic model explained previously, and it illustrates that model very well.[47] This area of study treats arguments as conversations, showing how they follow rational coherence rules, and it focuses specifically on how people manage disagreement. Managing disagreement, like any of the structural features of talk, is a rule-governed, cooperative achievement.

There can be a number of levels of disagreement in conversation. In the typical case, both parties openly disagree and state reasons for their positions. More typically, however, the disagreement is less open. Because of the preference for agreement, the goal of conversational argument is to achieve agreement. Each turn must be a rational move designed to reach agreement, and the coherence of an argument is largely judged in terms of the rationality of moves in achieving this objective. Thus, conversational argument is a method of managing disagreement so that it is minimized, and agreement is achieved as quickly as possible.

There are basically two kinds of arguments. *Argument₁* involves *making* an argument, or stating a case. A speaker makes an argument by giving reasons, as in "Smoking is bad for you." *Argument₂* is *having* an argument, or exchanging objections. In the case of the smoking example, Mary and her son might be arguing about the effects of smoking. People can make an argument without having one, but they cannot easily have an argument without making one.[48] Here is an example of a typical argument:

George: Well, I better get this grass cut.

Harry: Yeah, me too.

George: Can I borrow your mower?

Harry: Well, I really need it myself.

George: I'll return it right away.

Harry: Last time you kept it two weeks.

George: No, I'll return it.

Harry: Last spring you kept it a month.

George: Gosh, Harry, I really will get it back to you today.

Here, George makes a request and a promise. The argument (argument₂) ensues because Harry does not grant the request as would normally be expected, and he challenges George's promise. In objecting, Harry makes an argument (argument₁) by saying that George has not been reliable in the past, and George comes back by supporting his intent to return the item.

Like all conversations, arguments have a certain order and rationality that may or may not be apparent on the surface. For the participants, the argument probably will seem coherent because of the cooperative principle, which, in the case of arguments, requires the communicators to cooperate in creating a dispute-resolving episode.

This is ironic because arguments do not sound very cooperative, but you cannot have an argument unless both parties cooperate in doing so. Notice that the following somewhat comical conversation is not a very coherent argument because one party refuses to cooperate:

Katie: You never turn your reports in on time, Sara.

Sara: I know, I really like taking my time on things.

Katie: But this infuriates me!

Sara: Just what I really like, a good emotional reaction.

Katie: Stop it. I want to know why you are falling down on the job.

Sara: I sure do enjoy being the center of attention. This is great!

Arguers essentially agree to use certain kinds of speech acts and to meet certain goals, and in the above conversation, Sara refuses to participate in the game.

Just as promises and requests have their own requirements, so do arguments. To have an argument, you must put forth an opinion that you do not expect the other person to initially accept. In conversational argument theory this is called a *standpoint*. You have to support the standpoint with certain assertions that you expect will not be immediately apparent to the other person. And, of course, you are not cooperating in "having an argument" if you do not at least initially believe your own standpoints and assertions.

There are many forms an argument can take, but there is one idealized form that most arguments approximate. This consists of four stages necessary for a complete argument to occur: confrontation, opening, argumentation, and concluding. The *confrontation stage* identifies the disagreement. The *opening stage* establishes agreement on how the dispute will be handled. The *argumentation stage* includes an exchange of competing positions. The *concluding stage* establishes resolution or continued disagreement.

These should not be considered the "steps" of an argument because they rarely occur in this order. Instead, you should think of these as aspects or parts of an argument. These stages are characterized by certain kinds of speech acts, as outlined in Table 6.2.[49] In general the idealized model is like a code of conduct for having an argument. People will come as close to it as they can within the constraints of the situation. The idealized model is a measuring stick by which actual arguments can be compared and evaluated. When all of these dimensions of an argument are present, the communicators are said to be participating in what conversational-argument theorists call a *critical discussion.*

One of the problems arguers must manage as part of a critical discussion is the notion of face. We look at this topic in the following section.

Face-Negotiation Theory

Developed by Stella Ting-Toomey and her colleagues, face-negotiation theory provides a basis for predicting how people will accomplish facework in different cultures.[50] Thus it is a natural extension of argument theories. *Face* refers to

TABLE 6.2

Distribution of Speech-Act Types Across Functional Stages in Discussion

Stage in Discussion	Speech-Act Type
Confrontation	
1.1	expressing standpoint (assertive)
1.2	accepting or not accepting standpoint (commissive)
Opening	
2.1	challenging to defend standpoint (directive)
2.2	accepting challenge to defend standpoint (commissive)
2.3	deciding to start discussion; agreeing on discussion rules (commissive)
Argumentation	
3.1	advancing argumentation (assertive)
3.2	accepting or not accepting argumentation (commissive)
3.3	requesting further argumentation (directive)
3.4	advancing further argumentation (assertive)
Concluding	
4.1	establishing the result (assertive)
4.2	accepting or withholding acceptance of standpoint (commissive)
4.3	upholding or retracting standpoint (assertive)
(Any stage)	
5.1	requesting usage declarative (directive)
5.2	defining, precizating [sic], amplifying, and so on (usage declarative)

one's self-image in the presence of others. It involves feelings of respect, honor, status, connection, loyalty, and other similar values. In other words, face means your desired image or the identity others ascribe to you in a given social situation. Culture strongly dictates what identities are desired within a situation. *Facework* is the communication behaviors people use to build and protect their own face and to protect, build, or threaten the face of another person.[51]

When you observe facework in action, you can see various things going on. For example,

you might notice the *locus of facework*, or whether it is directed at self or others. You might notice people bragging about an accomplishment or praising another person for a job well done—in the first case, the locus is directed at self and in the second, it is directed at another person. As you observe people communicating, you might also notice *face valence*, or whether a person's actions are positive (as in the case of defending, maintaining, or honoring one's face) or negative (as in attacking someone else's face). Next, you might notice *temporality*, or whether the communication is designed to prevent loss of face in the future or restore loss of face that has already happened.

Face is a universal concern, but how face is defined and the ways in which facework is accomplished vary significantly from person to person and culture to culture. All cultures have ways to accomplish both preventive and restorative facework. *Preventive facework* involves communication designed to protect a person from feelings that threaten personal or group face. If you need to discuss a problem with your boss, for example, you might begin by saying, "I know you are very busy, and I'm sorry to intrude, but . . . ." *Restorative facework* is designed to rebuild one's face after loss has already occurred. If you made an insulting comment to a friend in a moment of anger, you might later apologize and say, "You are really a great friend, and I'm sorry I said that, 'cause I didn't really mean it."

Two primary cultural variables seem to affect facework. The first is *individualism-collectivism*.[52] Many cultures honor the individual above the community or group. These cultures promote autonomy, individual responsibility, and individual achievement. These cultures are considered *individualist*. Other cultures, in contrast, tend to honor the community or collective above the individual person. Important for these cultures is the connection among people, and promoting the interests of any one person would feel odd or inappropriate. These cultures are defined as *collectivis*.

We would expect members of individualist cultures to do more facework directed at or honoring people as autonomous individuals.

They would see themselves as important apart from others and work to build their own esteem as well as that of others. When a person in an individualist culture is attacked or threatened in some way, it would be considered appropriate to help build that individual's face, to repair the damage, or honor the person to compensate for the face threat.

In collectivist cultures, by contrast, facework is not normally self-oriented. Instead, one acknowledges the group or community, deferring to the values of the group over particular values of the self. Members of collectivist cultures tend to be somewhat self-effacing and deferential. They accept face loss and rebuild it by acknowledging the need to work harder on behalf of the group. In a collectivist culture, you would accept criticism, talk about the effectiveness of others, and promise to do a better job of living up to the group's standards in the future. In restoring another person's face in such cultures, you would compliment a group with which the person affiliates or perhaps tell the person what a good member of the group she is.

Cultures are never purely individualistic or collectivistic in orientation. Most people have feelings of both individuality and collectivism, but within a given culture, one of these will usually predominate. Cultures in northern and western Europe as well as in North America, tend to be individualist, while collectivism is common in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

The second cultural variable affecting facework is *power distance*.[53] In many cultures of the world, there is a strong hierarchy, or sense of status, in which certain members or groups exert great influence and control over others. Members of these cultures accept the unequal distribution of power as normal. In different cultures, however, the felt distance among groups and individuals is less. Again, power distance is a variable, with some cultures having a great deal and other cultures having less. In cultures in Malaysia, certain Latin American countries, the Philippines, and Arab countries, power distance is emphasized. In cultures in New Zealand and Scandinavia, power distance is deemphasized.

Face is usually an issue in conflict situations. When you are having a conflict with another person, respect and honor are often compromised. Face threats can happen because of a competition or desire to win; as a result of anger or feeling disconfirmed in some way; or due to conflicting values, opinions, or attitudes. In any case, face threats are common in conflict, so that facework is a regular part of conflict communication. Often the facework is negative and takes the form of an attack on the other person. Other times, we try hard to work through the conflict using positive facework to accomplish our own goals, while helping others feel good about themselves in the process.

Because of culture, people have different styles in conflict. Individualists, for example, tend to use more direct personal attack and may try to protect or rebuild face—theirs and that of others—by showing personal respect. Collectivists, on the other hand, will use less personal attack and be more indirect in conflicts. They may avoid the issue at hand, talk around it, discuss side issues, take more time to get to the point, and generally talk in ways that build the sense of the group over themselves. Individualists in a conflict tend to want to get through it by solving the problem or settling the dispute. Collectivists, in contrast, are more interested in affirming the relationship. Collaboration and compromise mean different things in these different cultures. For individualists, collaboration and compromise are ways of solving the problem, but for collectivists, they are a means for building a relationship.

Of course, facework and conflict management become even more complex when we factor in power distance. In low power-distance situations, consultation and participation are key. Everyone wants to be involved. As a result, people communicate more directly and personally. In high power-distance settings, decisions will tend to be made by higher-status individuals. People behave differently depending upon their status, so that their facework varies. High-status members already have the power, so they do not need to be very direct. They can communicate indirectly, avoid threatening the face of lower-status members, and still get their way. Lower-status individuals, on the other hand, will be more self-effacing and deferential. They will acknowledge the high-status person's right to make the decision. In these situations, the communication is designed to maintain the power distance by being more formal. Conflict is often resolved by a mediator in such cultures—someone who is respected by both parties.

According to Ting-Toomey, culture largely determines how facework and conflict are enacted, but culture is not the only factor. There are important individual differences that must be factored into the equation. The individual characteristic that seems to matter most is *self-construal*, or one's sense of independence or interdependence with other people. This variable is simply how you see yourself in relation to others. "Independents" tend to use more direct, problem-solving communication, while "interdependents" are more relationally oriented in their conflicts. People who see themselves as both independent and interdependent tend to have a larger repertoire of strategies for facework and conflict than the other types. People who are ambivalent may use more third-party (mediator) interventions.

While the sociopsychological tradition defines ways in which individuals respond to each other's behavior, the sociocultural goes beyond behavioral patterns to look at what is achieved or accomplished—what gets done—in this back-and-forth interaction. Again, the sociocultural tradition is interested not in the individual per se but in what lies beyond the individual in terms of what it means to be social, to create meaning, and to work collaboratively in constructing meaning.

Notice also that the move from the psychological to the sociocultural is a shift in what kind of data is considered important. In the former tradition, individual behavior is taken as data, but in the latter, the discourse is what gets examined. We could say—and some do—that discourse is actually a kind of behavior. When you make a statement, you are producing language, which is behavioral. In the sociocultural tradition, however, discourse is considered more than individ-

ual behavior; instead, it is a jointly produced text, in which meaning must also emerge in the collaboration, never in the individual statement.

Face-negotiation theory departs to some degree from this generalization. Although cultural in orientation, this theory makes heavy use of psychological assumptions and methods. This line of work is sociocultural to the extent that it characterizes cultural communities and looks at facework as a manifestation and construction of culture, but the research methods and general theoretical approach has a somewhat psychological feel. Face-negotiation theory really does take the cultural dimension down to the individual level by trying to predict how you would manage face based on your culture, personal traits, and situational factors. This is interesting, because sociopsychological and sociocultural theories rarely resonate with one another, but this theory does show that there may be more possibilities for the two to come together than we would initially think.

Once again, then, we see that the presence of insights from various traditions deepens our understanding of communication, in this case conversations, so that all of the facets of the process come to light in a way that no one tradition could accomplish. Let's add yet another perspective—the cybernetic—to this common, everyday occurrence called conversation.

☾ THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

What is the systemic connection among meaning, action, and coordinated behavior? How do various contexts for understanding conversations impact and inform one another? These questions are addressed by the cybernetic theory called the coordinated management of meaning—the subject of the next section.

The Coordinated Management of Meaning

The theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM), developed by W. Barnett Pearce, Vernon Cronen, and their colleagues, is a comprehensive approach to social interaction that addresses the ways in which complex meanings and actions are coordinated in communication.[54] Although conversations provide a useful metaphor in CMM, this theory addresses all contexts of communication, from microinteraction to cultural and societal processes. As a result, CMM is a broad theory that could have been placed in a number of chapters. We decided to summarize it here because of its strong emphasis on conversational interaction. The theory is sociocultural in orientation, but it is also characterized by relationships, loops, and interaction, planting it firmly in the cybernetic tradition.

When you encounter any communication situation, you do two things. First, you assign meaning to the situation and to the behaviors and messages of others, and, second, you decide how to respond or act within the situation. Let's say you are called into your boss's office for a discussion, whereupon you are told that there are certain deficiencies in your work. Your supervisor engages you in a discussion of what you need to do to improve your performance, sets some goals for improvement, and asks whether she can provide you with any assistance or resources to meet these goals. Your supervisor meant for this to be a helpful and supportive meeting, but you leave angry, embarrassed, and perplexed.

What does this event mean? What does it count as? Is your supervisor's message a helpful intervention, another episode in oppressive organizational life, or perhaps a long overdue conversation in a somewhat distant supervisor-employee relationship? What will you do? File a lawsuit? Seek the support of co-workers? Quit? Get even? Ignore it? Or will you buckle down and try to meet your performance goals? As you work through these questions, you are engaged in an ongoing process of meaning and action. You must consider what this event means and what you will do—how you will act—in regard to it.

CMM helps us understand this process of *meaning and action*. However, the theory also recognizes that you do more than interpret and act: you must coordinate your actions with those of others in a process of *interaction*. You respond to your boss, and your boss responds to you. Each

of you is going through this meaning-action process, and you do it together. Your respective understandings and responses are shaped by the *stories* you have lived and those you tell. Indeed, you experience the performance review as a kind of "story" and you tell yourself and others various aspects of this story. These three sets of ideas—meaning and action, interaction, and stories—are keys to CMM. We will look more closely at each in turn.

Meaning and Action.   According to CMM, your meanings are closely connected to your actions. Meanings affect action, and action affects meanings. If you think the performance review is an oppressive act, your response will follow logically. If you respond by resisting, you will be re-creating a meaning of oppression. But there is never a one-to-one relationship between meaning and action. Rather, the connection is mediated by a series of contexts. The context is the reference point that frames your meaning and action. Further, contexts are related to one another in a hierarchy. In other words, one context is always part of another one. Figure 6.2 illustrates one possible arrangement of the hierarchy of meaning contexts. The hierarchy in Figure 6.2 is not fixed but merely illustrative. Many different contexts are possible, and they can relate to one another in many different ways. Notice the double arrows, meaning that two contexts have a reciprocal influence on one another. Each influences and is influenced by the other.

How would this work in the example of the performance review? Let's start with the self as a context. Within the context of self as a competent person, your boss's criticism would be an insult. However, this may not be the only context working for you. You could also assign meaning based on your *relationship* with the boss. There is also the consideration of the *episode* in which the conversation takes place—a performance review—as well as the organizational *culture* in which the interaction occurs. Notice how your first thoughts may be a clue to the contexts operating here:

> She does not understand how good I really am! (context of self)
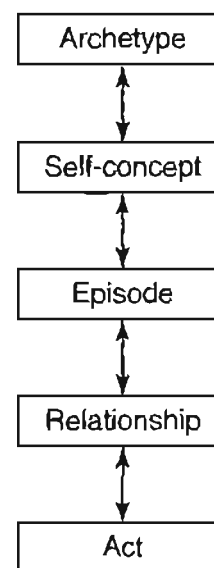
> How can I cooperate with her after she said that! (context of relationship)
>
> I hate these meetings! (context of episode)
>
> What a horrible and oppressive workplace this is! (context of organizational culture)

Further, each context affects the others, so, for example, your sense of self is affected by your sense of the relationship with the boss, which, in turn, is affected by the episode and, in turn, by the organizational culture. Your meanings and actions depend on the frame you set. To illustrate this point, let's look at two cases in which very different contexts of meaning and action are operating:

> Case 1: Within the context of a supportive and accommodating organizational culture, the performance review interview counts as an attempt to empower employees to do a better job. This leads to a supportive relationship between boss and employee, and the supervisor's comments should be taken as a well-motivated intervention that will make me a better worker.
>
> Case 2: Within the context of an oppressive and authoritarian organizational culture, the performance review interview counts as a way of

controlling employees to meet managerial interests. Relationships here are control-oriented, and my supervisor's comments should be taken as an ill-motivated intervention that ignores the real contributions I am making.

An interesting dynamic here is that we often shift these contexts around so that at certain moments one context (such as the organizational context) prevails and has a strong effect on the other parts of the interaction, and at other moments a different context comes to the fore, as might happen when your self-concept reigns. Indeed, we often reframe communication situations in order to manage them more effectively. Instead of letting the performance-review episode hurt your self-concept, for example, you might decide that your strong sense of self will enable you to use the episode just as another resource in your otherwise effective workplace. But how, precisely, do contexts affect meanings and actions?

Meanings and actions are shaped by rules. There are two types of rules. *Constitutive rules* are essentially *rules of meaning*, used by communicators to interpret or understand an event or message. Such rules determine what something "counts as." The event or message, as one understands it, is "constituted by" the rules of meaning. For example, within the context of your self as a strong and effective person, you might take the supervisor's message as a personal challenge and affront. Within the context of the episode of performance review, you might take it as a normal and expected interaction; or within the context of the organizational culture as open and accommodating, you might see it as an invitation for self-empowerment. What just happened between you and your boss is determined by the rules operating within these contexts.

The second category of rules is *regulative*, and these are essentially *rules of action*, used to determine how to respond or behave. The contexts, as outlined previously, shape these rules. Within the context of viewing yourself as a strong and assertive person, you will interpret and act one way; but within the context of the organizational culture as open and accommodating, you may interpret and act in a very different way. Rules of action have a particular impact by giving you a

sense of what is logical or appropriate in a given situation. This is called *logical force*. Because people behave in a manner consistent with their rules, rules provide a logical force for acting in certain ways. Four types of logical force are common.

The first type of logical force is *prefigurative*, or *causal force*, an antecedent-to-act linkage in which you perceive that you are made to behave in certain ways because of prior conditions. For example, you see yourself as hot headed and couldn't help yourself when you responded in an angry fashion. Your angry outburst was "caused" by this trait ("I have an anger-management problem"). In contrast to this kind of logic, *practical force* is an act-to-consequent linkage in which you behave in a certain way to achieve a future condition. So, for example, you might say that you got mad because you wanted your boss to back down and admit that she was wrong. Here your behavior was strategic, or designed to get a certain outcome ("I get what I want").

The third type of logical force is contextual. *Contextual force* leads you to believe that the action or interpretation is a natural part of the context. Within the context of your self-concept, for example, you might feel that responding with outrage is "what you had to do," an act of righteous indignation ("Of course I got mad. It was the most appropriate thing to do."). Finally, *implicative force* is a pressure to transform or change the context in some way. Here, you act to create a new context or to change an existing one. Implicative force might come into play, for example, if you acted deliberately in an angry way because you wanted to shift the context from cooperation to confrontation. You are asserting another way of understanding this—from helpful support (your boss's context) to inappropriate intrusion (your context). In implicative force, you are not willing to buy into the first context that presents itself, but instead seek to change the context itself to make it what you want it to be.

Implicative force shows the *reflexive relationship* between meaning and action. People have the power to shift contexts and to affect the meaning and action rules within a context by their responses. In other words, your meanings and actions are affected by the rules and contexts,

but rules and contexts are affected by meanings and actions. There is a reciprocal relationship between one context and another. So, for example, organizational culture affects relationships and episodes, but relationships and episodes also affect organizational culture. So the way you respond to events and people contributes to the meanings and actions that emerge over time.

This is a very practical idea because it gives you some power in shaping your life. Let's say, for example, that your first thoughts about your boss's performance review are negative and resistive. You could follow that inclination, respond angrily, try to get back at her, and maybe file a lawsuit. Or you could pause and decide that your self-image allows you to put the review in a new perspective. You could respond in a way that might help to build a positive relationship so that good things can happen in the future. There is even the chance that the supervisor herself could come to a new understanding because of the way you are handling the situation.

People are able to shift contexts, change meanings, and act in a variety of ways because of a history of interaction with many people over time, in which they learned numerous ways to interpret and act in different situations. In modern society a person is part of many systems, each with its own set of meaning and action rules. The rules are learned through interaction in social groups. Over time, individuals internalize many of these rules and draw on them to guide their actions. Thus we have numerous resources for acting in a situation. The daisy model in Figure 6.3 illustrates this idea. This history of interaction may constrain our meanings and actions, but it can also provide resources for new perspectives and new forms of action.

Interaction.   Indeed, the variety of meanings that can apply to any situation is so numerous that we often experience problems in meshing our actions with those of others, which brings us to the next topic—*interaction*. When an individual enters an interaction, that person can never be certain what rules the other participants will be using. The primary task in all communication, then, is to achieve and then sustain some form of coordination.
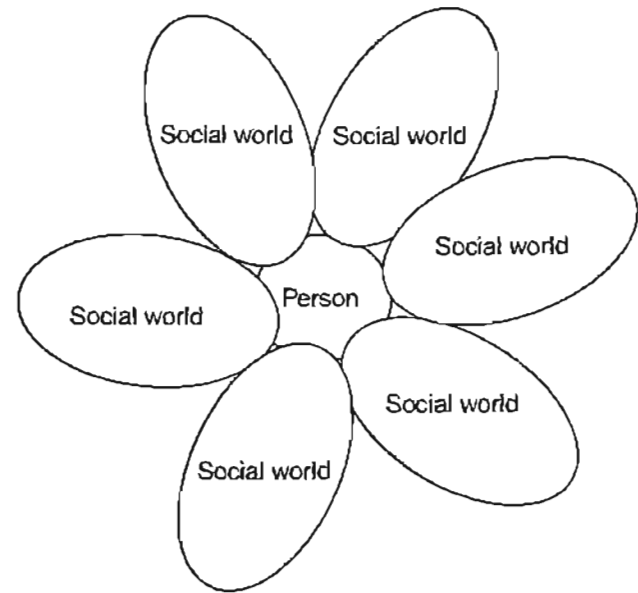
FIGURE **6.3**

Daisy Model

Coordination involves organizing interpersonal actions so that you feel you are proceeding in a logical or appropriate way. The communicators in an exchange need not interpret the events the same way, but each must feel, from within his own system of rules, that what is happening makes sense. The serpentine model in Figure 6.4 illustrates this idea.

Figure 6.4 shows how coordination operates. Person A acts in a certain way, and person B takes this as a message and uses meaning rules to interpret it. Person A's act thus becomes an antecedent event to which person B responds, based on B's action rules. B's response is in turn interpreted by A as a message from the standpoint of A's meaning rules, and B's act becomes the consequent to A's initial move. If A and B are operating with substantially different rule structures, they will quickly discover that their respective behavior are not what was expected, and they will readjust their rules until some level of coordination is achieved.

People can have perfectly satisfactory coordination without understanding one another. In other words, communicators can organize their actions in ways that seem logical to all parties,

Person A interprets	What is happening? What should I do?		What does this mean? How should I respond?		What does this mean? What should I do?
Actions	ACT 1	ACT 2	ACT 3	ACT 4	ETC.
Person B interprets	What does this mean? What should I do?		What does this mean? How should I respond?		
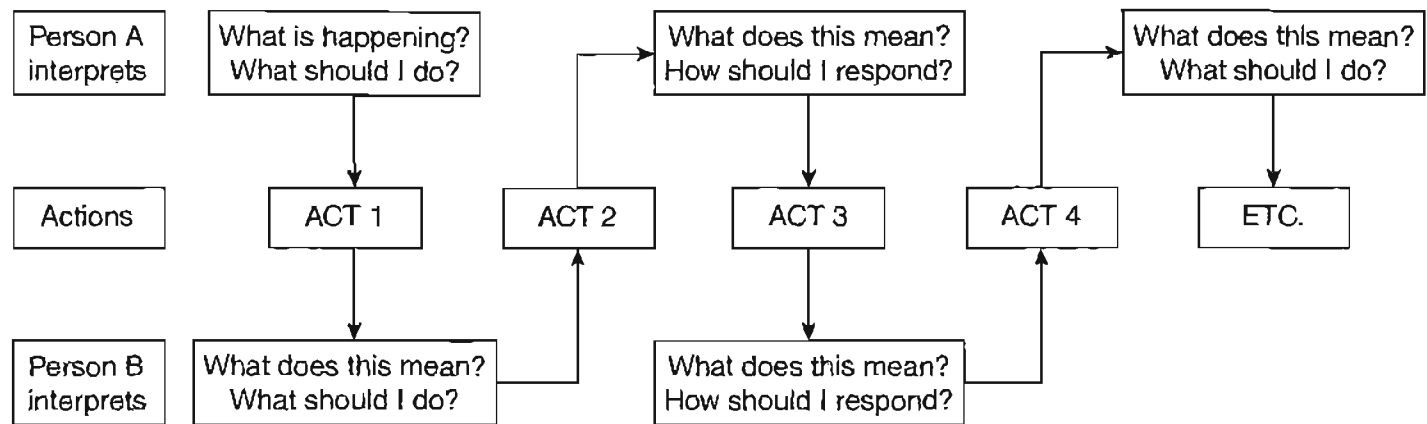
FIGURE 6.4

Serpentine Model

yet they understand what is going on in a variety of different ways. For example, a dynamic and engaging speaker thinks he is educating and persuading the audience, but the audience, quite overjoyed by the speech, is merely entertained and forgets the point of the message within hours. Here, both sides are satisfied, and each thinks what happened was logical, even though their meanings were different. Consider this example:

Supervisor: Please come to my office. [Good, I got the ball rolling.]

Employee: Okay. [Uh oh, what did I do wrong?]

Supervisor: Here is your evaluation. As you can see, there are a couple areas where I'm asking for some improvement. [I am being a good supervisor and conducting this meeting very well.]

Employee: I see. I'd like to have some time to read your comments more carefully. Can I get back to you in a few days? [What a jerk. She is completely off base. I'll just put her off, and she'll forget about the whole thing.]

Supervisor: Yes, of course. Why don't you take the weekend to look this over? [Well, he is certainly being cooperative. That worked well.]

Employee: Okay, see you later. [Well, I showed her who's boss.]

Coordination is not always a satisfying experience. Two communicators may be coordinating very well without being happy about it. Over time, in fact, communicators can have such a strongly coordinated set of unfortunate actions that they cannot think of how the pattern of interaction might be changed. In CMM, this state of affairs is called an *unwanted repetitive pattern* (URP).

Patterns of domestic violence illustrate this state of affairs. Here the pattern is *enmeshed*, meaning that it is so tightly organized into a certain form that change becomes very difficult and harm is done because the parties are unable to create new rule sets that would enable them to shift contexts, change how they might understand what is going on, or act differently in responding to one another.

Stories. Let's move now to the third major dimension important to CMM—stories. Stories help communicators make sense of a situation.

If two communicators share a story of what is happening—whether happily or not—they have a kind of shared coherence or mutual understanding, which usually leads to a high level of coordination. It is entirely possible for each to have a story of what is happening and thereby remain perfectly coordinated even without understanding one another. CMM identifies six aspects of stories that interact to create various levels of coherence or its opposite—confusion—in communication situations. You can remember these with the LUUUTT model, which stands for:

stories LIVED

UNTOLD stories

UNHEARD stories

UNKNOWN stories

stories TOLD, and

story TELLING

We combine life experiences (stories lived) into many different stories told. A given experience or sequence of life experiences can be packaged and repackaged in numerous different ways. Further, we can tell those stories in a variety of ways. We can choose the time, place, and manner to tell stories, and we can control what parts of a story are told. This storytelling process provides the data or materials from which our meanings and actions emerge. When shared coherence is high, (1) stories told reflect with some fidelity the stories lived; (2) stories told match stories heard; and (3) constructive outcomes are not prevented by untold or unknown stories.

In problematic communication situations, in which parties feel uncoordinated, confused, or frustrated, one or more of these conditions may be missing. Communication can be improved by exploring more completely the differences in the stories lived and told, stories that are not being told, or stories that are not being heard. Greater exploration of these aspects of stories may make new contexts, new rules, and new responses possible. In recent years, CMM has concentrated on how to communicate in ways that expand and explore stories and allow participants to move forward

From the Source . . .

All of CMM's models and concepts—rules, hierarchies, loops, etc.—should be read as "heuristics," invitations to "look at communication this way!" rather than as declarations that "this is what we are doing. . . ." I am delighted that these heuristics have been found useful by mediators, managers, consultants, therapists, social workers, teachers, researchers, facilitators and others, who use them to understand, evaluate, and decide how to act in order to create better social worlds.

— W. Barnett Pearce

constructively together. Work by CMM theorists on community dialogue on difficult public issues is a good example of this extension of the theory.[55]

CMM, the sole theory in this section, combines the sociocultural and cybernetic traditions. CMM shows the power of connections, interactions, and relationships as a cybernetic process. Eschewing linear explanations, Pearce, Cronen, and their colleagues see meaning and action as inextricably linked, creating logics that drive conversation and action in various situations.

So far in this chapter, we have discussed how conversations are organized behaviorally, how language structures conversations, and how people use socially established rules and forms to understand and participate in conversations. Social institutions are made in conversations, and these large social arrangements are not incidental, but critical, to human life. As a result, struggle and conflict are an important part of social interaction, as the theories in the following section illustrate.

◖ THE CRITICAL TRADITION

Although conversations are a natural and unavoidable part of human life, they are not inconsequential. Indeed, our conversations shape

our individual and collective identities. Critical theories show us how the use of language in conversations creates social division and holds out a vision for egalitarian forms of communication that empower all groups. Here we present three theories that illustrate this line of work. The first, the language-centered theory of culture, explains the importance of language in establishing cultural identity. The second, co-cultural theory, applies this thinking to interpersonal relations, and the third, invitational rhetoric, presents a new way of thinking about conversations.

Language-Centered Perspective on Culture

Fern Johnson's language-centered perspective brings cultural linguistics to bear on issues of cultural diversity in the United States.[56] Johnson posits six assumptions or axioms of a language-centered perspective: (1) all communication occurs within cultural frameworks; (2) all individuals possess tacit cultural knowledge that they use to communicate; (3) in multicultural societies, there is a dominant linguistic ideology that displaces or marginalizes other cultural groups; (4) members of marginalized cultural groups possess knowledge about both their own culture and the dominant culture; (5) cultural knowledge is both preserved and passed down and constantly changing; and (6) when cultures coexist, each influences and affects the other.

This theory is designed to promote an understanding of the particular linguistic features and cultural patterns of any particular cultural group as well as how the discourses of that group emerge, develop, and play out against dominant linguistic ideologies in the United States. In terms of our focus on conversation, Johnson would assert the need for any conversation to be understood against the context of the cultural factors each participant brings to it. Also important to the conversation, however, is the matter of English hegemony, or the power of one language group over others in the United States, and the commonly held belief that there must be a single dominant language in a country.

Johnson examines four cultural discourses in the United States as case examples—gender, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American—each with different implications for communication practice and social policy in four primary institutions—health care, legal settings, education, and the workplace. While any non-dominant group is to some degree invisible across these institutional contexts, the historical and cultural factors inherent to each group means that each is positioned differently within these institutions. As examples of discursive consequences of linguistic dominance in the United States, Johnson cites a reticence on the part of many Asian-Americans to seek treatment for physical or mental ailments because of a greater cultural reserve; the difficulties of using black vernacular and limited English in schools where teachers insist on "correct" English; and the imposition of "English only" rules in workplaces where nonnative speakers of English are at a decided disadvantage. In offering a theory that takes into account the cultural particulars of the various language groups that coexist in U.S. society, Johnson seeks to promote a greater understanding of the various factors that contribute to multiculturalism. Ultimately, she hopes to promote linguistic policy that is appropriately complicated, thoughtful, and respectful of these cultural factors and that recognizes the importance of multilingual competence in increasingly global contexts.

Co-Cultural Theory

Co-cultural theory is a theory about conversations between dominant and underrepresented group members, including people of color; women; gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals; people with disabilities; and the like. Developed by Mark Orbe,[57] the theory is distinctive in that co-cultural communication is defined from the perspective of the members of the underrepresented group when they perceive cultural differences as salient. The theory is designed to facilitate understanding of how co-cultural group members negotiate their cultural differences with others.

Co-cultural theory is grounded in five assumptions: (1) a hierarchy exists in any society that privileges certain groups; (2) dominant members, on the basis of varying levels of privilege, occupy positions of power that enable them to create and maintain systems that reinforce their perspectives and experiences and mute those of others; (3) dominant communication systems function to keep co-cultural group members outside the centers of power; (4) while there is considerable variation across co-cultures, they share a marginalized social position within the dominant system; and (5) co-cultural group members strategically communicate to negotiate the dominant system in which they find themselves.[58]

Orbe's theory emerged from a series of studies of how underrepresented group members communicate with members of a dominant culture. The first three studies focused on different groups—African-American graduate students, African-American men, and gay men. In the fourth study, Orbe included a broad range of participants from diverse co-cultural groups, including people of color, women, gays/lesbians/bisexuals, and those from lower socioeconomic classes. As a result of these and subsequent studies, Orbe and his colleagues have identified 26 co-cultural practices that members of co-cultural groups use, including emphasizing commonalities, averting controversy, overcompensating, bargaining, dissociating, mirroring, ridiculing self, educating others, avoiding, and attacking.[59]

The creation of an inventory of these negotiating practices raised yet another issue: when do individuals use which strategies? When, where, and why individuals choose certain strategies has become the focus of Orbe's recent research. Six factors were found to influence the choice of strategy: preferred outcomes—is the goal assimilation, accommodation, or separation?; field of experience—what experiences make up the repertoire of possibilities for response for given co-cultural members?; abilities—what differing abilities affect a person's use of a strategy?; situational context—the particulars of the interaction, and perceived costs and rewards of a strategy; and communication approach—assertive,

nonassertive, or aggressive. These factors are interdependent and create a matrix of understanding and action that frames a co-cultural response in any given interaction.[60]

Since Orbe's original work, various communication scholars have applied co-cultural theorizing to different co-cultural groups and across situations, focusing on such diverse groups as people of color in organizational settings, people with disabilities, people without homes, and first-generation college students.[61] This work has affirmed the value of the co-cultural approach, and even demonstrates that dominant group members can be co-cultural members within particular settings.

Co-cultural theory, then, with its explicit focus on strategic interaction among co-cultural members and on dominant cultures, is very much a theory of conversation. With its emphasis on power and its effect on co-cultural groups, it is very much within the critical tradition. Orbe articulates, from a marginalized standpoint, the communication processes and practices used to manage and negotiate dominant culture; in terms of viewing communication, he offers a distinctive standpoint from that of most theories about conversation.

Invitational Rhetoric

Continuing the analysis of the relationship of conversation and culture is the theory of invitational rhetoric. The phrase was coined by Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin in their essay, "Beyond Persuasion";[62] they argue for consideration of a different interactional mode than persuasion, in which one person tries to change the other. They base their theory on the work of Sally Miller Gearhart, who sees persuasion as a kind of "violence" because it implicitly, if not explicitly, says to another, "my perspective is right and yours is wrong." For Gearhart, persuasion is problematic because it denies the authenticity and integrity of the other's perspective—a perspective that has developed from one's distinctive life experiences. Seeking a way to converse without persuasion as a central demand, Foss and Griffin propose a perspective based in

From the Source . . .

We developed the theory of invitational rhetoric to describe communicative experiences we had had that could not be described as persuasion. Theorizing those experiences led us to question the idea that persuasion is a part of every interaction and then to challenge the definition of rhetoric itself. Although the theory has caused controversy, many communication students and scholars have embraced it because it expands the array of options available to rhetors, especially to those committed to nondominating ways of living.

— Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin

feminist values of equality, immanent value, and self-determination. An attitude of equality places each perspective on an equal plane and engenders relationships of respect and non-domination. An attitude of immanent value acknowledges the worth and dignity of all life — reputation or earned credibility are not privileged over inherent value. Finally, an attitude of self-determination affords all participants in the interaction the right to decide for themselves what to do and how to live.

Invitational rhetoric uses the idea of an invitation, both literally and metaphorically, as a conversational mode. When you issue an invitation for others to consider your perspective, you invite audience members to see the world as you do and to take your perspective seriously. It is up to the audience, however, to decide whether to adopt that perspective or not, and the primary goal is the clarification of ideas among all participants.

When an interaction is approached from this perspective, the desired outcome is not to change others but to invite the understanding of different perspectives on the part of all involved in the interaction. Unlike traditional efforts at persuasion, then, where audience members are expected to change in the direction advocated by the speaker, here the speaker, too, can choose to change as a result of the interaction. Any

changes that result as part of the interaction are the result of insights, not influence, because all change is self-chosen. Rather than having to get others to agree that your perspective is "right," diverse perspectives are seen as resources for better understanding an issue. Invitational rhetoric operates on the assumption that when we deliberately expose ourselves to ideas that are different from ours, we have more opportunities for understanding.[63]

Sonja Foss and Karen Foss refined and elaborated the notion of invitational rhetoric in their book, *Inviting Transformation*.[64] They contrast what they call different modes of rhetoric (which, for our purposes, can be thought of as different conversational patterns) in our culture. *Conquest rhetoric* is an interaction in which winning is the goal; you want to establish your "idea, claim, or argument as the best one from among competing positions."[65] It is perhaps the most prevalent form in U.S. culture and is the expected communication mode in our legislative, judicial, and political systems. *Conversion rhetoric*, on the other hand, is designed to change others' perspectives or behaviors based on the superiority or rightness of a position. Religious groups, social-movement groups, and advertising campaigns use conversion rhetoric; in these situations, communicators seek to convert others to their perspectives or points of view. A third rhetorical mode is *benevolent rhetoric*, which is designed to help others improve their lives. In the benevolent mode of interaction, information is typically provided to others with the aim of benefiting them in some way. Health campaigns are an example of benevolent rhetoric. Finally, there is a kind of rhetoric called *advisory*, in which requested information is provided to someone. Counseling and education are two cases of advisory rhetoric; when you are on the receiving end of this kind of rhetoric, you expose yourself to new and different perspectives in the hopes of improving your life.

Foss and Foss suggest that conquest and conversion modes function as default modes in our culture — they are the forms of interaction or conversation most privileged and most common. The world they create, however, is an

adversarial one. Deborah Tannen uses the phrase *argument culture* to describe this world—a world in which we approach almost everything as if it were a fight.[66] By exploring other modes, such as the invitational, different realities can be created.

Foss and Foss suggest that a necessary first step in moving to an invitational mode is creating an appropriate environment in which the assumptions of invitational rhetoric are created and upheld. An environment conducive to all parties reaching greater understanding consists of four factors: freedom, safety, value, and openness. Freedom is the power to choose or decide and means allowing those with whom you are communicating more than one option, not insisting that the others adopt your perspective and not doing things that will restrict others' participation. You probably have found yourself in a situation where you felt that you would be humiliated or put down if you spoke up. Freedom is not present in that situation.

The condition of safety refers to feeling emotionally, physically, and intellectually secure in the interaction. Of course, what makes a situation "safe" for one person—the ability to speak freely and to be ensured a turn at participating—might mean extreme lack of safety to someone who is very shy and does not wish to speak up. Nonetheless, determining what is safe in a speaking situation is critical if an invitational approach is to be realized.

Value, the third element of an invitational environment, refers to the intrinsic worth of each individual and of each person's perspective. Each perspective is valued and respected, in other words, and value is communicated by listening well, acknowledging, and taking seriously the perspectives offered by others.

The fourth and final condition is openness, a desire for, willingness to consider, and genuine curiosity about a variety of perspectives. Unless a feeling of openness exists in the interaction, participants will not feel free to share their perspectives fully, to consider different perspectives, and to utilize fully all the diverse perspectives that are available.[67]

The theory of invitational rhetoric, then, suggests an alternative conversational approach to the default modes traditionally privileged in our culture. Rather than accepting the dominance of those default modes, Foss and Griffin, and Foss and Foss urge exploration and consideration of more invitational approaches that create an understanding rather than adversarial culture.

The theories described in the critical tradition of this chapter imagine new kinds of conversations, designed both to honor the contributions of all groups as well as to promote freedom and choice. Because they react to the customary power relations embedded in conversations, these theories are distinctly critical in tone. These theories do not merely react to domination in society but go a step further in suggesting ways of conducting conversations that diminish domination and empower all cultural groups. We will return to the critical tradition in several chapters of this book to see how ideas of power, struggle, conflict, and inclusion play out in various communication contexts.

APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

In many respects, human life can be characterized by conversation. Our species is distinguished by the fact that we have ongoing, complex, conversations; we define our realities in talk; and our relationships to one another and to the world are structured through a history of symbolic interaction from birth to death. It is no wonder, then, that conversation has been an important topic of communication theory.

From the sampling of theories presented in this chapter, we see that conversation can be understood in a diverse set of ways. Yet, five themes seem to cut across the many variables that are explored in these theories.

1. Everyday talk matters.

Many students and scholars get most excited about "big-splash" communications like popular television and movies, media news, public demonstrations, communication technology, and historic speeches. Increasingly, however, we have come to realize that everyday conversation is more than a sidelight to human life. Indeed, our constant social interactions with others structure our individual lives, provide ways of understanding experience, create interpersonal relationships, and build social institutions. How could you have a romantic relationship, a friendship, or a family without conversation? How could organizations exist without conversations? Indeed, even the "big splash" would never happen without conversations behind the scenes.[68] In other words, we need to understand the importance of, and pay attention to, ordinary conversations. Even the most mundane talk is significant in defining who we are and producing the cultures in which we live.

2. Conversations require coordinated interaction.

We must have tremendous intuitive knowledge about culture, language, and nonverbal behavior in order to have a conversation. We also need the ability to mesh our behaviors with those of others. The theories in this chapter say volumes about the knowledge and skill necessary to do what often feels and looks effortless. Of course, conversation is not always easy, and problematic moments make us realize that interaction can often tax our cultural and social knowledge and skills.

Especially in problematic situations, we treat information as a valuable resource in interaction. We are sometimes compelled to go out of our way to get information by watching other people's behavior and by seeing how they respond to us. We use this information to reduce uncertainty and make decisions about how to react to certain other people, as uncertainty-reduction theory demonstrates. While we are seeking certain kinds of information on a conscious level, we also take note subconsciously of interactional behaviors and adjust and adapt our behaviors as part of the flow of the conversation. Verbal and nonverbal behavior is adapted to what we see going on around us. Accommodation theory, for example, shows how people match or distinguish their behavior from that of others: we compare the way people behave to how we think they should behave, and we respond to others based on the ways and extent to which our expectations are violated. This kind of comparison is a key factor in deception and deception detection, for example. Face negotiation is another example of this principle in action.

Theories of the conversation show that it is difficult, and probably not very useful, to separate verbal and nonverbal communication in the ongoing stream of talk. The theories in this chapter show that interaction involves both and that the two are tied together. Some of the theorists featured in this chapter tend to focus more on one or the other, but all freely acknowledge that the separation of verbal from nonverbal features is more a research convenience than a reflection of reality.[69]

3. Conversations achieve meaning through convergence.

Although the information we seek is important, conversations are much more than information exchanges. Conversations are also instances of what Hartmut Mokros and Mark Aakhus call "meaning engagement practice."[70] In conversation, partners come to share, and often to create, jointly understood meaning. Conversations are more than scripts. They are the creative form in which we make our social worlds. Although we may hold concepts and ideas in our individual brains, our mental constructs are created, sustained, and changed through conversation. Curtis LeBaron, Jenny Mandelbaum, and Phillip Glenn remind us, "Human minds extend beyond the skin as people depend upon social and material worlds to acquire knowledge and display intellectual ability."[71]

By going back and forth in an interaction, communicators come to make something that is logical, sensible, or coherent to them. They organize their talk together, drawing on certain social conventions. Much can be learned about how coherence is achieved through discourse analysis.[72] In communication, the term *discourse* usually denotes segments of talk. Discourse is always understood as part of an ongoing stream of communication that has some sense of coherence. In other words, our discourse at any moment responds to and anticipates interaction with others in an exchange of messages. When a professor asks a discussion question in class and students respond with answers, you are seeing discourse in action. If the discussion is very good, students will begin to respond to one another, and the professor will join the conversation. We can look at any one speech that a participant makes as discourse, or we can look at the entire discussion as *discourse*, but always the question is how the messages gain meaning from the whole conversational context.[73]

Scott Jacobs outlines three things we can learn by examining conversations carefully in what is known as discourse analysis.[74] The first thing we can learn is how people understand messages. What information is embedded in the structure of a statement that enables another person to know what it means? How do you know, for example, that "Is Sybil there?" means that someone wants to talk to her on the telephone? How do you know that, "You sure are hot," means someone thinks you are on a winning streak and not that you are sexy? We acquire this information by learning conventions of discourse that enable us to converge or come together on the meaning of what is being said.

The second thing we can learn from discourse analysis is how to get something done through talk. What kinds of choices do we have when we want to do something like make a request or greet someone? How does a person decide how to say something, and how can that person know the difference between an appropriate and an inappropriate way of putting something into words? Again, over time within a social group, certain patterns of interaction become resources that we can rely on to accomplish our goals. Others understand what we are doing because of the shared meanings for these patterns of interaction. For example, if you wanted to ask a friend to go out without feeling pressured about it, you might say, "I would love to figure out how to get out of this pile of work I have tonight." Your friend knows you are "fishing" for an invitation, but also realizes that you have provided an "out," which gives him a perfectly good excuse to turn you down without hurting your feelings. He could say, "Hey, why

don't you blow off your work and let's get a pizza," or he might say, "Sounds like you are boxed in tonight. Me too."

Finally, we can figure out how to make patterns of talk sensible and logical. In a conversation, for example, there is a back-and-forth flow among participants. How do they string words together rationally? What principles are used to connect one statement with another in a way that everyone understands? If you look at a transcript of a conversation carefully, you often find that it seems disjointed, yet the communicators made sense of what they were saying as they went along. How did they do this? Next time you get together with a group of friends, pay close attention to the turns in the conversation. Notice how people respond to one another and how the topic changes from time to time. Notice, too, how people exchange turns, and how, despite all of these unpredictable bends, the talk still makes sense. It hangs together.

Conversations are cooperative events. People must play the game by the same rules or they would never know what was going on. For cooperation to occur, participants make a certain assumption about the other people — an assumption that everyone is conversing in good faith, with the intent to speak in accordance with the rules. Even blatant violations of conversational rules are interpreted through implicature as being cooperative. Indeed, the combination of basic rules of cooperation — such as appropriate quantity of talk, truthfulness, relevance, and organization with the flexibility permitted by conversational implicature — makes it possible for humans to enact an infinite number of often-creative expansions of talk to meet a whole array of intentions.

Coherence, then, is achieved through convergence of many types. Symbolic interactionism addresses the ways in which certain words and gestures come to have a shared meaning within a social group. Objects are more than things — they have meaning because of the symbols we use to talk about them. Even the self, as we saw in Chapter 4, is a social object, as we come to see ourselves in certain ways because of how we are symbolized and talked about in ordinary conversation. Narrative is especially powerful in bringing people together in the construction of common understandings of experience. Over time, stories combine to form large narratives, or rhetorical visions, which structure our sense of reality and value. A conversation with old friends or colleagues "clicks" because communicators rely again and again on the fantasy themes that form these larger visions emerging from a common history.

4. Conversations are organized.

Conversations are structured, but they are not preorganized in the same way that a play is prescripted. A conversation is more like an improvisation, in which the participants rely on conventions of several types to organize as they go. Theories about conversation help us see how communicators create order as they interact.

Conventions of conversation can be thought of as rules, as Susan Shimanoff points out in the following passage:

> In order for communication to exist, or continue, two or more interacting individuals must share rules for using symbols. Not only must they have rules for individual symbols, but they must also agree on such matters as how to take turns at speaking, how to be polite or how to insult, to greet, and so forth. If every symbol user manipulated symbols at random, the result would be chaos rather than communication. [75]

A rather large body of literature has been created to explain the place of rules in discourse. These theories teach that rules govern how discourse can be organized and understood. Rules affect the options available in a given situation, yet because they are situational, rules allow communicators to behave differently at various times and places.

Many of the theories in this chapter rely on the rules' concept to some extent. The rules' concept has been popular in communication studies because it acknowledges that people can make choices while still behaving somewhat predictably. Whether we are talking about maxims and implicature (from Grice), adjacency pairs (from conversation analysis), or logical force (from CMM), some sense of rule is at play. Many rules of conversational interaction are universal within a culture and have staying power over time. Other rules are limited to small social groups like families and have a limited life span. In either case, the rules function to provide organization and structure to the conversation.

5. Conversations derive their meaning from the contexts in which they occur. The ongoing flow of communication within our lives at all levels creates a set of contexts that give meaning to particular conversations. No conversation stands by itself, but always follows a history and leads to a future. As an observer, you can focus on a particular aspect of the conversation, which scholars call "the text." At the same time, however, you cannot forget that the meaning of the text is always influenced by some context. One of the most important contexts for meaning is the culture, or set of cultures, within which the conversation occurs. As CMM teaches us, however, culture is but one context. Others can include the self, the relationship, or any other arrangement that can provide guidelines for interpretation and action. A powerful example is face negotiation, in which we build, maintain, and sometimes threaten the personal dignity of self and others within a cultural frame.

◖ NOTES

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8. This concept is developed by Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1976).

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10. See Howard Giles, Justine Coupland, and Nikolas Coupland, "Accommodation Theory: Communication, Context, and Consequence," in *Contexts of Accommodation: Developments in Applied Sociolinguistics*, ed. Howard Giles, Justine Coupland, and Nikolas Coupland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–68. See also Howard Giles and others, "Speech Accommodation Theory: The First Decade and Beyond," in *Communication Yearbook 10*, ed. Margaret L. McLaughlin (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987), 13–48.

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22. Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism,* 19.

23. Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism,* 19.

24. Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism,* 5.

25. This idea, that meaning arises through interaction, is expanded in Donald Davidson's philosophy of communication. See Eli Dresner, "Davidson's Philosophy of Communication," *Communication Theory* 16 (2006): 155–72.

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59. The 26 strategies are summarized in a table in Orbe and Spellers, "From the Margins to the Center," 176–77.

60. Orbe and Spellers, "From the Margins to the Center," 175–79.

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64. Foss and Foss, *Inviting Transformation*.

65. Foss and Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, p. 5.

66. Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 3.

67. For an explanation of these conditions, see Foss and Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 36–39.

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74. Jacobs, "Language and Interpersonal Communication," 68. Susan B. Shimanoff, *Communication Rules: Theory and Research* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980), 31–32.

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7

THE RELATIONSHIP

Conversations are rarely isolated. Instead, they are connected to one another over time and create communication contexts much larger than any one conversation. In the following chapters of this book, we explore these larger contexts, including relationships, groups, organizations, media, culture, and society. These contexts are more than containers in which conversations happen. Instead, they are the patterns, connections, and institutions that "get made" in conversations. In a circular way, these contexts then affect and shape the conversations that are part of them.

We have taught communication courses for more than 30 years. Of all the topics we have covered in our classes, relationships immediately capture the interest of students. People are fascinated with relationships because they differ greatly — some relationships are easy and comfortable and others are hard and seemingly contorted. We are fascinated, too, because relationships change and evolve, often dramatically, and such changes have the ability to affect families, friends, and romantic relationships in significant ways. Finally, relationships can be problematic, and studying about them can be a way of trying to find answers to their problematic aspects. The topic of relationships, then, is highly relevant to all of us, and it is not surprising that it has occupied a great deal of time and attention from communication scholars.

The communication field has been powerful in helping us to understand relational differences and relational change. With a communication lens, we see that relationships

Topics Addressed	Cybernetic Theories	Sociopsychological Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Phenomenological Theories
Interaction patterns	Relational patterns of interaction			
Schemas & types		Relational schema in the family		
Disclosure & privacy		Social penetration theory		
Identity			Identity-management theory	
Managing difference			Dialogical/dialectical theory Communication privacy management	
Dialogue				Carl Rogers Martin Buber

are comprised of interactional patterns — a back-and-forth set of responsive behaviors that are extremely dynamic. In long-term relationships, the patterns can become relatively stable over time, but events can also propel a relationship into new and sometimes unexpected directions. The theories in this chapter help us understand this dynamic process.

How would you characterize some of the significant relationships you have had in your life? Which have been intimate? Which have been casual? In which relationships have you been a dominant influence, and in which relationships have you just gone along, letting others take the lead? Which relationships have been more egalitarian? Several researchers have been interested in looking at the different qualities of relationships, and such qualities are often tied to particular ways of thinking about relationships, or schemas, that seem to govern stabilized patterns of relationships over time.

You must constantly decide how much information about yourself to share with others in relationships. Sometimes you really feel like sharing something private with a friend and other times you feel more guarded. In some relationships, you share a lot of information about yourself, and in others, you do not. Even more interesting is the fact that over time within a single relationship, you negotiate what topics you can talk about and what levels of information can be revealed, not only between yourselves but also with others outside the relationship. The topics of disclosure and privacy have been extremely interesting to theorists in communication.

But disclosure and privacy are really a manifestation of something larger. A constant challenge within any relationship is managing difference. The tension between disclosure and privacy is only one example of a difference we have to manage effectively in relationships. Many opposing forces impact our relationships, and it is no small task to deal with these. We often feel confused about whether we should be dependent or independent, whether we should keep things the way they are or change them, and whether we should be an individual or be part of a couple. How do you present yourself authentically in a relationship so that others are authentic with you? How can we allow for both difference and unity? An important body of theory is developing within the field to explain (1) how relationships are defined through the management of contradictions like these; and (2) ways in which communicators within a relationship actually manage these kinds of tensions.

Relationships have been an important subject related to interpersonal communication since the 1960s. In this chapter, we include significant theories from four traditions — the cybernetic, the sociopsychological, the sociocultural, and the phenomenological. In combination, these theories help us understand relationships from many perspectives. The chapter map on page 195 outlines the theories in this chapter and helps to clarify the traditions from which they emerge and the topics they address.

■ THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

The cybernetic tradition has had a vital impact on how communication scholars think about relationships. Relationships are not static entities that never change. Instead, they consist of cybernetic patterns of interaction in which individuals' words and actions affect how others respond. We keep adapting what we do and say to the reactions of others, and over time the relationship develops a kind of character. Another way of thinking about this—using strictly cybernetic terms—is that we continually adapt our behaviors to the feedback we receive from others, and in a relationship, both parties are doing this simultaneously.

Relational Patterns of Interaction

The work of Gregory Bateson, Paul Watzlawick, and their colleagues in the early years of the study of interpersonal communication established the foundation for how communication scholars approach the study of relationships.[1] Known as the Palo Alto Group, these theorists founded the Mental Research Institute based in Palo Alto, California. Their ideas are most clearly laid out in the now-classic *Pragmatics of Human Communication*.[2] In this book, Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson present an analysis of communication from a cybernetic perspective. We do not summarize their entire theory here, but present the basic idea of relational interaction, which illustrates the importance of the cybernetic tradition in much of the work in relationships over the past 35 years.

We learned from the Palo Alto Group that when two people communicate with each other—in addition to whatever else they may be doing—they are defining their relationship by the ways in which they interact.[3] As you talk with a friend, a co-worker, a professor, or a family member, you are always creating a set of expectations for your own and the other person's behavior. Sometimes you reinforce old expectations, and at other times, you engage in new patterns of interaction that may establish new expectations for future interactions.

In a marriage, for example, a dominant-submissive relationship might come into being over time. Communication between co-workers might result in a status hierarchy, in which one person is more highly esteemed than the other. The interaction between neighbors might turn out to be an equal-and-polite relationship. Implicit rules are numerous in any ongoing relationship, be it a friendship, business partnership, love affair, family, or any other type, and these can change as interaction patterns change.

Patterns get established, in part, because any behavior is potentially communicative. As the Palo Alto Group expressed it: you cannot not communicate.[4] In other words, when you are in the presence of other people, you are always expressing something about your relationship with the other person, whether you are conscious of it or not.[5] This axiom holds, even if you don't want to interact with the other person, because, at least potentially, the other individual may "read" your avoidance as a statement.

For example, when your professor announces an upcoming test, many possible relationship messages might be inferred at the same time. She could be saying, "I am the authority in this classroom"; "I teach, you learn—what I have lectured about is important"; "I need feedback on your progress"; "I have a need to judge you"; or "I want you to think I am fulfilling my role as professor." Of course, students' responses also include a relationship dimension, which might express compliance, defiance, respect, fear, equality, or other messages. In communicating about tests and all other topics, the teacher and student constantly define and redefine the nature of their relationship.

Suppose a father at a playground sees his daughter fall and scrape her knee. Immediately, he says, "Don't cry. Daddy's coming." The content meaning is clear, but what is the relationship message? It depends on how the message is

delivered. The father might communicate his own fear, worry, anger, boredom, or dominance. At the same time, he might communicate a number of possible perceptions, including, "You are careless," "You are an attention getter," "It was just an accident," and so on. When it comes to relationships, then, actions can speak louder than words. The basic unit of relationship is not the person nor two individuals but interaction— behaviors responding to other behaviors. Over time, the nature of the relationship is formed, or made, through a series of interactions— responses to responses to responses.

Two kinds of patterns important to the Palo Alto Group illustrate this idea. If two people keep responding to one another the same way, they are said to be involved in a *symmetrical relationship*. Power struggles are exactly this: One partner asserts control; the other responds by asserting control back. The first responds again in kind, and a struggle ensues. Symmetrical relationships are not always power struggles, however. Both partners might respond passively, both could respond in a questioning way, or both might behave in nurturing ways.

The second type of relationship is *complementary*. In these relationships, communicators respond in opposing ways. When one is domineering, the other is submissive; when one is argumentative, the other is quiet; when one is nurturing, the other is accepting of the nurturing. Since the Palo Alto Group took a mental-health perspective, these practitioners were especially interested in distinguishing pathological interaction patterns from healthy ones.

To further elaborate the general idea of relational patterns of interaction and the more specific concepts of symmetrical and complementary relationships, we turn now to a study of *relational control*. The investigations of L. Edna Rogers and her colleagues demonstrate how control in a relationship is a cybernetic process.[6] They found that control could not be defined by one person's behavior alone. In other words, the control within a relationship does not depend upon any one person's actions or even the individuals' personalities. Instead, you

have to look at the pattern of behavior between partners over time—how they respond to one another cybernetically.

When one person makes an assertion, the other person can respond in one of three ways. He can accept the assertion, which is a *one-down* move. The second possibility is that he can make a counter assertion, or reject the first person's move—a *one-up* response. The third kind of move is *one-across*, which neither accepts nor rejects the first person's bid for control but responds in a way that does not really acknowledge the other's control move. You could, for example, ask a question, change or extend the topic, or defer to another time.

A *complementary exchange* occurs when one partner asserts a one-up message and the other responds one-down. When this kind of interaction predominates in a relationship, we can say that the relationship itself is complementary. The individual whose one-up message predominates at a given time is said to be *dominant*. Notice the difference here between "dominance" and "domineeringness". A one-up move is domineering, but it is not dominant unless the other person accepts it by behaving in a one-down fashion. A *symmetrical exchange* involves both partners responding the same way—either one-up/one-up, one-down/one-down, one-across/one-across. Symmetrical, one-up/one-up patterns over time constitute a power struggle. Table 7.1 illustrates nine control states generated by combinations of these types of control messages.[7] The table shows clearly how control in relationships comes to be defined over time cybernetically through patterns of interaction.

The cybernetic tradition has been very important in the field of relational communication. Indeed, the idea that relationships are formed systemically by interaction patterns across time has been the mainstay of our ideas about what relationships are, how they form, how they are maintained, and how they change. Many theories, however, focus on only one part of this overall process—the psychology of the individual—the theme of sociopsychological theories.

TABLE **7.1**

Control Configurations

Control direction of speaker A's message	Control direction of speaker B's message		
	One-up (↑)	One-down (↓)	One-across (→)
One-up (↑)	1. (↑↑) Competitive symmetry	4. (↑↓) Complementarity	7. (↑→) Transition
One-down (↓)	2. (↓↑) Complementarity	5. (↓↓) Submissive symmetry	8. (↓→) Transition
One-across (→)	3. (→↑) Transition	6. (→↓) Transition	9. (→→) Neutralized symmetry

Control Pattern Examples

1. Competitive symmetry (one-up/one-up):
   A: You know I want you to keep the house picked up during the day.
   B: I want you to help sometimes.

2. Complementarity (one-down/one-up):
   A: Please help. I need you.
   B: Sure, I know how.

3. Transition (one-across/one-up):
   A: Let's compromise.
   B: No, my way is best.

4. Complementarity (one-up/one-down):
   A: Let's get out of town this weekend.
   B: Okay.

5. Submissive symmetry (one-down/one-down):
   A: I'm so tired. What should we do?
   B: I can't decide. You decide.

6. Transition (one-across/one-down):
   A: My dad was pretty talkative tonight.
   B: You're right; he sure was.

7. Transition (one-up/one-across):
   A: I definitely think we should have more kids.
   B: Lots of people seem to be having kids these days.

8. Transition (one-down/one-across):
   A: Please help me. What can I do?
   B: I don't know.

9. Neutralized symmetry (one-across/one-across):
   A: The neighbor's house needs paint.
   B: The windows are dirty too.

◖ THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

Interpersonal behavior has been a mainstay within the field of social psychology, and a great deal of research in the field of communication is influenced by this tradition. The work in the sociopsychological tradition relies heavily on typing and characterizing individuals and relationships. It relies on measurement and analyses of variables as a way of assessing what people are like within a relationship as well as what the relationship itself is like. Here we look at two lines of work—family schemas and social penetration.

Relational Schemas in the Family

For many years, Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and her colleagues have been developing a line of research and theory on family relationships, especially between husbands and wives.[8] More recently, Ascan Koerner and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick have expanded this work to encompass the entire family.[9] The resulting theory provides a set of terms that describe different family types and explain the differences among them. As a sociopsychological theory, this work bases family types on the ways in which family members as individuals think about families. Following the lead of psychological theory in this area, Koerner and Fitzpatrick refer to these ways of thinking as *schemas*, or more specifically, *relational schemas*.[10]

Your relational schemas consist of your knowledge about yourself, others, and relationships, along with knowledge about how to interact in relationships. This knowledge provides an image of relationships based on your own experience and guides your behavior within relationships. A schema is an organized set of memories that you make use of whenever you interact with other people. Since people have different experiences, their schemas will be somewhat different.

Your relational schemas are organized into levels from general to specific, including knowledge about social relationships in general, knowledge of types of relationships, and knowledge of specific relationships. Your family schema, therefore, includes (1) what you know about relationships in general; (2) what you know about family relationships as a type; and (3) what you know about your relationship with other members of your own family.

Your interaction with other members of your family at any given time will be directed first by your specific schema, then by your family schema, and then by your general schema. In other words, when you and your brother interact, you will rely first on your knowledge of this particular relationship. If, for some reason, that doesn't work, you will fall back on your general knowledge of how family members should behave. If that fails, you will rely as a last resort on your knowledge of relationships in general.

Suppose, for example, that during childhood your brother was your close companion and your behavior together relied on this specific schema of companionship, a schema that consists of a lot of shared experiences between the two of you. Imagine, however, that your brother goes off to college and comes back for the summer a changed person. You fully expect to hang out with him all the time, but he actually pays little attention to you. In other words, your previous schema does not work any more, and you must think of new ways of interacting. You are most likely to make decisions about how to respond based on your schema for families in general, so you may decide to take on more of a distant-sibling relationship similar to what you have seen in other families.

Continuing the previous example, perhaps your brother gets married and moves across the country, and you have little opportunity to interact. Years later, he comes to town for a family reunion, but you really don't know how to respond to him since you feel that you hardly know him any more. You may just follow general rules of social etiquette, such as hospitality and politeness—at least until a new relationship is negotiated.

According to Fitzpatrick and her colleagues, then, family communication is not random but highly patterned based on particular schemas that determine how family members communicate with one another. These schemas consist of knowledge about (1) how intimate the family is; (2) the degree of individuality within the family; and (3) factors external to the family, such as friends, geographical distance, work, and other concerns outside the family unit.

In addition to this kind of content knowledge, a family's schema will include a certain kind of orientation to communication. Two kinds predominate: the first is *conversation orientation,* and the second, *conformity orientation*. These are variables, so families differ in how much conversation and conformity the family schema includes. Families that have a high-conversation schema like to talk; in contrast, families with a low-conversation schema do not spend much time talking. Families with a high-conformity schema tend to go along with family authorities such as parents, while families low in this variable expect more individuality. Your family's communication pattern will depend on where your schema fits within these two types of orientation.

Various schema create different family types. Fitzpatrick and her colleagues have identified four types: (1) consensual; (2) pluralistic; (3) protective; and (4) laissez-faire. Each of these families has certain types of parents, determined by the ways in which they use their space, time, and energy and the degree to which they express their feelings, exert power, and share a common philosophy of marriage.[11] A certain type of family schema combined with orientation to communication or conformity results in a particular marriage *type*. The marriage types are (1) traditional;

(2) independent; and (3) separate. Each marriage type functions in very different ways.

The first type of family is *consensual*. Such families are high in both conversation and conformity. Consensual families have a lot of talk, but the family authority—usually a parent—makes decisions. These families experience the tension of valuing open communication while also wanting clear parental authority. Parents typically listen well to their children but make the decisions and then explain these to the children, in an effort to help the children understand the reasoning behind the decisions.

Parents in consensual families tend to be *traditional* in marital orientation. This means that they will tend to be conventional in their views of marriage and place more value on stability and certainty in role relations than on variety and spontaneity. They have strong interdependence and share much companionship. Although they are not assertive about disagreements, they do not avoid conflict. According to Fitzpatrick and her colleagues, a traditional wife would take her husband's name, both members of the couple would have strong feelings about infidelity in the relationship, and they would share much time and space. They would try to work out a standard time schedule and spend as much time together as possible, and they probably would not have separate rooms for their own activities.

The research data suggest that there is not too much conflict in a traditional marriage because power and decision making are distributed according to customary norms. Husbands, for example, may be in charge of certain kinds of decisions and wives in charge of others. Consequently, there is little need to negotiate and resolve conflict in these marriages. At the same time, there is little impetus for change and growth in the relationship. A traditional couple can be assertive with each other when necessary, but each person tends to support the other's requests with appeals to the relationship rather than by refuting each other's arguments. Traditional couples are highly expressive and disclose both joy and frustration, which probably explains why they value open communication and produce consensual families.

Now to the second family type: if your family is high in conversation but low in conformity, it will display characteristics of the *pluralistic* type. Here you will have lots of unrestrained conversation, but everyone will decide for themselves in the end what actions to take on the basis of that talk. Parents do not feel the need to control the children; instead, opinions are evaluated on the basis of merit, and everyone participates in family decision making.

The parents of pluralistic families tend to be typed as *independent*, since they usually are unconventional in their views of marriage. As independents, the husband and wife do not rely on each other very much and tend to produce independent-thinking children. Although these types of parents may spend time together and share a great deal, they value their own autonomy and often have separate rooms in the house for their own activities—they both might have studies of their own, or one might have a woodworking shop and the other a sewing room. They may also have separate interests and friends outside the family.

Because they do not rely on conventional roles, independent marriages are constantly renegotiated. There is much conflict in a typical independent marriage; partners often vie for power, use a variety of persuasive techniques, and are not reluctant to refute each other's arguments. Like the traditionals, the independents are also expressive. They respond to each other's nonverbal cues, and they usually understand each other well, which explains why they value open communication.

The third type of family is *protective*. If your family tends to be low in conversation but high in conformity, there is a lot of obedience but little communication. Parents in these types of families do not see why they should spend a lot of time talking things through, nor do they owe the children an explanation for what they decide. For this reason, such parents tend to be typed as *separates*. These individuals seem to be ambivalent about their roles and relationship. They may have a conventional view of marriage, but they are not very interdependent and do not share much. Fitzpatrick refers to separates as "emotionally divorced." They have their opinions and can be

contentious, but conflicts never last long because separates are quick to retreat from conflict. In some cases, there is little conflict simply because they do not coordinate their actions for very long and thus do not sustain conflicts. Their attempts to gain compliance rarely use relationship appeals and often mention the bad things that will happen if the spouse does not comply. Couples of this type have a watchful attitude. They ask many questions but offer little advice. Predictably, then, they are not very expressive, and they do not understand their partners' emotions very well.

Finally, if you are low in both conversation and conformity, then your family is *laissez-faire* — hands-off and low involvement. Members of this family type really don't care much what other members of the family do, and they certainly don't want to waste time talking about it. The parents in such families tend to be mixed in orientation, meaning that they do not have the same schema from which they are operating. They may be a combination of separate and independent or some other combination. Actually, mixed marital types are quite common. About 40 percent of the couples Fitzpatrick tested display some combination of types—separate-traditional, traditional-independent, or independent-separate. The characterization of mixed types is naturally more complex.

Are all of these forms of communication and marriage types equally positive? Fitzpatrick now believes that they are not. Although different family patterns work well for different people, mixed and laissez-faire families probably tend to be dysfunctional. A strong implication of this theory is that different interactional patterns and types are crucial to the effective functioning of a family. The following theory was instrumental in helping communication theorists think about how relationships move from distant to close; thus it extends our understanding of families and relationships.

Social-Penetration Theory

Self-disclosure was an important theme in communication theory in the 1960s and 1970s.[12] *Social penetration* came to identify the process of increasing disclosure and intimacy within a relationship and represents a formative theory in the intellectual history of relationship theory. Spurred by the work of Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor, social penetration theory set in motion a long tradition of investigation into relational development.[13] Most of the early investigators of social-penetration focused on individual behavior and motivation, planting this work firmly within the sociopsychological tradition. Today, we realize that relationship development is governed by a complex set of forces that participants must manage over time. For the most part, these more sophisticated ways of looking at relationship development arose from within the sociocultural and phenomenological traditions, as we will see later in the chapter.

To begin to explain social penetration, imagine yourself as a sphere. Within this ball is contained everything that might be known about you— your experiences, knowledge, attitudes, ideas, thoughts, and deeds. The information that is contained in this sphere, however, is not a jumble but is highly organized around a core. Those things that are close to your center are farthest from the outside, farthest from what others can see or detect. These are the most private aspects of your self. As you move toward the outside of the sphere, this information is closer to what other people can see and less central to your inner core. The "skin" of the sphere is what people can easily detect—how you dress, your outward behavior, what you carry around for anyone to see.

This metaphor is not far from the image of the individual espoused in early social-penetration theory. According to the theory, you get to know another person by "penetrating" the sphere. The sphere contains both breadth and depth. You could learn many different kinds of things about another person (breadth), or you could learn increasingly detailed information about one or two things (depth). As the relationship between two individuals develops, the partners share more aspects of the self, adding both depth and breadth to what they know about one another.

Altman and Taylor's original theory was based on one of the most popular ideas in the sociopsychological tradition—the economic

proposition that human beings make decisions based on costs and rewards. In other words, if something will be very costly, you will think twice before you do it. If the results could be very rewarding, you may go ahead, despite the costs. Every decision is a balance between costs and rewards. When we apply this principle to human interaction, we are looking at a process known as *social exchange*.[14]

Within social-exchange theory, human interaction is like an economic transaction: you seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. Applied to social penetration, you will reveal information about yourself when the cost-rewards ratio is acceptable to you. According to Altman and Taylor, then, relational partners not only assess the rewards and costs of the relationship at a given moment but also use the information they have gathered to predict the rewards and costs in the future. As long as rewards continue to outweigh costs, a couple will become increasingly intimate by sharing more and more personal information.

Altman and Taylor suggest four stages of relational development: (1) orientation; (2) exploratory affective exchange; (3) affective exchange; and (4) stable exchange. *Orientation* consists of impersonal communication, in which one discloses only very public information. If this stage is rewarding to the participants, they will move to the next stage, the *exploratory affective exchange*, in which movement to a deeper level of disclosure takes place. The third stage, *affective exchange*, centers on evaluative and critical feelings at a deeper level. This stage will not be entered unless the partners perceive substantial rewards relative to costs in earlier stages. Finally, *stable exchange* is highly intimate and allows the partners to predict each other's actions and responses very well. Using romantic couples as an example, early dating would illustrate the orientation stage, later dating would probably be exploratory exchange, full affective exchange would happen once the couple becomes exclusive and begins to plan a future together, and marriage or long-term partnering is representative of the stable-exchange phase.

Originally, social-penetration theory was important in focusing our attention on relationship development as a communication process; however, it did not hold up very well to the actual experience of relationships in daily life. The idea that you move increasingly from public to private in a linear fashion now seems naive. We know from experience that relationships develop in a variety of ways, often moving back and forth from sharing to privacy. The current version of the theory suggests that social penetration is a cyclical, dialectical process.[15] It is cyclical because it proceeds in back-and-forth cycles, and it is dialectical because it involves the management of the never-ending tension between the public and the private.

In their later writings, Altman and his colleagues recognized this limitation and revised social-penetration theory to provide a more complex notion of relational development.[16] More than a linear progression from privacy to openness, relationship development came to be seen as involving cycles of stability and change as a couple manages its contradictory needs for predictability and flexibility. Altman and colleagues developed the notions of openness and closedness to describe the complexity of relationships.

A couple's cycle of openness and closedness possesses a certain regularity or predictable rhythm. In more developed relationships, the cycle is longer than it is in less developed relationships. This is because, consistent with the basic tenet of social-penetration theory, developed relationships have on average more disclosure than do less developed ones. In addition, as relationships develop, partners become more able to coordinate the cycle of disclosure. Their timing and extent of disclosure are more likely to be synchronized.

To test this idea, C. Arthur VanLear paired students into dyads.[17] Each couple met to talk for one-half hour per week for five weeks, and their conversations were tape-recorded. These tapes were then examined statistically for cyclical patterns. The analysis indicated that cycles of openness did occur in these conversations, as well as some synchronization, suggesting that

such cycles can be established even in very new relationships.

To compare these results with real, ongoing relationships, students were asked to monitor their conversations with a relational partner (such as a spouse, friend, or romantic partner) for a 10-week period. After each conversation of at least 15 minutes, the students filled out a "conversation monitoring form" that asked about satisfaction and perceived openness/closedness. The results of this study mirrored those of the first study. Both studies indicated that cycles do occur, that these are complex, that the partners recognize their cycles, and that matching and synchronization often occur. Important to note, however, is the finding that the amount of synchrony was not the same for each couple, which means that there are differences between couples in their ability to coordinate self-disclosure cycles.

In contrast to the sociopsychological theories in the current section, the sociocultural theories discussed next have explored and expanded the idea of managing tensions in relationships, bringing cultural factors to bear. We begin the following section by looking at a current theory—identity-management theory by Altman and Taylor—that elaborates on the role of communication in managing the tension between the need for sharing and the need for privacy.

As psychologists, Altman and Taylor used a common frame from their field for understanding interpersonal behavior, noticing that individuals weigh costs and rewards in deciding how to act. Increasing intimacy, then, is a process of judging whether increasingly personal communication will be worth it or not. Intriguing as this hypothesis has been, Altman and Taylor themselves came to see its limitations and developed a much more cybernetic view of social penetration. As a result, their theory really cuts across the sociopsychological and the cybernetic traditions.

The sociocultural tradition also extends Fitzpatrick's work on family schemas and types that we have articulated as part of the sociopsychological tradition. Her work relies on the typing and categorizing of cognitive dimensions—all fundamental to the cybernetic tradition. As we move to the sociocultural tradition, there is much more of an emphasis on how meanings are constructed and how relationships actually are managed in interactional processes.

◖ THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

As we move from sociopsychological theories to sociocultural ones, we see a dramatic shift from an emphasis on individuals to an emphasis on interaction, and from a focus on typology to process explanations. First we will look at a *theory of identity management* that helps us see how relationships come to acquire an identity through communication. This theory introduces us to the many factors and forces that impinge upon relational identity, leading nicely to *dialogical theory*. This theory, the second to be discussed in this section, suggests that relationships integrate a mix of diverse "voices" that pull and push on the relationship over time. As a natural extension of this theory, we move next to Mikhail Bahktin's dialectical theory, which explores the tensions caused by inconsistent forces within relationships. Finally, continuing the analysis of the previous section, we show how the flow of relationships actually affects the management of disclosure and privacy. This is Sandra Petronio's *privacy-management theory*.

Identity-Management Theory

In Chapter 4, we discussed communicator identity at some length. However, identity is not limited to individual communicators but involves relationships as well. Identity-management theory, developed by Tadasu Todd Imahori and William R. Cupach, shows how identities are established, maintained, and changed within relationships.[18] With the important people in your life, you will constantly negotiate mutually acceptable answers to the question, "Who are we and what is the nature of our relationship?"

Imagine an intercultural marriage between a Native-American wife who grew up on the reservation and an Anglo husband from New

York City with Italian immigrant grandparents. Like all couples, these individuals will be engaged in a constant process of negotiating their relational identity—who they are as a couple. This entails knowing who they are culturally and individually. For example, the wife's Native heritage will be very important to her at certain times and in certain situations, but other aspects of her background—like her level of education or personality—may assume greater importance at other times. We could make the same generalization about the husband. This couple is more than their individual identities; they must attend to their relational identity as well. And although we have used an example in which there is considerable ethnic and geographic diversity, even couples who are fairly homogenous—who grow up in the same town with parents of similar backgrounds and values, let's say—still need to attend to their relational identities.

When constructing a relational identity, cultural differences sometimes stand out starkly, and partners will find themselves engaged in *intercultural communication* as they work out the cultural aspects of their relationship. Within a relationship, this happens when the partners must work through salient cultural differences. Other times, certain common cultural qualities will take over, necessitating *intracultural communication*, which happens when common cultural identities become salient. On other occasions, a couple's greatest concern will be their own unique characteristics as a married couple, apart from cultural concerns, which require *interpersonal communication*. All relational partners will spend at least some time engaged in each of these three kinds of communication with family, friends, and co-workers.

We refer metaphorically to our desired identity as *face*, and the work we do to establish our own face and that of our relational partners is called *facework*.[19] One's desired identity, or face, can be supported or threatened, and in the negotiation of relational identity, you can expect some of both, although most people make a good faith effort to support the face of others by accepting and approving of the identities they wish for themselves and allowing one another a

certain amount of autonomy and freedom without intrusion or interference.[20]

Identity-management theory has much to say about relationships in which cultural differences are important and obvious. Here negotiation is not just about what the partners may want for themselves and for the relationship, though this is always part of it, but about support and/or threat to cultural identity as well. Because cultural identity is often intense in such relationships, there is much potential for face threats related to culture.

Our Native- and Italian-American couple may have many cultural challenges as they work through such issues as spirituality and religion, land ties, music and dance, role of elders, child raising, cultural rituals, and so forth. When they assert their own cultural preferences in situations like these, they will sometimes threaten the face of the other by challenging certain cultural forms that are valued, even sacred, to the other. This can happen in one of four ways.

First, one partner may feel constrained or stereotyped into certain cultural forms and not accepted as a complex and whole person. The tendency to simplify a partner of a different culture is common in the early stages of a relationship when partners don't yet know each other very well. Imahori and Cupach call this *identity freezing*. People cope with this in a variety of ways, such as showing support for themselves or indicating some positive aspect of their own cultural identity; showing good mutual support by laughing and humor; modeling support for the other; or mutual negative support in the form of avoidance. In the movie *Something New*, a relationship develops between Kenya, a black professional woman, and Brian, her white male landscaper. At one point, Kenya describes the "black tax" to Brian— she has to work twice as hard as her white counterparts to be seen as competent. At a gathering of her friends, he makes a comment that he knows about the "black tax," a move by which he tries to show support but just succeeds in identity freezing instead.

Second, partners sometimes find that their cultural values are ignored. This is the *nonsupport* problem. This too is a face threat and is often

handled in many of the same ways as freezing. Also in *Something New*, Brian asks Kenya about her hair weave. Whether he is curious or making a judgment is not clear, but she takes it as a sign of nonsupport and gets angry.

The third problem experienced in intercultural identity negotiation is the tension, or dialectic, between supporting one's own face and supporting that of the other. This problem, what Imahori and Cupach call the *self-other face dialectic*, occurs when you want to support the other person's cultural identity but you also want to assert your own and find it difficult to do both. To assert or support your own cultural ways, you simultaneously deny or minimize those of the other person. Methods of coping include holding one's own ground, giving in, alternating between supporting the two identities, and avoiding the issue altogether. An African-American man we know is married to a Chinese woman. He is fluent in Mandarin, so they can speak easily to each other, but she knows very little English. Thus, when they are in the United States, interacting with his friends, she refuses to speak English and wants him to translate everything into Mandarin for her. In this case, he cannot easily assert his own identity—U.S., black—and support hers at the same time because he is busy translating for her.

Fourth, intercultural couples sometimes experience a tension between wanting to affirm a cultural value (positive face) but not wanting to constrain or stereotype (negative face). This is the *positive-negative face dialectic*. In our earlier example, the Native-American wife might say something like, "I think we should have pasta at least once a week because I know your family always serves it." The Italian-American husband could get offended, "What, you think that's all we eat! I wish you would stop thinking of me as some kind of spaghetti lover." Partners can cope with this problem in a variety of ways. For example, they can stay in a confirmed comfort zone based on what they have already learned about each other (don't mention food), use explicit or implicit warning signs to determine what to say or not say (oops, better not say anything like that again), stay away from cultural

attributions altogether (just don't mention anything Italian), or provide nonverbal support (just serve pasta occasionally and don't say anything about it).

Of course, identity management is never-ending, but Imahori and Cupach have noticed that couples deal with it differently at different stages of the relationship. Specifically, they address three relational stages—(1) trial; (2) enmeshment; and (3) renegotiation.

In the *trial* phase, intercultural partners are just beginning to explore their cultural differences and what cultural identities they want for their relationship. Cultural difference is usually salient at this point and, indeed, stands as a barrier in the relationship. The biggest challenges at this stage are trying to avoid nonsupport and freezing, while managing the tensions in the self-other and positive-negative face dialectics. In other words, the couple will be dancing all around possible mistakes in handling one another's cultural identities. In this stage, the couple will risk face threats as a natural part of discovering the balance necessary if they are to have a relationship.

In the *enmeshment* phase, a certain relational identity, with commonly established cultural features, will have emerged. Here the couple finds a level of comfort in who they are as a couple, they come to share rules and symbols, and they develop common understandings of one another and of the relationship. In other words, they have less need for intercultural communication but rely on intracultural interaction. The Jewish-Christian couple's decision to have a Christmas tree with a star of David on top is one example of an agreement that might come to characterize the enmeshment phase.

In the *renegotiation* phase, the couple proceeds to work through various identity issues as they come up, making use of the common relational history they have already developed. They have a strong relational identity at this point, and they are able to rely on this to a greater extent than in earlier times. By this time, cultural differences are easier to manage because there is already a common basis for doing so. The couple can easily attend family gatherings because they know

what to expect and have established ways of negotiating the diversity of events and expectations. Also, cultural difference itself has already been defined as part of the relationship, so there is a larger frame in which to understand the difference. Cultural difference is to be expected, in other words, and is seen as a positive aspect of the relationship. Certain cultural issues that were hard to discuss—even avoided—may now be dealt with constructively.

A Dialogical/Dialectical Theory of Relationships

For a number of years, Leslie Baxter and her colleagues have been exploring the complex ways in which persons in relationships use communication to manage the naturally opposing forces that impinge on their relationship at any given time.[21] This idea of relationship as a dialogical and dialectical process is based in large measure on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, so we begin this section with a brief overview of Bakhtin's theory.

Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogics. Mikhail Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher and teacher who wrote and published in the 1920s and 1930s. Not until he was discovered by scholars in the 1960s were his works translated and republished. Today his ideas are known across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Bakhtin's work actually constitutes a crossover theory in terms of the traditions of communication, since it contributes to both the sociocultural and critical perspectives. We have decided to include it in the sociocultural tradition because it offers a useful foundation to the other sociocultural theories detailed here. Actually, Bakhtin never mentioned "relationships" as we are exploring them in this chapter, but because his ideas are so foundational to Baxter's approach, we are compelled to introduce them in this chapter. Indeed, in a metaphorical sense, Bakhtin does help us understand relationships in society.

Bakhtin begins with the notion of everyday reality—what he calls the *prosaic*—which simply refers to the ordinary, taken-for-granted, familiar world—eating, sleeping, walking, talking. Bakhtin sees the everyday world as one of constant activity and creativity and the starting point for change of any kind. These changes occur very slowly, so slowly they often cannot be observed until after the fact, but nonetheless, this is the realm where critical decisions are made.[22] Accumulated decisions about what to wear, where to go, what to eat, and how to organize your work on a given day end up having enormous impact on your life. The big issues—social norms, values, standards, and systems—are actually built up over time from these small microbehaviors. In the everyday life of the prosaic, then, we face all kinds of competing influences that push and pull us in many directions, and these forces are not trivial.

Using a metaphor from physics, Bakhtin identifies two general kinds of forces that impact this kind of everyday life—centripetal and centrifugal.[23] *Centripetal forces* seek to impose order on the apparent chaos of life, while *centrifugal forces* disrupt that order. You can see the analogy from physics operating here: centripetal forces such as gravity pull objects together into a center, while centrifugal forces like rotation pull objects away from each other. When a rocket takes off into space, gravity wants to pull it back to earth, but at a certain point, the force of the trajectory of the rocket starts to pull it away from the earth.

Social life is like this. Just when you think you have something, it gets pulled away. Just when you think things are nicely organized—you're all ready for that big presentation at work—something happens to remind you that life is not tidy—you can't find your keys. Some forces, then, support the existing order, while others, by chance or design, work in ways that ultimately produce changes in the fabric of daily life by giving events new meanings.

The constant presence of disorder in the form of centrifugal forces is what intrigues Bakhtin; he is interested in how individuals, cultures, and even language construct an integrated whole when there are so many things operating that work against a sense of order. Language illustrates this dance very well. In the United States, we

learned that it was not politically correct to call African-Americans *colored people*—the label used until the 1960s—but in recent years, the term *people of color* has come into fashion. Many members of earlier generations have difficulty understanding the differences between these two sets of labels.[24] Similarly, earlier generations learned to avoid the use of the term *queer* to refer to gay men and lesbians because of its derogatory meanings but now are confronted with a scholarly body of work in the academy known as *queer theory*. Language becomes a medium for both centripetal and centrifugal forces. We are thrown off when meanings migrate, but we use language itself to help us re-establish order.

Questions of identity are especially central to social life. Who am I? Who are we? What is the nature of our relationship? Centripetal and centrifugal forces embedded in everyday situations require that we answer these questions differently at different times—in a day, in a year, in a lifetime. It is through communication that we manage this flow of forces, that we form order in the face of change.

While Bakhtin begins with the notion that everyday life requires a constant effort to reintegrate diverse forces, he does not stop there. He advocates the assumption of a certain kind of responsibility by fully engaging the obligations of each situation that presents itself. Many people refuse to undertake this responsibility, and Bakhtin labels them *pretenders*. According to Bakhtin, they avoid the effort of defining their identity by living "representatively" and "ritualistically"—just following established patterns or habits of thought, speech, and action without ever confronting or addressing the need for reintegration. Bakhtin prefers a way of life that confronts the changing particulars of everyday life and forces the development of an individual ethic based on who you are within the situation at any given moment. In Bakhtin's words, "There is no alibi for being."[25] The only real choice is to engage fully the dynamic of centripetal and centrifugal forces.

Bakhtin's focus on the prosaic leads to a second important aspect of his theory—*unfinalizability*. Bakhtin believes that the world is not only messy

and chaotic but genuinely open and free—nothing is yet decided. In the process of interacting in the world, we influence the future and emerge "along with the world."[26] In other words, we do not enter a complete and static world; rather, we help construct all of the events and contexts that make the world a complex one. This world is made up of multiple voices or what Bakhtin calls a *heteroglossia*—literally "many voices," all of which contribute to the constant change and flux of the world.

Against the context of everydayness, the concepts of unfinalizability and heteroglossia comprise the basis for Bakhtin's notion of *dialogue*. Bakhtin used this word in several ways throughout his writing, but scholars generally agree that it refers to a particular kind of interaction.[27] Just as Bakhtin prefers to engage the world in its specificity rather than its abstraction, so dialogue is about how we interact in specific interactions. There is no "general language," spoken by a general voice, divorced from what that voice is saying. There is always somebody talking to somebody, even when you are talking to yourself. Dialogue, then, is something that happens within a specific situation among specific participants, like a discussion in your communication theory class.

At the heart of Bakhtin's conception of dialogue is the *utterance*—a unit of exchange, spoken or written, between two people. An utterance refers to language spoken in context. It contains a theme—the content of the conversation, the communicator's attitude toward that subject, and some degree of responsiveness on the part of the person being addressed. The communicator, then, expresses an idea and makes an evaluation about it, anticipating some kind of response from the person addressed. The speaker not only anticipates the viewpoint of the other and adapts her communication on the basis of that anticipation but the addressee also participates literally by responding, evaluating, and initiating utterances of her own.

Dialogue, then, is a complex web of interrelations with others. What you say as part of a class discussion must always be understood as part of an ongoing conversation with the other students

in the class, both within and outside of the classroom. Those interactions can only be understood as part of something even larger. Bakhtin explains: "The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue."[28]

Dialogue represents a contextualized, ongoing, and evolving subject matter that contributes to the constant redefinition of the participants in the dialogue as well. The products and potentials of dialogue are endless. According to Bakhtin, "the final word has not yet been spoken and never will be spoken."[29] By this Bakhtin means that the possibilities in any dialogic situation are enormous and unending. Each participant in dialogue is open to the possibilities that may be suggested by the other, each is enriched by the dialogue, and each is a cocreator of the future that is being created in the interaction, a future that is ever changing as the interaction changes.

Bakhtin contrasts dialogue with *monologue* (he sometimes uses the term *finalization* as another word for monologue). This occurs when an interaction becomes static, closed, or dead. Abstraction, generalization, and a failure to engage the moment, and habitual ways of thinking and acting are examples Bakhtin offers of monologue. In such instances, there is no mutual enrichment between the parties.[30] Bakhtin contrasts the static nature of monologue with his ideal of dialogue as full engagement: "To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium."[31]

Dialogue also shapes cultures, because every dialogic interaction is a viewing of each culture from a particular standpoint. We negotiate our understanding in interaction with another, testing our views, our understandings, our standpoints against those of others we encounter. Culturally, your grandparents may have negotiated their identity in terms of the language of the white culture and called themselves *Negroes.* Your parents may have negotiated an identity based on pride of community and called themselves *black.* Later, they may have evolved their sense of self to a pan-world identity and changed their label to *African-American.*

Bakhtin's ideas have received considerable attention from critical and cultural theorists who are interested in understanding processes of negotiation from marginalized places in a culture. Bakhtin is important, then, for providing a view of relationship: (1) between two individuals as an opening to potentials that may never be realized; and (2) between cultures as well. In the following section, we look at a theory that shows the relevance of Bakhtin's work to our everyday relationships.

Baxter's Theory of Relationship. Over the years, Baxter has come to see Bakhtin's dialogics as a way to better understand the flux and flow of relationships. Incorporating many of Bakhtin's concepts, Baxter refers to her theory as a *dialogical* theory of relationships. In other words, relationships are defined through a dialogue among many voices. At the same time, Baxter also characterizes her theory as *dialectical*, meaning that relationships are a place where contradictions are managed.[32]

Before we see how Baxter uses them, let's look more closely at these two terms—*dialogue* and *dialectic. Dialectic* refers to a tension between opposing forces within a system. In our lives, we often experience equally compelling "voices" that impinge upon our decision making. For example, you may want to achieve material success, but your humanitarian and environmental values make you question this goal. This contradiction is serious because you realize that in order to achieve your humanitarian and environmental goals, you must achieve material success to provide the resources to allow you to have an impact. You may go back and forth about this tension, confused about how to proceed. Perhaps you decide to take a job that allows you to work

From the Source . . .

Relational dialectics theory (RDT) grew out of dissatisfaction with the monologic biases of traditional interpersonal/family communication research, in which discourses of openness, certainty, and connection were privileged while competing discourses of nonexpression, unpredictability, and autonomy were muted. It has evolved from its early focus on bipolar contradictions to its current articulation as a constitutive theory of communication, centered in the struggle of competing discourses with a companion method of discourse analysis, contrapuntal analysis.

—Leslie Baxter

on environmental issues, or perhaps you have a job that allows summers off to do the humanitarian work you most value. In the end, you will probably not resolve this contradiction but will manage it in any number of creative ways.

Dialectical tensions are seen very easily in larger societal institutions. For example, corporations are sustained by profit, which often exists in tension with the income and job security of workers; yet, the profits that corporations make enable them to develop and expand, creating jobs and income for the workforce. This is a classic dialectic involving the natural tension between opposing material forces; Baxter and other dialectical communication theorists apply this concept to human relationships as well.

In addition to the notion of *dialectic*, Baxter and her colleagues describe the process of *dialogue*. In general, a *dialogue* is a coming together of diverse voices in a conversation. Instead of saying, "We had a conversation," you might say, "We had a dialogue." In fact, the term *dialogue* is a metaphor from literature and theater, referring to the lines of dialogue of the characters. Following Bakhtin, Baxter sees dialogues as conversations that define and redefine relationships as they emerge in actual situations over time. When Baxter writes that relationships are both dialogical and dialectical, she means that the natural tensions of relationships are managed through coordinated talk.

Relationships are dynamic, and communication is what manages both similarity and difference. Indeed, it draws us together through similarity, while creating, maintaining, and managing areas of difference as well. Using Bakhtin's terminology, relational communication creates centripetal forces that give a sense of order while managing the centrifugal forces that lead to change. This idea of relationships is multidimensional, and in order to really see it, you have to move around and take several perspectives, as you would when looking at a sculpture in a gallery. Baxter provides five vantage points for viewing this process of relational dialogue.

Relationships are made in dialogue. In this first vantage point of Baxter's theory, it is in dialogue that you define your relationships with others. Your ideas about your *self*, the *other*, and the *relationship* are constructed in talk, which happens in several ways. You create moments, often turning points, which you later remember as important. You even retell old stories from the relationship that bring a sense of similarity or shared experience over time. Baxter calls this *chronotopic similarity*. At the same time, you identify differences between yourself and the other person in that relationship, which enables you to set yourself apart and to develop as a person, a concept she calls *self-becoming*. In other words, both similarity and difference are made in the conversations of a relationship over time. This happens in conversations within the relationship and with people outside of it.

Imagine for a moment that you joined your department's tutoring program and are matched up with a freshman looking for help in her basic communication courses. You meet with her a couple times a week throughout the semester to help her organize speeches, prepare for exams, and plan projects—a job you very much enjoy. By talking together about courses and assignments as well as things going on within your personal lives, you create shared moments that you will look back on in the future. She might call you excitedly after the fall semester to let you know that she got an A on

a final exam that the two of you worked to prepare for.

At the same time, many differences are accentuated in the tutoring relationship. You are older, more experienced in the major, and more knowledgeable than your new friend. In the tutoring relationship, you come to see what you have accomplished and the directions in which you are going. Even though you and your tutee feel quite close to one another and enjoy the shared moments you create together, each of you also acknowledges and appreciates your different trajectories of life. These points are made even clearer when you talk with your friends about the relationship you have with your tutee. From the first angle, then, you literally make your relationship within dialogue.

Baxter's second vantage point is that *dialogue affords an opportunity to achieve a unity within diversity.* Through dialogue, we manage the dynamic interplay between centrifugal and centripetal forces—those that push us apart and those that pull us together, those that create a sense of chaos and those that provide a feeling of coherence. These opposing forces are dialectical in that they involve a tension between two or more contradictory elements of a system, and relationships provide a context in which we manage *contradictions.*[33]

You can see the influence of cybernetics in this idea. Remember that the cybernetic tradition leads us to see the ways in which counteracting forces in a system create balance and change. Baxter, however, distances her work from the cybernetic, because she does not want to leave the impression that a relationship is a kind of balancing system of forces. Instead, her work more accurately reflects the ideas of social constructionism (Chapter 3)—that we both make and manage the many forces that define or shape a relationship in its development over time. The key here is contradiction.

Although discussion of bipolar opposites such as dependence-independence or stability-change is frequent in the literature on relationships, Montgomery and Baxter feel that bipolar opposites oversimplify the much more complex process of contradiction, in which various forces tug at one another. At any moment, certain dominant, or *centripetal,* forces work in opposition to countervailing, or *centrifugal,* ones. Montgomery and Baxter see these as a cluster of forces or a "knot of contradiction."[34]

Each cluster consists of a variety of related contradictions that can occur in relationships.[35] One cluster, for example, is *integration and separation,* or the tension between feeling close and feeling more distant. Whenever you struggle with decisions about whether to support another person or strike out on your own, you are facing this contradiction. A second cluster is *expression-nonexpression.* This is the tension between whether to reveal information or keep it secret. When you are trying to decide whether to tell your partner something and feel reluctant to do so, you are probably experiencing this tension.

A third cluster is *stability-change,* or the tension between being predictable and consistent versus being spontaneous and different. Often couples experience a quandary about whether to keep doing the same old thing or to try new things, and when this happens, they are feeling this particular contradiction. Baxter has put special emphasis here because of the impact of this pair on relationship development. How do you interact in a way that keeps things somewhat predictable and stable while allowing the relationship to change and grow?

Carol Werner and Leslie Baxter write about five qualities that change as relationships develop.[36] These are amplitude, salience, scale, sequence, and pace/rhythm.

1. *Amplitude*—the strength of feelings, behaviors, or both. For example, at certain points in a relationship, you may be very active and have strong feelings about what is going on. At other times, you may be more laid back or calm.
2. *Salience*—focus on past, present, or future. At some moments in a relationship, you may find yourself concentrating a lot on what happened between the two of you in the past. At other times you may be very centered on what is going on right now; and at other times, you may think mostly about the future, where the relationship seems to be headed, or where you would like it to be going.

3. *Scale*—how long patterns last. You and your partner may have some rituals that stick for a very long time, or perhaps you find yourselves doing things a certain way for short periods of time, changing your routine often.

4. *Sequence*—the order of events in the relationship. As a relationship changes, a variety of things may be undertaken, but they are not always organized the same way for the entire length of the relationship. It is interesting to reflect back on the history of your relationship. Look at how the two of you have organized your time and the actions you do around and with each other. You will probably find that these sequences are different from one moment to another. Some sequences are rather stable and last a long time, while others are short-lived and easily replaced by new patterns of behavior in the relationship.

5. *Pace/Rhythm*—the rapidity of events in the relationship and the interval between events. During certain periods in a relationship, events may occur in a rapid-fire way, with everything seeming to happen quickly. At other times, the pace may be much slower. At a given time, a relationship will be characterized by some combination of these variables. Tracking the development of a relationship means watching the ways in which the profile changes over time.

Dialogue is aesthetic. This is Baxter's third vantage point. Aesthetics involve a sense of balance, of coherence, of form, and of wholeness. The mere fact that you can say that you are having a relationship means that there is some pattern there that, like a portrait, gives the relationship identity, uniqueness, and wholeness. You are not only able to name the relationships in which you take part, but you can describe them, characterize them, and tell stories that show what the relationship is like. The character of a relationship is a reflection of its aesthetic, which is created in dialogue.

Thus, although social life is "messy" in many respects, we are able to provide a sense of order through dialogue. Communicators in a relationship can construct a feeling of wholeness and unity, a momentary feeling of completion, an aesthetic through dialogue. This can happen in several ways. You can, for example, create a feeling of temporal continuity, or a sense that what is happening now is logically connected to what happened before. You can also create a feeling of a unified relationship, so that despite your differences, you are able to get a sense of "being together" as a couple. This can happen, for example, when conversation feels like an effortless flow or when you easily participate in a common ritual within the relationship.

Dialogue is discourse. Baxter's fourth vantage point refers to the idea that the practical and aesthetic outcomes are not things-in-themselves but are made, or created, in communication. Baxter reminds us, with Bakhtin, that dialogue is conversation. Hailing back to the early work in relational theory, summarized earlier in the chapter, Baxter notes that relationships are never a series of single-person statements but consist of an ongoing back-and-forth process over time. Important, then, are the actual behaviors or practices in which communicators engage along the trajectory of a relationship. In relationship theory, this idea is very important because it means that some sort of relational pattern and definition arises in the give-and-take of material action. Relationships are not something you work out cognitively in your head but are the product of discourse.

By definition, every interaction occurs within a larger context; it is always understood in part by what came before, and it sets the stage for new turns to happen in the future. Discourse, then, is ongoing—an unending conversation—which makes relationships *unfinalizable* in the Bakhtinian sense of the word.

We turn now from Baxter's broad dialectical theory to a more focused theory that addresses one aspect of relationships—the communication privacy management theory of Sandra Petronio.

Communication Privacy Management

The final theory to be summarized in this section is Sandra Petronio's communication privacy management theory (CPM), which addresses the

tension between openness and privacy, between the "public" and the "private" in relationships.[37] According to Petronio, individuals involved in relationships are constantly managing boundaries between the public and private, between those feelings and thoughts they are willing to share with others and those they are not. Sometimes the boundary is permeable, meaning that certain information can be revealed; at other times, it is impermeable, and information is never shared. Of course, the permeability of a boundary will change, and situations may lead to opening or closing the boundaries. Maintaining a closed boundary can lead to greater autonomy and safety, whereas opening the boundary can promote greater intimacy and sharing but also greater personal vulnerability.

This play between the need to share and the need to protect oneself is present in every relationship and requires persons to negotiate and coordinate their boundaries. When do you disclose and when do you not? And when your partner discloses personal information, how do you respond? We all have a sense of ownership of information about ourselves, and we feel we have the right to control that information. We are constantly making decisions about what to reveal, who should have this information, and when and how to reveal it. Petronio sees this decision-making process as a dialectic—an interplay between pressures to reveal and to conceal.

Notice the difference between this explanation and that of Altman and Taylor discussed earlier in the chapter. Couples do not make a simple "disclose/not disclose" decision based on *individual costs and rewards*. Instead, they must together figure out how to manage a "tension" between revelation and concealment when there are good reasons to do both.

Further, disclosure is never simply an individual decision, but is governed by a relational contract that includes consensus on *shared costs and rewards*. Once we reveal private information to another person, that person becomes a co-owner of the information, and *co-ownership* has its own set of negotiated rights and responsibilities. For example, your family may have an implicit rule that certain things, such as money, are not to be discussed with others outside the family. Thus, coordination between the persons in a relationship is key. When a person discloses something, he must negotiate this disclosure in terms of when, how, and to whom this information may later be disclosed. Part of what happens in defining a relationship, then, is establishing rules that govern how persons will manage and use the information they share with one another.

Petronio therefore sees boundary management as a rule-based process. It is not merely an individual decision—"Do I tell or not?" Rather, it is a negotiation of the rules by which the information will be kept and managed. When a married woman thinks she might be pregnant, she will usually consider when and how to reveal it. Some women choose to wait a while to make sure about the pregnancy and to make sure all goes well. Eventually, when the woman tells her husband, the information becomes co-owned, and the couple will need to discuss when and how to make it known to others. Do they tell other family members first? Do they announce it to all of their friends and family at the same time? Some couples wait until "it shows." Others may rush to tell everyone as soon as the first test shows positive.

The rules for boundary management are developed, in part, with a kind of risk-benefit ratio. What do you have to gain from disclosing private information, and what risks come into

play? *Risk assessment* means thinking about the costs and rewards of revealing the information. For example, if you have had a series of miscarriages, you may find that revealing a new pregnancy is very risky. On the other hand, if you have been trying to get pregnant and this is your first pregnancy, you may want to share your joy with your friends and family immediately.

Other criteria are also used to make these rule decisions, including, for example, cultural expectations, gender differences, personal motivations, and situational demands. When you become pregnant, you will probably decide whom and when to tell based on your sense of privacy as a woman, how pregnancy has been traditionally handled in your family, how you are personally feeling about it, and even how many children you already have.

Boundary rules do change as circumstances change. Some rules are persistent, routine, and dependable. There may be a long-standing rule among family members, for example, not to discuss family finances with others. This rule could last for years and years, and yet at some point, maybe in retirement, it changes as the benefits of discussing money with friends become productive.

Negotiating the rules for co-ownership of information can be tricky. The various parties who share private information must coordinate and synchronize their behavior. Explicit and implicit agreements must be forged about how to manage shared information. Partners must negotiate rules about *boundary permeability*, or how open or closed the boundary is supposed to be. This is why a married couple will discuss how and when to reveal that they are expecting a baby. Partners also need to negotiate rules about *boundary linkage*, which involves an agreement about who is included within their boundary and who is not. So, for example, the couple may agree that their parents can be told about the pregnancy but no one else. Third, partners must negotiate *boundary ownership*, or the rights and responsibilities of the co-owners. This is a clear concern when you tell someone something and then swear him to secrecy. Permeability, linkage, and ownership, then, are all part of boundary coordination.

Boundary rules are sometimes ambiguous, not always clear or even agreed-upon. Sometimes, too, persons in a relationship deliberately violate the rules. Gossiping about something you know is private is a good example of this type of violation. When this occurs, sanctions may be invoked. For example, you may be reluctant to reveal future private information to a person who violated your rules of privacy. Petronio refers to these moments of fuzzy, unshared, or violated boundary rules as *boundary turbulence*. Such turbulence is frequently the source of conflict and presents the need for stronger or more careful action in establishing or changing the rules.

The theories in this section look at what partners in a relationship must do in order to manage the challenges they face. These theories share the idea that the work of a relationship is not individual work but conjoint effort negotiated in communication. These theories have a strong cybernetic base, describing how things get worked out through a back-and-forth movement, or interaction, across time. In many ways, then, these theories are systemic and create a bridge between the cybernetic and sociocultural traditions in communication theory.

◖ THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION

Phenomenology as a tradition focuses on the internal, conscious experience of the person. It looks at the ways in which a person understands and gives meaning to the events of her life as well as to her own sense of self. In this section, we continue the discussion of dialogue started in the previous section and look at two important figures in dialogue theory—Carl Rogers and Martin Buber—whose work stems from the phenomenological tradition.

Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers was a giant of 20th-century approaches to human relationships.[38] Although Rogers was a psychologist, his work, in contrast

to the mainstream of his own field, was phenomenological rather than part of the sociopsychological tradition. Rogers, a therapist, devoted his career to listening to how patients expressed their experience of the self, leading him to theorize about communication and to provide guidelines on how to communicate more effectively within relationships. In this sense, Rogers's approach can be considered normative or prescriptive. Often called a "self theory," Rogers's approach says as much about relationships as it does about the self because, according to Rogers, the self cannot be separated from relationships.

Rogers's approach to relationships starts with the notion of the phenomenal field. Your overall experience as a person constitutes your *phenomenal field*; it is all that you know and feel. It is the totality of your experience. Although no one can really know your experience as you do, we can and do infer the experience of others based on what they say and do. In fact, your ideas about how another person is feeling become part of your own phenomenal field, leading to *empathy*.

As you mature, your phenomenal field grows, and a certain portion becomes identified as the *self*. The self is an organized set of perceptions of who you are and what distinguishes you from other persons and from other aspects of your environment, so that you know exactly what you mean when you use the terms *I* and *me*. As the self develops, you seek autonomy and growth, a sense of self-development. You want your life to change in ways that work well for you. At the same time, however, you also want to feel part of a consistent pattern that fits into your overall experience of life in general.

A healthy person is able to achieve both of these aims. When you are feeling strong and clear, you experience *congruence*, or a consistency between who you are, what you do, and how you fit into the world. During times when you feel confused about yourself, you experience *incongruence*, or a loss of consistency in your life. In other words, how you feel, what you do, and what you experience are not aligned. For Rogers, congruence leads to growth, while incongruence leads to frustration. This is what Rogers found in his patients. Clients who came to him for help

were out of balance and required a new kind of relationship to allow for realignment to occur.

The degree to which you experience congruence is very much affected by your relationships with others. Relationships characterized by negative, critical communication tend to breed incongruence, precisely because they create inconsistency between your sense of self and other aspects of your experience. This would be the case, for example, if someone criticized your behavior. Let's say you like to eat, but others are telling you that you eat too much.

In contrast, congruence is a product of affirming, supportive relationships. In other words, a supportive relationship is characterized by *unconditional positive regard*, which creates a threat-free environment in which we can be self-actualizing. In healthy relationships, partners have a high regard both for self and other. In such relationships, partners are free to explore new avenues of development, try out new things, and move in directions that work well for each without the threat of criticism from the other.

Sometimes we find ourselves in relationships in which we play a supportive role, seeking to facilitate growth and change on the part of the other person. Whenever someone comes to get support—whether you are a professional therapist or not—you have the opportunity to engage in what Rogers calls a *helping relationship*. Such relationships—along with all healthy relationships—are characterized by 10 qualities:

1. The communicators are perceived by one another as trustworthy, or consistently dependable.
2. They express themselves unambiguously.
3. They possess positive attitudes of warmth and caring for the other.
4. A partner in a helping relationship keeps a separate identity.
5. A partner permits the other to do the same.
6. The helping relationship is marked by empathy, in which each attempts to understand the feelings of the other.
7. The helper accepts the various facets of the others' experience as they are communicated by the other person.

8. The partners respond with sufficient sensitivity to create a safe environment for personal change.
9. Communicators are able to free themselves from the threat of evaluation from the other.
10. Each communicator recognizes that the other is changing and is flexible enough to permit the other to change.

Rogers developed a style of therapy that embodies these 10 elements, which he called *client-centered therapy.* They are also qualities of an *authentic relationship,* or *person-centered approach,* which Rogers believes we can and should have in everyday life.

Consistent with several of the other theories presented in this chapter, Rogers's theory concentrates not on psychological variables but on actual communication patterns. In an authentic relationship, we can acknowledge and allow our differences, while moving toward mutuality, which is a feeling of satisfaction with the communication we experience within the relationship. Further, one's self is a product of relationship, not the other way around. That is, who you are as a person is made or constructed within relationships with others. This fact makes communication central to human development. In dialogue, then, we come to relate to others by (1) being present and connected to what the other person is saying; (2) being congruent; (3) showing positive regard; and (4) having empathy, or perceiving where the other person is coming from.

Although Carl Rogers was discovered and embraced by communication scholars and teachers in the 1960s and 1970s, his work fell out of favor in the communication field for several years. We came to think of Rogers's ideas as naive and simplistic. However, his theory has undergone something of a renaissance in the last decade or so and has been reinterpreted by Kenneth Cissna, Rob Anderson, Ronald Arnett, and others, who see Rogers's work as a foundation for understanding dialogue.[39] Cissna and Anderson call dialogue from a Rogerian perspective "an interplay . . . between two partners . . . such that when one partner is able to listen more sensitively to the other, to respond with greater caring and respect, or to be more careful in identifying and expressing his or her own feelings and needs, both parties and the relationship benefit."[40]

The work of Carl Rogers is frequently associated with that of Martin Buber, and together these theorists provide a relatively unified view of the dialogic relationship. Indeed, Rogers acknowledged the influence of Buber on his own work, and the two actually met and had a public dialogue about their respective ideas—a dialogue on dialogue.[41]

Martin Buber

Martin Buber was an important figure in 20th-century religious thought.[42] Writing about many subjects, Buber provided a coherent view of what it means to be a human being in modern times.[43] For Buber, God can only be known by means of personal relationships with God, with other human beings, and with all aspects of the natural world. There is, then, no unified, objective definition of God, as God is always intensely personal and defined in a special type of relationship that Buber referred to as *dialogue.*[44]

Dialogue embodies a special kind of communication that Buber labeled the *I-Thou relationship.* When you have such relationships, you see yourself and others as whole persons who cannot be reduced to any simple characterization. Each person has important life experiences that warrant positive regard, even when the experience of others is different from your own.

Communication in Buberian dialogue, or in an I-Thou relationship, is tricky. Because you are a whole person worthy of your own experiences, opinions, ideas, and feelings, you must stand by what is important to you. At the same time, however, you must also acknowledge the full life experience of others and allow them to express what is important to them. This is what Buber calls *the narrow ridge.* In the genuine dialogue of interpersonal relationships, we walk the narrow ridge between self and other. In a good dialogue, you stay on the ridge of honoring yourself and the other, even though substantial differences may be present. This means clearly expressing your own ideas but listening well and honoring

the ideas of others. We also walk the narrow ridge whenever we manage opposites like freedom and discipline, and individualism and community. Because all human beings are complex, the I-Thou relationship always means staying in the dialectical tension of managing opposing forces, much as Baxter describes, and being willing to go back again and again to face our own complexity and that of others in a continual resistance of any generalizations or universals.

Much of the time, however, we do not treat others as worthy individuals. In an *I-It relationship*, you think of the other person as an object to be labeled, manipulated, changed, and maneuvered to your own benefit. In an I-It relationship, you privilege yourself over the other. Buber identified three types of interaction within an I-It frame, where one's own voice is privileged over that of others: monologue, technical dialogue, and monologue disguised as dialogue. *Monologue* exists when you simply monopolize the conversational show, privileging your ideas and interests over those of the others present. *Technical dialogue* is an exchange that is mostly about information rather than about participants' experiences.

There is nothing inherently wrong with monologue and technical dialogue; each can be useful. The point is to recognize what kind of communication is going on, to make sure it is appropriate for the relationship, and to be honest about which form is being used. *Disguised monologue*, on the other hand, is communication in which participants talk around the issues without honestly and directly engaging the self and other in their complexity, and it is neither appropriate nor honest.

Dialogue theories, as represented by the work of Rogers and Buber, acknowledge that we come to know the world through personal experiences. Communication is the process by which we acknowledge and express our experience of the world.

APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, we have taken a brief look at some of the most significant theorizing in relational communication, a set of theories that have been immensely popular and influential. As we look back over the landscape we have just surveyed, five generalizations seem warranted.

1. Relationships are formed, maintained, and changed through communication.

In the back-and-forth interaction of a conversation, many things get made. You can work out the meaning of gestures, define objects, create new connotations for words, accomplish goals, and change your self-image. But if you talk very often with another person over time, you will create something else as well — a relationship. It might be a friendship, a co-worker relationship, a marriage, a parent-child relationship, a customer relationship, a relationship between neighbors, or any number of other types. Clear to students of communication — and this is not always obvious to people who do not study communication — is that every relationship is made by the participants in their conversations. Relationships don't just happen; they are created and maintained through communication.[45]

We also know that no relationship will remain the same indefinitely. Indeed, many relationships are highly dynamic. Whether constantly changing or relatively stable, the relationship is always characterized by certain patterns of interaction.

This is easiest to see in your simplest relationships. For example, you can quite accurately predict the pattern of conversation that will take place between you and your hair stylist. Unless your hairdresser is a relative or very good friend, the conversation will follow the same pattern repeatedly. In more complex relationships, such as in the family, certain forms of interaction may last a long time, while other forms — even with the same person — change almost daily.

How you communicate with others, then, really does matter. Beyond achieving whatever immediate goals you may have for a conversation, the implications are always bigger. For example, when someone tells you what to do, you have a choice among accepting, demurring, or resisting. Over time, the way in which partners react to one another establishes a pattern that could be complementary or symmetrical, comfortable or uncomfortable, coordinated or uncoordinated, and positive or negative for the parties and the relationship. Such patterns may determine who controls the relationship, what direction the relationship will take, how privacy is managed, and who is included or excluded.

The practical implication of this insight is that we can have a say in what a relationship is like, not by dictating it but by being conscious of how we act in the situations we encounter as part of the relationship. Of course, once a pattern is broken, a period of discomfort may result as we "renegotiate" the definition of the relationship. A divorce is hard because it involves severe, often traumatic, redefinitions of relationships, both with spouse and children.

Sandra Petronio's theory of privacy management is especially useful in helping us identify moments of interaction that may be important in maintaining existing patterns or initiating new ones. Because private information is so important, we really do make conscious decisions about what to reveal to others, and once revealed, how to manage the information that is shared between the two people involved. This is a situation in an ongoing interaction in which you really do have to think consciously about how to act in a situation.

Carl Rogers taught that deliberate interaction is very important in creating positive relationships. In his career as a therapist and theorist, Rogers found that certain patterns of relationship inhibit personal growth. He devoted his life to finding ways for human beings to establish healthy relationships that enhance personal congruence.

If the way in which we communicate determines the kind of relationship we have, then interaction must somehow organize the relationship in a way that gives it certain characteristics. This leads to our next generalization about relationships.

2. Relationships are coordinated.

In modern life, most of us must contend with periods of stability and periods of change within our relationships. Following Bakhtin, we might call these centripetal periods and centrifugal ones. Yet there is always a tendency to find a way to organize, or coordinate, the interaction within the relationship. Even the management of dynamic tension between opposing forces is organized, or structured, in some way.

Koerner and Fitzpatrick have shown that families eventually tend to settle into types. Some of these types (like protective families) are very stable and complementary in interactional pattern, while others (like pluralistic families) will be quite

dynamic. The mere fact that you can tell one family type from another shows that patterns of interaction are palpable.

Two fundamental organizational patterns commonly found in relationships are symmetry and complementarity. Either form can be functional and comfortable or destructive and uncomfortable, but how the partners in a relationship respond to one another will always organize the interaction. Even a power struggle — uncomfortable as it might be — is a way of structuring a relationship. Although a relationship always has structure, it is not always organized the same way, and the structure will inevitably change over time.

Fitzpatrick and colleagues look more at stable structures of relationships, while Baxter and her colleagues look at the dynamic and process-oriented nature of relationships. Each is focusing on different aspects of relationships, so we understand from these theories that both elements exist in relationships. It is not that we have to see relationships as stable or see them in flux; indeed, every relationship is both, and the characteristic you choose to focus on serves as the lens through which you examine and understand that relationship.

3. Relationships are dynamic.

Bakhtin reminds us that we live in a multivoiced world, a world of heteroglossia. The metaphor of voice is valuable because it reminds us that conversations do consist of voices that somehow have to be structured or organized together into discourse beyond any one message. Unlike talking to yourself, a conversation (let alone a relationship) requires that you blend or mesh your voice with that of others. Sometimes this is very easy because everyone shares a common view of how to interact and relate. Here the rules are largely shared and the conversation is coherent, not unlike a choir. Other times, organizing talk is tough business because very different cultural traditions clash, differing political views compete to be heard, and voices do not blend very well — like trying to listen to hip hop and big-band music at the same time. Although we have moments in which organization and coherence are high, nothing is ever fixed because there is an eventual intrusion of someone else's voice into the stream of conversation.

In a single week, for example, you may have a talk with your pastor about Christian love, a discussion with a co-worker to plan the office holiday party, an office visit with a professor to clarify a point about political theory, a difficult interaction with your teenage daughter, and an orientation meeting for new international students in your department. At moments during this week, you will experience centripetal forces that tend to pull things together into meaningful patterns and centrifugal forces that remind you that nothing is complete and final. This is the challenge of coordination in the ongoing organization of talk.

Relationships are both a haven from this clamor of many voices and a place in which such turbulence can actually be intensified. The relatively straightforward idea from L. Edna Rogers and her colleagues is that relational patterns can be complementary or symmetrical illustrates both of these features of a relationship. For example, if you have a complementary relationship with your spouse around control issues, one of you will call the shots. This predictable pattern could be quite comforting because you will not have to renegotiate decision making every time. After a week like the one we described previously, it might be nice to come home on Friday evening and have your partner tell you exactly

what your plans are for the weekend. The long-term implications of this type of relationship, however, could be stifling for some people, and most individuals would not put up with it very long — especially in our postmodern world. So the weekend could turn into a symmetrical power struggle, even worse than the storms you experienced during the week.

The process of social penetration itself is dynamic, and we go back and forth between disclosing and withdrawing. Privacy management involves constant negotiation; and staying in the tension of the "narrow ridge" between self and other can make you feel a little dizzy as well. The dynamism of a relationship is driven in many ways by dialectical tension.

4. Partners in a relationship actively manage tension.

Virtually all of the theories in this chapter address this point in one way or another. Whether in terms of when and how to manage relational information, when to disclose and when to keep information private, how to stay in the tension between self and other, how to coordinate varying relational schemas, how to manage conversation and conformity, and how to negotiate managing similarity and difference, all suggest that contradictory forces need to be actively managed in relationships.

Dialectical theory suggests that relationships inherently involve the management of natural tensions. Friendships illustrate this very point; the challenges of friendship arise chiefly from the need to manage a variety of dialectical contradictions, such as being dependent versus being independent, using friends for affection versus help, judging versus accepting friends, and being honest versus being protective toward friends.[46] The practical point for everyday life is that we cannot escape contradiction. When we get confused about whether to do A or B, it does not mean there is something wrong with our logic, only that opposites can and do exist side by side. We should not ask whether there is something wrong with contradiction, but how to use communication to manage it well.

Relational communication theory is an immensely interesting, important, and challenging field of study. We see in these various theories about relationships efforts to advance our understanding of one of the most difficult aspects of human life, and although any single theory leaves many questions unanswered, as a group the theories provide a great deal of insight.

NOTES

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2. Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: Norton, 1967).
3. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, 120–21.
4. This axiom has been challenged by Michael Motley, "On Whether One Can(not) Not Communicate: An Examination via Traditional Communication Postulates," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 1–20. See also "Can One Not Communicate?" *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 593–623; Peter A. Andersen, "When One Cannot Not Communicate: A Challenge to Motley's Traditional Communication Postulates," *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 309–25; Michael T. Motley, "How One May Not Communicate: A Reply to Andersen," *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 326–39; Theodore Clevenger, Jr., "Can One Not Communicate? A Conflict of Models," *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 351.

5. Janet Beavin Bavelas, "Behaving and Communicating: A Reply to Motley," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 593–602.
6. Perhaps the most recent compilation of this work is L. Edna Rogers and Valentin Escudero, eds., *Relational Communication: An Interactional Perspective to the Study of Process and Form* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004).
7. Frank E. Millar and L. Edna Rogers, "A Relational Approach to Interpersonal Communication," in *Explorations in Interpersonal Communication*, ed. Gerald R. Miller (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1976), 97.
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20. For more theoretical background on facework, see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of this book.

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22. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 23. For a brief overview, see also J. Kevin Barge and Martin Little, "Dialogical Wisdom, Communicative Practice, and Organizational Life," *Communication Theory* 12 (2002): 375-397. For various perspectives on Bakhtin and especially his views on writing, see Frank Farmer, ed., *Landmark Essays: On Bakhtin, Rhetoric, and Writing* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum/Hermagoras, 1998).

23. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 30.

24. There have been a whole host of labels attached to members of the black race. The first recorded use of the term *Negro* was in 1442; it gained popularity in the 1920s when its use was promoted by black community leaders such as Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. DuBois, who saw it as a stronger and more versatile term than *colored*. The term *black* replaced *Negro* during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, as an antonym for *white* and the best way to promote pride within the black community. *African-American* was introduced by Jesse Jackson in December 1988 as a way of providing blacks with a connection both to their cultural as well as their ancestral homeland. For a summary and analysis of these terms, see Vitania M. Quinones, "The Paradox as Expressed Through Ethnic Labels," paper prepared for *Rhetorical Criticism, Department of Communication & Journalism*, University of New Mexico, Fall 2003.

25. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 31.

26. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 48.

27. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), xxi.

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29. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 52.

30. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences," in *Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 162.

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36. Werner and Baxter, "Temporal Qualities."

37. Sandra Petronio, *Boundaries of Privacy: Dialectics of Disclosure* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); Sandra Petronio, *Balancing the Secrets of Private Disclosures* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000).

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42. Among his many works, Martin Buber's most recognized treatise on human relationships is *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner, 1958).

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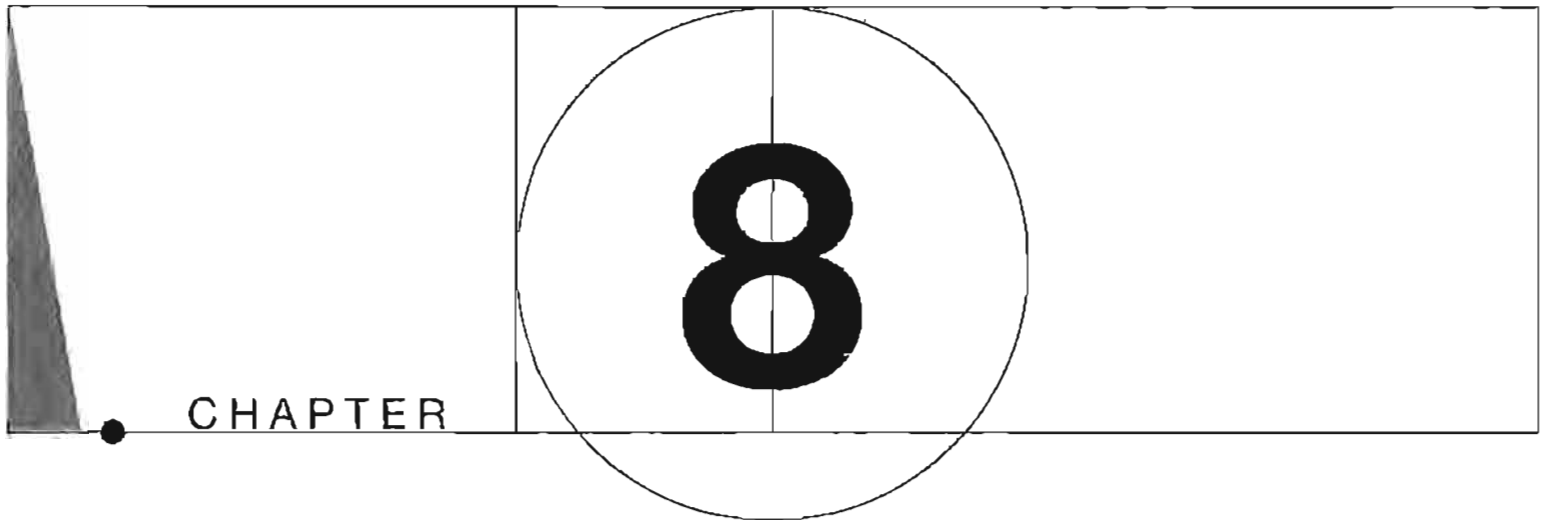
THE GROUP

If you were to count the number of times in a week that you are involved in group communication, you might be surprised. Meetings alone would number quite a few, and if you expanded the count to include social groups, the number would balloon. Of course, the number of hours per week that we spend communicating in groups tells only part of the story. Groups take up time, but they also help to structure time. They sap our energy, but they also energize. They can be deadly boring, but they provide much enjoyment as well. They create constraints on what we can do, but they can also shape future directions that open opportunities in our lives.[1]

Have you ever had the experience of worrying that a group was getting off track when someone made a joke or members talked about sports instead of getting right to work? If so, you were struggling with balancing relationship building and task effort—a tension common to all groups. Some humor and drama can help alleviate the tension inherent to a group and actually increase members' effectiveness. Too much joking around will distract from the work and hurt effectiveness as well. This fact illustrates an aspect of group communication; namely, everything you say in a group helps to make the group what it is and helps to shape the work that the group is doing.

For example, how often do you ask a question in a group? How does this compare to the number of times that you share an opinion? Research has shown that

Topic	Sociopsychological Theories	Cybernetic Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Critical Theories
Messages, roles & personalities	Interaction process analysis			
Environment/system/ context		Bona fide group theory Input-process-output model		
Interaction		Interaction analysis		
Diversity		Effective intercultural work group theory		
Group structure			Structuration theory	
Group Task			Functional theory Groupthink theory	
Gender Issues			Feminist approaches	

giving opinions far exceeds asking questions in most groups,[2] but how would a group change if the opposite were true? What may be even more important is not so much the kinds of things that individuals say but how they respond to one another. If, for example, one person asks a question, to what extent do others (1) answer it; (2) use it as an opportunity to launch into a new topic; (3) ignore the question entirely; (4) or remain silent? Each of these kinds of responses creates a different relationship among members. From a theoretical perspective, then, communication interaction is very important in shaping both relationships and task accomplishment in groups.

We know that groups really cannot legitimately be examined in isolation. They are always part of some larger system. Group members come and go, people belong to several overlapping groups, the environment changes, and groups must adapt to these developments. In a group, then, your affiliations with other groups affect what you do and say, and roles change as members leave or new members come into a group.

Actually, roles constitute just part of the structure of a group. Groups do have form, and you can see this form in the interactional patterns over time. Something gets created through interaction within the group, including roles and norms, but also relationships and task accomplishments. Power structures are also formed within these interactional patterns. So when old members leave and new ones arrive, these structures can change, sometimes dramatically.

Because you spend so much time in groups, it is natural to question their effectiveness. Is it better to do things by yourself or work with a group? The answer, of course, depends upon how well the group works together, how focused it is, and how much creative and critical thinking the group allows. How well does the group weigh information, how effectively does it create options, and how critically does the group evaluate ideas?

Groups vary in their ability to do these things well, and the theories in the chapter help us to see what works and what does not. Contemporary research and theory in group communication stems from a variety of early 20th-century sources.[3] One such source was the work of Mary Parker Follett on integrative thinking.[4] Follett wrote in 1924 that group, organizational, and community problem solving is a creative threefold process of (1) gathering information from experts; (2) testing that information in everyday experience; and (3) developing integrative solutions that meet a variety of interests rather than competing among interests. Groups further deal with problems and conflicts through discussion. These are the topics pursued in this chapter. They are outlined in the chapter map on page 225.

THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

Much of the original work in small-group communication occurred in social psychology. In fact, the group dynamics movement was an important step in the evolution of what we know about groups today. We do not devote any space here to group-dynamics theory per se, but we do include one classic theory—interaction-process analysis—that had a great influence on group communication theory. This theory addresses the kinds of messages that people express in groups and how these affect group roles and personalities.

Interaction Process Analysis

Robert Bales's *interaction process analysis* is a classic in the field.[5] Using his many years of research as a foundation, Bales created a unified and well-developed theory of small-group communication, aiming to explain the types of messages that people exchange in groups, the ways in which these shape the roles and personalities of group members, and thereby the ways they affect the overall character of the group.

In groups, individuals can show positive or mixed attitudes by (1) being friendly; (2) dramatizing (telling stories); or (3) agreeing. In contrast, they can also show negative or mixed attitudes by (1) disagreeing; (2) showing tension; or (3) being unfriendly. In accomplishing the group's task, individuals can (1) ask for information; (2) ask for opinions; (3) ask for suggestions; (4) give suggestions; (5) give opinions; and (6) give information.

If people do not adequately share information, they will have what Bales calls "problems of communication"; if they do not share opinions, they will experience "problems of evaluation"; if they fail to ask for and give suggestions, the group will suffer from "problems of control"; if the group cannot come to agreement, the members will have "problems of decision"; and if there is insufficient dramatizing, there will be "problems of tension." Finally, if the group is unfriendly, it will have "problems of reintegration," by which Bales means that the group is unable to successfully rebuild a feeling of unity or cohesiveness within the group.

You can easily see the logic of Bales's scheme. Suppose, for example, that you are a member of a project team in a class. The job of this team is to decide upon a project, execute it, and write up a report. If group members keep withholding information from one another, they will not be able to communicate very well and will have little idea of what each person can contribute. If they fail to share opinions, they will not evaluate ideas very much, and the group may end up doing a terrible job. Let's say that group members give very few suggestions. In this case, the group has problems of control, with no one wanting to tell other group members what to do. If the members of your project group agree too much, ideas will not be tested, and you will make poor decisions. On the other hand, if you all disagree too much, there will be too much conflict, and you won't be able to make decisions at all. And if people concern themselves only with task issues and not interpersonal ones, tensions can build among members, creating a poor interpersonal atmosphere and an unproductive group. This latter notion—of unrelieved tension in groups—was one area that assumed special importance in Bales's theory. He developed the notion of *dramatizing*, which means relieving tension by telling stories and sharing experiences that may not always relate directly to the task of the group.

Bales's theory includes two general classes of communication behavior, a division that has had immense impact in the small-group literature. The first includes *socioemotional* behaviors, such as *seeming friendly*, *showing tension*, and *dramatizing*. The second category is *task behavior*, represented by *suggestions*, *opinions*, and *information*. In investigating leadership, Bales found that the same group will have two different kinds of leaders. The *task leader* facilitates and coordinates the task-related comments and directs energy toward getting the job done. Equally important is the *socioemotional leader*, who works for improved relations in the group, concentrating on interactions in the positive and negative sectors.

Usually the task and socioemotional leaders are different people. In a group that is working on a class project together, for example, you may have one member who calls meetings, makes sure everyone gets there, prepares the agenda, makes follow-up calls, and shows great concern for the quality of the project. This would be your task leader. There may also be someone who attends to the relationships in the group—a socioemotional leader. This is the individual who encourages others, smoothes over conflict, praises people for good work, and generally facilitates positive relationships among group members.

According to Bales, an individual's position in a group is a function of three dimensions: (1) dominant versus submissive; (2) friendly versus unfriendly; and (3) instrumental versus emotional. Within a particular group, any member's behavior can be placed in this three-dimensional space. An individual's position depends on the quadrant in which that individual appears (for instance, dominant, friendly, instrumental).

The way you appear to other members of a group is very much determined by how you combine these three dimensions in your communication. If your talk tends to be dominant, unfriendly, and emotional, you will probably be perceived as a hostile, abrasive person. On the other hand, if you are dominant, friendly, and instrumental, you will probably be appreciated for your helpful task leadership. If you tend to be submissive, unfriendly, and emotional, you will probably be perceived as negative and uncooperative. Since these factors are variables, you can score high, medium, or low on any of them, creating blended composites of characteristics rather than absolute category types. When all group members' behavior types are plotted on this graph, their relationships and networks can be seen. The larger the group, the greater the tendency for subgroups of individuals with similar characteristics and values to develop.

In this chapter, we present only a single example of the sociopsychological tradition. Bales's work is no longer in the mainstream of group-communication theory, but it had tremendous influence on how we think about groups. As a

research psychologist, Bales was mostly interested in the individual behavior of group members. Although he named his theory "interaction-process analysis," it really had little to do with "interaction" or "process," as we understand these terms today.

We now realize that Bales's focus on individual behavior limited the theory's ability to take into account larger systemic concerns, and current thinking in the communication field is that these broader issues should take center stage. To gain this larger perspective, we must turn to the cybernetic tradition. In the group-communication field, the cybernetic and sociocultural traditions have been the source of most contemporary research on groups.

◖ THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

The cybernetic tradition has been especially powerful in helping us see the systemic nature of groups. Although the theories of this tradition vary considerably, as a whole they remind us that groups are part of larger systems of interacting forces. A group gets fresh input from outside, deals with this input in some way, and creates outputs or effects that influence the larger system as well as the group itself. Here we look at four theories that develop this idea. They are bona fide group theory and two variations of input-process-output theory—interaction analysis, and effective intercultural work group theory.

Bona Fide Group Theory

Bales's theory, presented in the previous section, is one example of a theory that uses a "container" metaphor, likening groups to a bottle separated off from the environment. In fact, groups are not separate from the larger environment, and Linda Putnam and Cynthia Stohl started a line of thinking called *bona fide groups* as a response to this critique.[6] A *bona fide group* is a naturally occurring group. In this sense, all groups, unless they are artificially created in a laboratory, are bona fide, because all groups are part of a larger

system. Instead of thinking of a bona fide group as a type of group, then, think of it as a perspective or way of looking at all groups.[7]

Bona fide groups have two characteristics: they have permeable boundaries, and they are interdependent with the environment. The group's boundaries are permeable, meaning that what is defined as "in" the group or "out" of the group is sometimes vague, always fluid, and frequently changing. At the same time, you cannot have a group without some sense of boundary, meaning that the group does have a notion of itself in relation to an environment, but the boundary is always being negotiated.

The permeability of a group's boundaries is obvious when you consider that members are always part of other groups as well. They will bring into a group roles and characteristics established in other groups. Actually, you cannot separate a group member from the other groups to which he may belong. Sometimes, group roles actually conflict, and members must resolve differences between what they are supposed to do in one group versus what is expected of them in different groups. You might have had the experience of being part of a hiring committee in an organization; this committee had discussions that were confidential, but you were a member of other groups as well, groups curious about what happened in meetings of the hiring committee. In this situation, you encountered the need to manage the curiosity of the larger group against the confidentiality requirements of the smaller one.

Further, as a group member you rarely represent only yourself. Instead, you have other people's interests at stake. Outside interests will influence what you do and say within the group. If you are elected to a student council or·to a neighborhood association, for example, you are always aware of the larger interests involved. Also, group members change, so that someone who was outside the group at one time becomes a member at another time, and vice versa. Because of multiple group membership, you may not be equally committed to every group, and not all members of a group show the same amount of loyalty or sense of belonging to a group.

From a bona fide group perspective, the group is always interdependent with its environment. In other words, the environment influences it, and the group, in turn, affects the relevant contexts in which it works. The environment is a system of interacting groups. Groups communicate with one another, they coordinate their actions, they negotiate which group is responsible for what, and they must interpret the meaning of intergroup relationships. The point of contact or overlap between two or more groups is a *nexus*; it is in the nexus that interdependence is evident.

Among its many functions—such as accomplishing tasks and resolving internal conflicts—a group must also adjust and adapt its work coherently with the situation in which it is working. It must relate its work to an ongoing history of accomplishment within the larger system and to larger institutional opportunities and constraints. There are moments, however, when the group feels that it is "in transition," when it is not clear just how it does relate to history or institutions. These moments, referred to as *liminality*, create feelings of being in a suspended state. At these moments, groups work to define themselves vis-à-vis other considerations. For example, at the time of this writing, our building at the university is being remodeled, and the 20 or so faculty and 65 graduate students were essentially "sent home" at the end of the spring semester, to exist in "virtual" space until the remodeling is finished. It is interesting to see how this rather cohesive group of staff, faculty, and students is managing this state of liminality and how the group is working to preserve a sense of "groupness" when there is no building to facilitate regular interaction. Both grad students and faculty are hosting social gatherings of various kinds— brunches, weekly lunches, shopping trips, and the like to ensure that the group does not lose its center.

Gaming methodology offers an opportunity to easily see the interdependence of bona fide groups. Gaming methodology is a planning tool in which "players" from stakeholder groups are brought together for several days to simulate an environment in which they must work with other groups to plan a future of mutual concern.[8]

After players—usually 50 to 150 professionals—are assigned to stakeholder groups, they begin strategic planning around an issue like health care, homeland security, technology, or water quality.

Although they begin their planning in isolated stakeholder groups, they quickly learn that they cannot go very far without thinking about the larger system of groups of which they are a part. This realization occurs in a moment of liminality, in which they must think about their role in the larger system, the specific other groups with which they want to interact, what they hope to accomplish by doing so, and how they want to relate to this larger context. After a short team-planning period, players leave their team areas and begin to interact with individuals from other stakeholder teams, forging agreements, sharing information, establishing partnerships and alliances, and creating plans larger than any one stakeholder group could do by itself. Sometimes teams compete with one another, sometimes they collaborate, and at other times they complement one another. Each of these points of contact in the game is a nexus of opportunity, and it is always fascinating to watch the play unfold in these ways.

In a game, as in real life, group work is influenced by inputs and creates outputs that affect the group as well as the system as a whole. The input-process-output model of group functioning has been a mainstay in group studies, and we take a closer look at this approach now.

Input-Process-Output Models

Groups are often viewed as cybernetic systems in which information and influence come into the group (input), the group processes this information, and the results circulate back out to affect others (output). Collectively, this idea is known as the *input-process-output model*.[9] A simple example of the input-process-output model is a study group in which the members bring information and attitudes about the course to the group, the group talks about this material and provides mutual assistance, and the result is higher—or lower—grades in the course. The output of the study group provides feedback that affects future content as well as future feelings about the group.

The basic idea of input, process, and output in groups has influenced how we look at them, and most of the research over the years has followed this model. Researchers look at the factors that affect the group (input), what happens within the group (process), and the results (output). For example, a study might examine the effects of heterogeneity of group members (input variable) on the amount of talking in a group and the effect of interaction patterns (process variables) on member satisfaction (output variable).[10] Barry Collins and Harold Guetzkow elaborated this basic idea in an early model, shown in Figure 8.1.[11]

Resonating with Bales's approach to groups, this model shows that a task group is confronted with two types of problems—task and interpersonal obstacles. *Task obstacles* are the difficulties encountered by the group in tackling its assignment, such as planning an event or approving a policy. Group members deal directly with the problem by analyzing the situation, suggesting possible solutions, and weighing alternatives.

Whenever two or more people come together to handle a problem, *interpersonal obstacles* arise. Such obstacles include the need to make ideas clear to others, handle conflict, manage differences, and so forth. Thus, in any group discussion, members will be dealing simultaneously with task and interpersonal obstacles. The basic distinction between task work and interpersonal relations has been an overriding concern in the research and theory on small-group communication. Both types of behavior are important to productivity, and any analysis of group problem solving must deal with both.[12] When task and interpersonal work is integrated effectively, an *assembly effect* occurs in which the group solution or product is superior to the individual work of even the best member. So, for example, if a club meets to plan a picnic and handles its interpersonal relations and task work well, the event should turn out to be better than if just one person planned it.

Group rewards can be positive or negative, and this holds true for both task and interpersonal
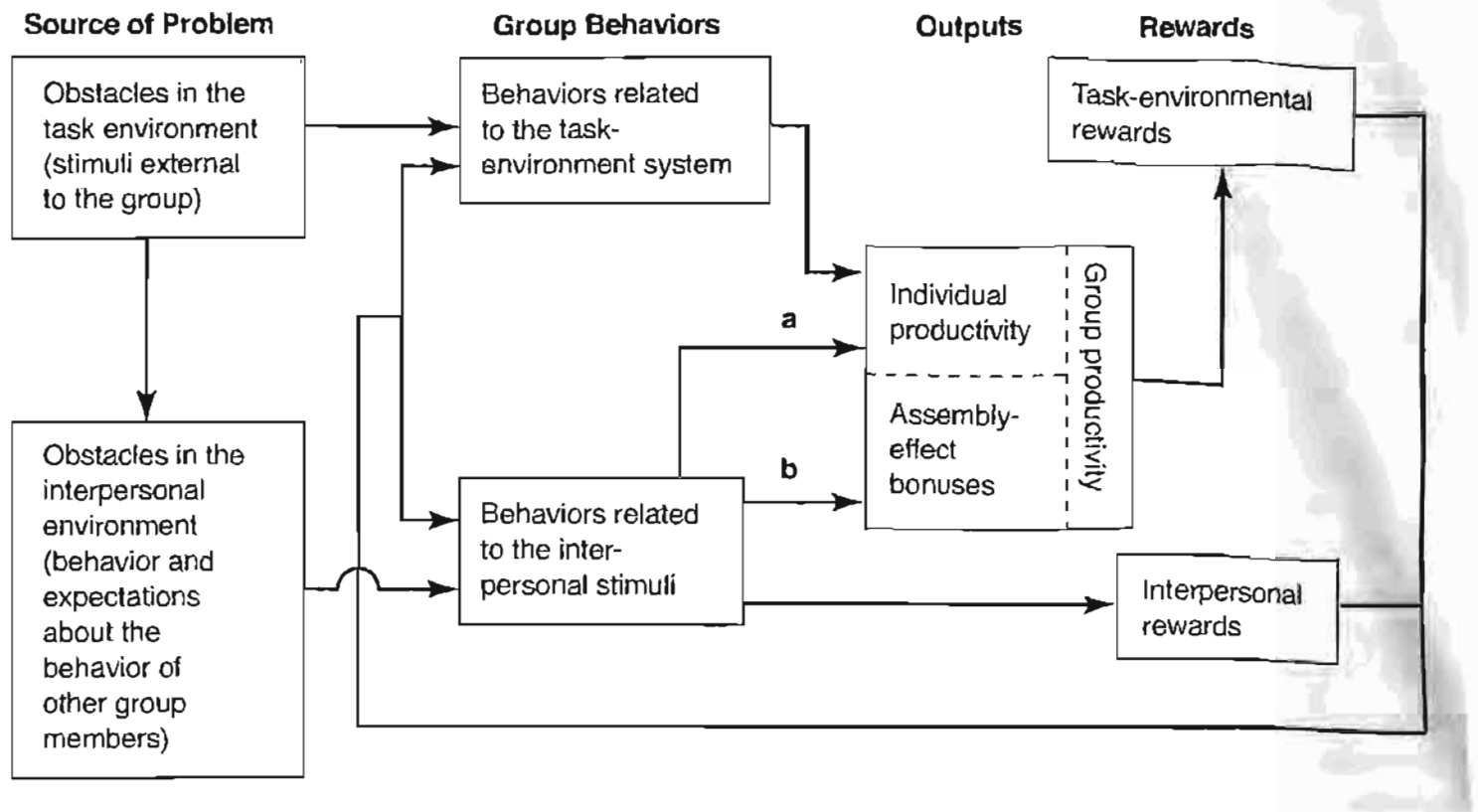
FIGURE 8.1

A Simple Working Model of Decision-Making Groups

From *A Social Psychology of Group Processes for Decision-Making* by Barry Collins and Harold Guetzkow; John Wiley & Sons, 1964. Used by permission.

work. A successful class project, for instance, is a task reward, and the fun involved in planning it is an interpersonal reward. If the job is well done and enjoyed by the members, their future work together will be affected in a positive way. If the task was not well done or the members did not handle their differences well, negative feedback may make it more difficult next time.

Think of group effort as a kind of energy. Some of this energy goes into solving task obstacles, and some goes into dealing with interpersonal ones. Raymond Cattell uses the term *synergy* for this group effort. The amount of energy devoted to interpersonal issues is called *intrinsic synergy,* and the remaining energy available for the task is *effective synergy.* If effective synergy is high, the task will be accomplished effectively; if not, it will be done poorly.[13] The level of synergy in a group results from the attitudes of the members toward one another. Conflict requires that a great deal of energy be devoted to group

maintenance, leaving little for task accomplishment. On the other hand, if individuals possess similar attitudes, there is less need for an interpersonal investment, and the effective synergy will be greater.

Think again about your class project group. Imagine that you discover that the members of your group have different attitudes toward the subject matter, different levels of motivation on the project, and different styles of working. One member, for example, is gung ho, plans ahead, likes to get things done in advance, and has little tolerance for the competing demands experienced by other group members. Another member, by contrast, is laid back, not terribly interested in the class, and procrastinates. In your meetings, you may end up wasting a lot of time arguing about how to organize your efforts and learn the material. You will be frustrated by the fact that not everyone is contributing equally to the group effort. All of the hassles around

these interpersonal issues constitute its intrinsic synergy. After getting your grade, you sense that the group failed to achieve the goal of mutual benefit, and you decide to suggest to the professor that the next project be done individually rather than in a group. In this case, the effective synergy of the group was so low that it did not accomplish more than you could have done by yourself.

Now imagine a different scenario. Suppose that your group agrees immediately on how to proceed and gets down to work. Because the interpersonal barriers are few, the group is cohesive. The effective synergy is high, and group members do better on the project than they would have done by themselves. Experience in these two groups shows the importance of interpersonal energy (intrinsic synergy) and its relationship to outcome (effective synergy).

Now let's look more closely at what actually happens in the "process" part of the input-process-output model. We turn now to two variations on the input-process-output model—the interaction analysis of B. Aubrey Fisher and the effective work-group theory of John Oetzel.

Fisher's Interaction Analysis.   Because Bales's theory looks at individual acts, B. Aubrey Fisher and Leonard Hawes refer to his approach as a *human system model*, by which they mean a model that looks at individual human behaviors. They are critical of this approach and advocate instead an *interact system model*, which focuses not on acts but on "interacts."[14] An *interact* is the act of one person followed by the act of another—for example, question-answer, statement-statement, and greeting-greeting. Here, the unit for analysis is not an individual message, like making a suggestion, but a contiguous pair of acts, like making a suggestion and responding to it.

Interacts can be classified along the *content dimension* and the *relationship dimension*. For example, if someone were to ask you a question, you would probably answer it, but the manner in which you stated the answer might tip off the group that you thought it was a dumb question. In such a case, your answer is the content

dimension and your nonverbal manner the relationship dimension.

Despite the potential utility of analyzing the relational dimension in a group discussion, Fisher concentrates on the content dimension. Because almost all comments in a task group are related in one way or another to a decision proposal—to coming up with an action or outcome on which all can agree—Fisher classifies statements in terms of how they respond to a decision proposal.[15] Statements might agree or disagree with a proposal, for example.

In his theory of *decision emergence*, Fisher outlines four phases through which task groups tend to proceed: orientation, conflict, emergence, and reinforcement.[16] In observing the distribution of interacts across these phases, Fisher notes the ways interaction changes as a group decision is formulated and solidifies.

The *orientation phase* involves getting acquainted, clarifying, and beginning to express points of view. People tend to appear agreeable in this stage, but their positions tend to be qualified and tentative, because people are testing the group and don't quite know what to expect. In this phase people grope for direction and understanding. The *conflict phase*, on the other hand, includes a great deal of dissent. People in this second phase begin to solidify their attitudes, and much polarization results. Here interaction includes more disagreement and unfavorable evaluation. Members argue and attempt to persuade, and they may form coalitions with other like-minded individuals in the group.

These coalitions tend to disappear in the third phase, which Fisher labels *emergence*. Here the first inklings of cooperation begin to show. People are less tenacious in defending their viewpoints. As they soften their positions and undergo attitude change, their comments become more ambiguous. The number of favorable comments increases until a group decision begins to emerge.

In the final phase, *reinforcement*, the group decision solidifies and receives reinforcement from group members. The group unifies and stands behind its solution, and comments are almost uniformly positive and favorable. The ambiguity that marked the third phase tends to disappear.

To illustrate the phases of group development, Fisher presents an analysis of a mock jury deliberation in a lawsuit over an automobile-pedestrian accident.[17] In the first phase, the jury explores its responsibility: What is it supposed to do, and how is it supposed to do it? What are the possible verdicts? Much uncertainty is expressed until clarification emerges. Considerable disagreement arises in the conflict phase as the jury argues over whether the defendant is negligent and over the criteria by which the jury should decide. Here, the interaction tends to be somewhat emotional and heated. In the emergence phase, the jury begins to agree that the defendant is not negligent and that the pedestrian could have avoided the accident. This agreement is somewhat tentative, and the jurors go back and forth on the issue, but the emotionality and debate definitely subside during this period. In the final reinforcement phase, the jury is convinced, and all of its members affirm their agreement with the verdict.

The phases of group decision making characterize the interaction as it changes over time. An important related topic is that of *decision modification*.[18] Fisher finds that groups typically do not introduce only one idea at a time, nor do they introduce a single proposal and continue to modify it until consensus is reached. Instead, decision modification is cyclical. Several proposals are made, each is discussed briefly, and some of them are reintroduced at a later time. Discussion of proposals seems to proceed in spurts of energy. Proposal A will be introduced and discussed. The group will suddenly drop this idea and move to proposal B. After discussion of B, the group may introduce and discuss other proposals. Then someone will revive proposal A, perhaps in modified form. The group finally settles on a modified plan that often is a consolidation of various proposals.

Why does discussion typically proceed in such an erratic fashion? According to Fisher, it is because the interpersonal demands of discussion require "breaks" from task work. In effect, the group attention span is short because of the intense nature of group work, and "flight" behavior helps manage tension and conflict.

Fisher finds that in modifying proposals, groups tend to follow one of two patterns. If conflict is low, the group will reintroduce proposals in less abstract, more specific language. For example, in a discussion about a public health nursing conference, an original idea to begin the conference program "with a nonthreatening something" was modified to "begin with a history of the contributions which public health has made to the field of nursing."[19] As it successively returns to a proposal, the planning group follows the pattern of stating the problem, discussing criteria for a solution, introducing an abstract solution, and moving finally to a concrete solution. Keep in mind, however, that the group most likely will not move through these four steps smoothly, but will probably do so sporadically as members depart from and return to the proposal in a stop-and-start fashion. When conflict is higher, the group does not attempt to make a proposal more specific. Because disagreement exists on the basic idea, the group introduces substitute proposals of the same level of abstraction as the original one.

Fisher's theory makes us aware of the importance of interaction as the basic process of communication that transforms inputs into outputs. It also shows how analyzing a group's interactions can better help us understand a group's decisions. Fisher's theory, however, does not go very far in examining the variables that may affect group outcomes. An example of a theory that looks more closely at variability in groups is John Oetzel's intercultural work-group theory.

Effective Intercultural Work Group Theory. John Oetzel employs the input-process-output model in establishing important variables that affect group functioning.[20] Interested in diversity as well as group effectiveness, Oetzel creates a model in which a culturally diverse group, facing certain inputs, creates outcomes through communication that feed back to affect the situation in which the group is working. This is a perfect cybernetic loop: inputs-process-outcomes situation.

From the Source . . .

The ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds is imperative in the workplace given the globalization of the world. However, what it means to communicate effectively needs to be judged on standards that are fair and appropriate for all cultures, not just the majority culture.

—John Oetzel

The groups with which Oetzel is concerned are culturally diverse, meaning that the cultural differences among members—nationality, ethnicity, language, gender, job position, age, disability, and others—are important in some way to the functioning of the group. The most important cultural differences cluster in three areas: (1) individualism-collectivism; (2) self-construal; and (3) face concerns.

The first area of difference is *individualism-collectivism*. Many cultures tend to be individualistic in orientation. Members of individualistic cultures tend to think of themselves as independent and give priority to their own goals over group goals. In contrast, collectivist cultures tend to think of themselves as part of a community and give priority to collective goals rather than personal ones. For example, one group member with an individualistic cultural background may assume that everyone is speaking for him or herself; that group member, then, will weigh what each person says individually. Another member from a collectivist society, however, might "beat around the bush" in terms of what he thinks, preferring to defer to the group as a whole.

The second cluster of differences is in terms of *self-construal*, or how members think about themselves. There are two general types—independent and interdependent. If you think of yourself in *independent* ways, you will see yourself as a unique person, with thoughts and feelings that are very different from the thoughts and feelings of others. On the other hand, if you think of yourself in *interdependent* ways, you will focus more on how

you are connected to others. Clearly, independent self-construals are common in individualistic cultures, while interdependent construals are more common in collectivist ones. You can imagine the problems that might occur when some group members evaluate success in terms of how well they achieve their personal goals, while other members of the group evaluate success in terms of the achievement of overall group goals.

The third cluster of difference is *face concerns*, or differences in how members manage personal image. Following from Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory (see Chapter 6), *self-face* is one's own image, *other-face* involves the image of other people, and *mutual-face* involves concerns about the relationship between self and other. Cultures differ in terms of how they manage these three types of face. Some, for example, are somewhat self-effacing, preferring to build the face of the other. Other cultures tend to focus on self-face, sometimes at the expense of others. A culturally mixed group could have some members who constantly try to make themselves look good, other members who work to make others look good, and still others who want the group as a whole to look good.

These kinds of cultural differences necessitate effective communication but also make it difficult. In other words, the very thing that diverse groups need—effective communication—is also very difficult for them to accomplish. The more heterogeneous the group, the harder it will be to communicate effectively in terms of (1) equal participation; (2) consensus-based decision making; (3) nondominating conflict management; and (4) respectful communication. Of course, an intercultural group is not necessarily a heterogeneous group; it just depends upon how important the cultural differences turn out to be. It is also true that the cultures represented in a diverse group may share the same orientation in terms of individualism-collectivism, self-construal, and/or face.

The degree to which a group is able to manage intercultural diversity is determined by several situational factors, including (1) a history of unresolved conflict among the cultural groups in society at large; (2) in-group–out-group balance,

determined by the number of group members representing the different cultures; (3) the extent to which the group's task is cooperative or competitive; and (4) status differences. If the cultures represented in the group have a history of good conflict resolution, the representation among cultures is fairly well balanced, the task is cooperative in nature, and members have more or less equal status, then they will tend to communicate effectively.

Suppose, for example, that you attend a multiracial university and are accustomed to working in classes with individuals from various cultural backgrounds. At least in recent years, there has been little ethnic conflict on campus, and people have learned to work pretty effectively with one another in student government, activities, sports, and academics. A class-project group under these circumstances would probably work well, if everyone were committed to the project. On the other hand, if recent racial tensions had broken out on campus, making it uncomfortable for, say, Jews and Muslims to interact equally and productively, then the group could fail. This situation could be exacerbated if one group felt superior to the other, if the two groups were not equally represented in the class-project group, or if the task itself were competitive in nature (such as seeing who can get the best grade on an exam).

The blend of cultures within a diverse group will affect its communication processes in several ways: First, if a group is individualistic or independent in orientation, it will tend to use dominating conflict strategies, but if it is collectivist or interdependent in orientation, it will tend to use collaborative conflict strategies. Group members who are more culturally individualistic or independent will tend to speak more frequently or take more turns, while collectivist or interdependent groups will tend to have more equal participation among members. Finally, when group members are mostly concerned with other-face or mutual-face, they will tend to use collaboration and be more satisfied with the group's communication.

Using an input-process-output model, Oetzel shows that the quality of communication affects both task and relational effectiveness. In general,

he believes that if a culturally diverse group has good communication, the effectiveness of the task and relationships among group members will increase. In one study, for example, Oetzel found that if a group has equal participation, cooperation, and respectful communication, members will be more satisfied and will be more likely to participate fully in the group effort.[21]

Because groups are part of larger systems—they take input from the system and produce outputs—the cybernetic tradition has been important in understanding this relationship. Indeed, bona fide group theory clearly shows how groups are constantly in flux and have steady give-and-take with larger systems, while the other theories in this section stress more of the internal workings (cybernetic nonetheless) of individual groups. Two ideas from the cybernetic tradition predominate here. One is that group action is more than a sum of individual action, that it is a product of interaction. The second major idea is that group outputs always provide feedback that affects group performance.

The cybernetic tradition has had a clear impact on our thinking about communication in groups. For the most part, these theories tend to be descriptive in approach, showing how, in different ways, groups act as systems of interacting forces. There is actually a fine line between cybernetic and sociocultural theories of groups. All of the theories in this section on the cybernetic tradition have some sociocultural elements. However, we decided to place them in the cybernetic section because each of these theories uses system terminology and/or makes explicit use of the input-process-output model.

We move now to a set of theories that are somewhat more sociocultural in focus, although they still deal with some of the features that characterize cybernetic theories.

◖ THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

This section deals with two general topics—group structure and group task. As a group works on its task, it actually creates a structure,

which in turn affects how it manages its task. In other words, these two topics are closely related, as the theories in this section show. Specifically, we will summarize three theories here, moving from the most general to the most specific. The first theory in the series, structuration theory, describes the general process by which groups create structure, with special attention to task. The second functional theory looks at a variety of factors that affect task effectiveness. Finally, we conclude with groupthink theory, which focuses specifically on one of the most common problems encountered by task groups.

Structuration Theory

Structuration theory, the brainchild of sociologist Anthony Giddens and his followers, is a general theory of social action.[22] This theory states that human action is a process of producing and reproducing various social systems. In other words, when we communicate with one another, we create structures that range from large social and cultural institutions to smaller individual relationships.[23]

As communicators act strategically according to rules to achieve their goals, they do not realize that they are simultaneously creating forces that return to affect future actions. Structures like relational expectations, group roles and norms, communication networks, and societal institutions both affect and are affected by social action. These structures provide individuals with rules that guide their actions, but their actions in turn create new rules and reproduce old ones. Interaction and structure are so closely related that Donald Ellis calls them "braided entities."[24] In other words, we act deliberately to accomplish our intentions, but at the same time, our actions have the *unintended consequences* of establishing structures that affect our future actions.

Let's say that you join a Habitat for Humanity group in your church that builds homes for low-income families. The group has some land but needs to get materials donated so that construction can begin. Your aunt owns a building supply store, and you suggest to the group that you might "at least check to see if she would be

willing to donate some lumber." Everyone happily agrees, and you call your aunt that evening. As it turns out, she is delighted to make the contribution, and your group is thrilled. Because of your action, the group solved an immediate problem. A little later, the group needs some roofing materials, so they naturally turn to you. You are hesitant to ask your aunt a second time, but you agree to visit various supply stores to see what you can do. Over time, the group comes to rely on you as the person who can get them materials, and a role is created. You never intended to take on this role, but it happened because of expectations created in the process of taking local action. This is the process of structuration.

Giddens believes that this kind of structuration saturates all social life, in ways far more profound than can be seen in simple group roles. As an example, Donald Ellis shows how ethnicity is entailed in structuration.[25] We create ethnic difference by interactional patterns within and between groups. Ethnicity is a structural arrangement created over time as a result of many local practices throughout the world. Yet once created, ethnicity has a life of its own, so that it becomes almost impossible not to see and act in accordance with ethnic experience in some way or another. Well-intentioned people acting in their everyday lives create unintended categories of social structure, which limit what they can do in future interactions. These structures are not necessarily bad, but they can limit the ability to see a range of possibilities for acting in future situations. The parent who constantly rescues a child from disagreements with other children creates a structure in which problems are always solved by others. This pattern or interaction will limit what that child perceives is possible in future interactions.

Giddens believes that structuration always involves three major modalities or dimensions: (1) an interpretation or understanding; (2) a sense of morality or proper conduct; and (3) a sense of power in action. The rules we use to guide our actions, in other words, tell us how something should be understood (interpretation), what should be done (morality), and how to get things accomplished (power). In turn, our

actions reinforce those very structures of interpretation, morality, and power.

Imagine a group that has created an atmosphere in which everybody is expected to speak up on every topic. Like all structuration, this was not planned but emerged as an unintended consequence of the actions of group members over time. In this scenario, a norm of *interpreting* emerges, in which the group is understood as egalitarian. It is considered proper for everyone to address every issue and not remain quiet on any subject. And *power* is granted to speech, as individuals use language to share their perspectives, attempt to persuade one another, and the like.

In actual practice, your behavior is rarely affected by a single structure such as the role of "materials acquisition" or the norm of "speaking-up," described above. Rather, your acts are affected by and affect several different structural elements at the same time. Two things can happen. First, one structure can *mediate* another. In other words, the production of one structure is accomplished by producing another. For example, the group may produce a communication network that governs who can talk to whom, but it does so by establishing individual roles. (This is why the custodian in an organization may not feel free to file a complaint directly with the CEO.) Here, the role structure mediates the communication network.

The second way structures relate to one another is through *contradiction*. In this case, the production of a structure requires the establishment of another structure that undermines the first one. This is the stuff of classical paradox. Contradictions lead to conflict, and through a dialectic or tension between the contradictory elements, system change results. The old problem of task and relationship work in groups is a good example of contradictory structure. To accomplish a task, the group has to work on its interpersonal relationships, but working on relationships detracts from accomplishing the task. Concentrating too much on task does not leave enough time to mend fences and work on relationships, which must be done for high-quality task accomplishment.

Now let's look at one way in which structuration theory has been applied to communication. Marshall Scott Poole and his colleagues have been working for several years on a structurational theory of group decision making.[26] This theory teaches that group decision making is a process in which group members attempt to achieve *convergence*, or agreement, on a final decision and, in so doing, structure their social system. In other words, in the process of trying to come to consensus, the group produces unintended consequences that shape the future work of the group. By expressing their opinions and preferences, group members actually produce and reproduce certain rules by which convergence can be achieved or blocked. This structuration process occurs within the three realms outlined by Giddens—interpretation, morality, and power.

Suppose, for example, that you are interested in persuading other members of a group to endorse a particular plan. You might share an *interpretation* of the plan by using the terms that, because of the previous history of the group, are commonly employed and understood by group members. Some of these words might even be rather specialized and specific to the group. By employing a particular style of speaking, then, you would be acting in a manner that is condoned by the group according to its norms, or sense of what is right or wrong (morality). To be effective as a speaker, you would also make use of a variety of sources of *power*, like leadership ability or status. What is powerful within the group is determined by a history of interaction within the group, and you will use these sources of power to persuade the group to endorse the plan.

Outside factors always influence the group's actions. However, these outside factors can only have meaning insofar as they are understood and interpreted by the group, and these interpretations are negotiated through interaction within the group. One of the most important outside factors is task type—what the group has been given to do—because the task renders certain rules appropriate and others inappropriate. For example, a study group will behave in one way when preparing for an exam and in an entirely

different way when researching a group report, but the group itself will need to work through what each of these means in practical terms.

Further, we act toward others in ways that reflect our views of their places in the group, and in time, a "group" definition of each person and of the group as a whole emerges. This group definition subsequently affects the interaction among the members of the group and is thereby reproduced again and again. Some members, for example, might become task leaders, others socioemotional leaders, others information providers, and still others conflict managers.

Task groups are often confronted with contradictions, and group actions both cause and resolve these inherent tensions. For example, the group must make a good decision before a deadline, but the time pressure of the deadline is inconsistent with the need for adequate time to do a good job. A group must attend to the requirements of the task, but in so doing its members must also take care of their socioemotional needs. The problem, as we saw earlier in the chapter, is that meeting socioemotional needs can detract from the quality of task work. Further, members join a group to meet individual objectives, but they can only do so by paying attention to group objectives, which may undercut their own individual needs. Convergence can only come about through agreement, yet the group is told it must disagree in order to test ideas.

One of the most interesting contributions of this theory is its version of the processes followed by groups as they make decisions. Poole and his colleagues propose that groups can follow a variety of paths in the development of a decision, depending on the *contingencies* with which they are faced. Groups sometimes follow standard agendas, but on other occasions, they are unsystematic, and sometimes they even develop their own pathways in response to unique needs.

How a group operates depends on three sets of variables. The first is *objective task characteristics*, which are the standard attributes of the task, such as the degree to which the problem comes with pre-established solutions, the clarity of the problem, the kind of expertise it requires, the

extent of the impact of the problem, the number and nature of values implicit in the problem, and whether the solution is a one-shot action or will have broader policy implications.

For example, you might be involved in a club that has to decide whether and how to participate in a town festival, a difficult decision involving many possible options. The potential number of values entering into the decision is fairly high, and what you decide to do this year may affect what you can do in other years. This decision may take some time, and the decision path may be complex. On the other hand, if your group merely has to decide whether to have a taco booth at the festival, the decision is simple. The range of options is limited, the values involved in the decision are few, and the decision will have little impact outside the club. This decision will probably be made quickly and simply.

The second set of variables that affects the group's decision path is *group task characteristics*, and these will vary from group to group. They include the extent to which the group has previous experience with the problem, the extent to which an innovative solution is required as opposed to adoption of a standard course of action, and the urgency of the decision.

The third group of factors affecting the path of a group is *group structural characteristics*, including cohesiveness, power distribution, history of conflict, and group size. If your club has many members, gives the officers most of the power, and has a history of conflict, one kind of process will be used, but if it is small, cohesive, and has shared power, quite another would be predicted. These three sets of factors will operate to influence the process adopted by the group, including whether it uses a standard or a unique path, the complexity of the decision path, the amount of organization or disorganization with which the task is handled, and the amount of time devoted to various activities.

To discover various decision paths adopted by different groups, Poole and Roth studied 47 decisions made by 29 different groups.[27] The groups differed in their size, task complexity, urgency, cohesiveness, and conflict history. They included a medical school teaching team,

an energy conservation planning group, student term-project groups, and a dormitory-management committee. Each discussion was tape-recorded and analyzed. Each task statement in a discussion was classified by judges according to type, and these were combined into interacts similar to those Fisher discussed earlier. In addition, every 30-second segment was classified according to a set of relationship categories.

By means of a sophisticated method of analysis, the researchers could see the various decision paths that emerged in these interactions on both the task and relationship tracks. Three general types of paths were discovered. Some groups followed a *standard unitary sequence* (like a regular agenda), although not always in exactly the same way. Several groups followed what Poole and Roth call a *complex cyclic sequence*. Most of these were problem-solution cycles, in which the group would go back and forth, in concentrated work, between defining the problem and generating solution ideas, much as Fisher imagined. The third type of sequence was *solution-oriented*, in which the group did not really discuss or analyze the problem before trying to solve it.

In addition to a preferred sequence, the groups took different decision paths that Poole and Roth call *activity tracks*. These are interwoven paths or tracks along which the group develops or moves. A group may develop in different ways on each track, and the course of action taken on each track is affected in part by the three contingency variables discussed previously—objective task characteristics, group task characteristics, and group structural characteristics.

There are probably many possible tracks, but three are elaborated in this theory—the task-process track, the relational track, and the topic-focus track. The *task-process track* consists of activities that deal directly with the problem or task, including, for example, analyzing the problem, designing solutions, evaluating solutions, and getting off on tangents. The *relational track* involves activities that affect interpersonal relationships in the group, such as disagreeing and making accommodations. These two correspond

neatly with the task-maintenance duality encountered in several other theories presented in this chapter. The third track, the *topic-focus track*, is a series of issues, topics, or concerns of the group over time.

Three types of breakpoints are common. *Normal breakpoints* are the expected, natural points of termination or transition. They include such things as adjournment, caucusing, or topic shifts. *Delays* are unexpected problems that cause a pause in normal group functioning. Delays often consist of rediscussion of issues necessary for the group to resolve conflicts or establish understanding. Delays may be a sign of impending difficulty, or they may be a more positive sign of careful thought or creative activity. *Disruptions* are more serious. These consist of major disagreements and group failures.

Although Poole and Roth's is a somewhat complex and sophisticated theory, it expresses the structurational character of group decision making very well. It shows that groups do adopt particular courses of action to meet their needs but that in so doing they create constraints that limit future action. This idea is clear enough, but it begs the question of what kinds of structures are most and least effective or productive. Functional theory steps in at this juncture to fill the void.

Functional Theory

Functional theories of group communication view the process as an instrument by which groups make decisions, emphasizing the connection between the quality of communication and the quality of the group's output.[28] Communication does a number of things—or *functions* in a number of ways—to determine group outcome. It is a means of sharing information, is the way group members explore and identify errors in thinking, and is a tool of persuasion.[29] Although the research methods used to study group functions resemble those commonly seen in the sociopsychological tradition, we have placed it here, in the sociocultural, because of a strong kinship with this larger sociocultural tradition that has looked at how groups work.

The functional approach has been strongly influenced by the pragmatics of teaching small-group discussion. It is based in large measure on the work of philosopher John Dewey, which, since the publication of *How We Think* in 1910, has greatly influenced 20th-century pragmatic thought.[30] Dewey's version of the problem-solving process has six steps: (1) expressing a difficulty; (2) defining the problem; (3) analyzing the problem; (4) suggesting solutions; (5) comparing alternatives and testing them against a set of objectives or criteria; and (6) implementing the best solution. The theories of the functional tradition address the ways communication affects each of these elements.

Randy Hirokawa and his colleagues have been leaders in the functional tradition, and their description of the group decision-making process mirrors that of Dewey. Their work looks at a variety of mistakes that groups can make, aiming to identify the kinds of things groups need to take into consideration to become more effective.[31]

Groups normally begin by *identifying and assessing a problem*, and here Hirokawa and his colleagues deal with a variety of questions: What happened? Why? Who was involved? What harm

resulted? Who was hurt? Next, the group *gathers and evaluates information* about the problem. As the group discusses possible solutions, information continues to be gathered.

Next, the group generates a variety of *alternative proposals* for handling the problem and discusses the *objectives* it wishes to accomplish in solving it. These objectives and alternative proposals are *evaluated*, with the ultimate goal of reaching consensus on a course of action. This general sequence of problem solving is depicted in Figure 8.2.[32]

The factors contributing to faulty decisions are easily inferred from this decision-making process. The first is *improper assessment* of the problem, which stems from inadequate or inaccurate analysis of the situation. The group may fail to see the problem, or it may not accurately identify the causes of the problem. The second source of error in decision making is *inappropriate goals and objectives*. The group may neglect important objectives that ought to be achieved, or it may work toward unnecessary ones. The third problem is *improper assessment of positive and negative qualities*, ignoring certain advantages, disadvantages, or both of various proposals.

FIGURE **8.2**

General Model of the Group Decision-Making Process
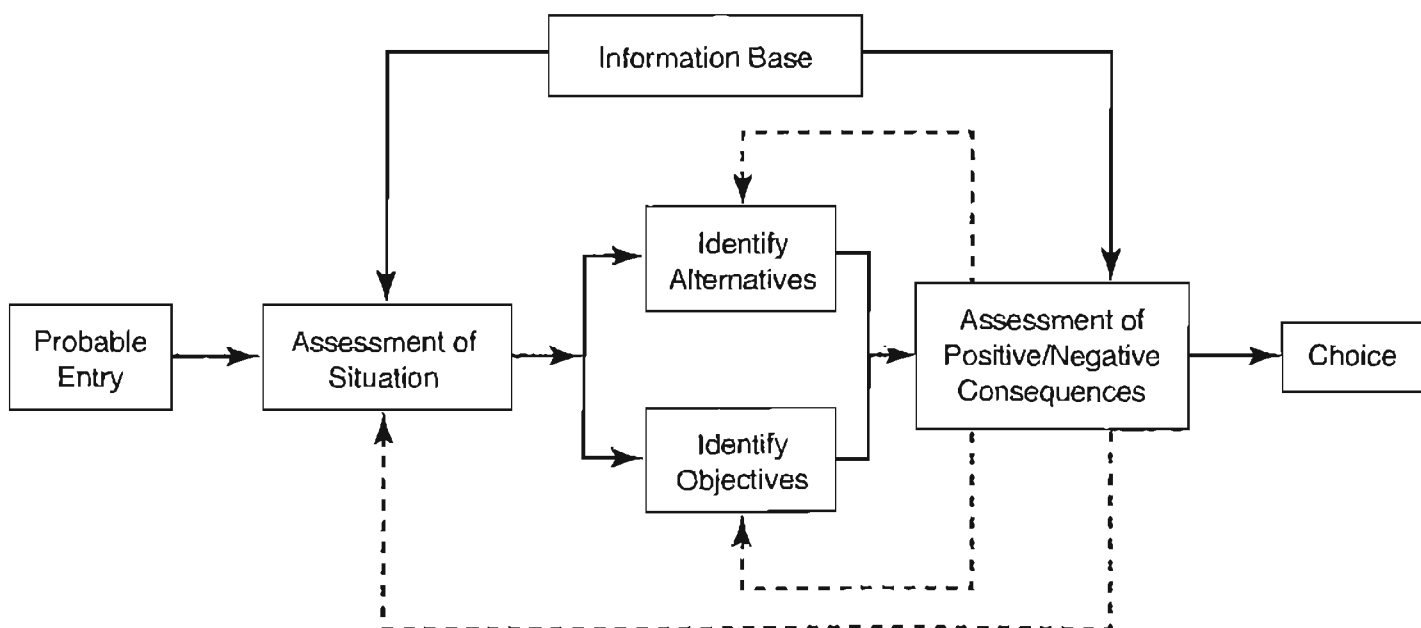
Or it may overestimate the positive or negative outcomes expected. Fourth, the group may develop an *inadequate information base*, which can happen in several ways. Valid information may be rejected, or invalid information may be accepted. Too little information may be collected, or too much information may cause overload and confusion. Finally, the group may be guilty of *faulty reasoning* from the information base.

Why do groups fall into these traps? Hirokawa believes that the errors most often arise from the communication in the group. The group is swayed by certain members who unwittingly mislead the group in some way, an outcome that requires someone to counteract it by exerting a positive influence on the group. As part of his investigations, Hirokawa conducted a study of four aspects of decision quality, all linked to communication: appropriate understanding of the problem, appropriate understanding of the objectives and standards of a good decision, appropriate assessment of the positive qualities of alternatives, and appropriate assessment of the negative qualities of alternatives.[33]

To study these four aspects of decision quality, Hirokawa formed about 40 three-person groups in a laboratory setting and had them discuss what to do about a certain plagiarism case at the university. The discussions ranged from 17 to 47 minutes in length, and each was videotaped. Two professors experienced in student-ethics cases judged the groups' decisions in terms of overall quality, and a panel of judges rated the extent to which each of the four critical elements—appropriate understanding of the problem, of the objectives, of alternatives, and of negative qualities—were met. Statistical analysis showed that the quality of a group's decision is definitely related to these four elements, and when the very best groups were compared to the very worst, there was a significant difference in the extent to which each function was accomplished by the group. Clearly, groups that were more effective in meeting the four functions made better decisions.

The next theory—groupthink—is another theory that looks at the difficulties groups can encounter. Unlike Hirokawa, who focused on what makes effective group functioning, groupthink, first formulated by Irving Janis, focuses on a set of errors that groups can make, often with disastrous consequences.

Groupthink Theory

The work of Irving Janis and his colleagues has been immensely influential within the functional tradition.[34] The *groupthink hypothesis* developed by Janis and others emerged from a detailed examination of the effectiveness of group decision making.[35] Emphasizing critical thinking, Janis shows how certain conditions can lead to high group satisfaction but ineffective output.

Groupthink is a direct result of cohesiveness in groups, which was first discussed in some depth by Kurt Lewin in the 1930s and has since come to be seen as a crucial variable in group effectiveness.[36] *Cohesiveness* is the degree of mutual interest among members. In a highly cohesive group, a strong mutual identification keeps a group together. Cohesiveness is a result of the degree to which all members perceive that their goals can be met within the group. This does not require that the members have similar attitudes but that members exhibit a degree of interdependence, relying on one another to achieve certain mutually desired goals. The more cohesive a group, the more pressure it exerts on the members to maintain that cohesiveness.

Cohesiveness can be a good thing because it brings the members together and enhances the group's interpersonal relationships. Although Janis does not deny the potential value of cohesiveness, he also recognizes its dangers. For one, highly cohesive groups may invest too much energy in maintaining goodwill in the group to the detriment of decision making. Members invest much intrinsic energy in groups because of the potential rewards for doing so: friendship, prestige, and confirmation of one's self-worth. Because our self-esteem needs are high, we will sometimes devote too much energy to establishing positive bonds, and this can lead to groupthink. Janis found in his

research that groupthink can have six negative outcomes:

1. The group limits its discussion to only a few alternatives without considering a full range of creative possibilities. The solution may seem obvious and simple to the group, and there is little exploration of other ideas.
2. The position initially favored by most members is never restudied to seek out less obvious pitfalls. In other words, the group is not very critical in examining the ramifications of the preferred solution.
3. The group fails to reexamine those alternatives originally disfavored by the majority. Minority opinions are quickly dismissed and ignored, not only by the majority but also by those who originally favored them.
4. Expert opinion is not sought. The group is satisfied with itself and its ability to make decisions and may feel threatened by outsiders.
5. The group is highly selective in gathering and attending to available information. The members tend to concentrate only on the information that supports the favored plan.
6. The group is so confident in its ideas that it does not consider contingency plans. It does not foresee or plan for the possibility of failure.

All these things result from a lack of critical thinking and from overconfidence in the group. Janis maintains that these outcomes are predicted by a number of symptoms that effectively summarize the essence of the groupthink phenomenon. The first symptom is an *illusion of invulnerability*, which creates an undue air of optimism. There is a strong sense that, "We know what we are doing, so don't rock the boat." Second, the group creates collective efforts to *rationalize* the course of action decided on. It creates a story that makes its decision seem absolutely right and literally talks itself into thinking it did the right thing. Third, the group maintains an unquestioned belief in its inherent *morality*, seeing itself as being well motivated and working for the best outcome. That leads the group to soft-pedal ethical and moral consequences.

A fourth symptom is that out-group leaders are *stereotyped* as evil, weak, or stupid. Fifth, *direct*

pressure is exerted on members not to express counter opinions. Dissent is quickly squelched, which leads to the sixth symptom—the *self-censorship* of disagreement. Individual members are reluctant to state opposing opinions and silently suppress their reservations. Thus, seventh, there is a shared *illusion of unanimity* within the group. Even if the decision is not unanimous, the group rallies outwardly around a position of solidarity. Finally, groupthink involves the emergence of self-appointed *mindguards* to protect the group and its leader from adverse opinions and unwanted information. The mindguard typically suppresses negative information by counseling participants not to make things difficult.

Janis believes that the answer to the problem of groupthink is to take the following steps in group decision making:

1. Encourage everyone to be a critical evaluator and express reservations whenever they come up.
2. Do not have the leader state a preference up front.
3. Set up several independent and separate policymaking groups.
4. Divide into subgroups.
5. Discuss what is happening with others outside the group.
6. Invite outsiders into the group to bring fresh ideas.
7. Assign an individual at each meeting to be devil's advocate.
8. Spend considerable time surveying warning signals.
9. Hold a second-chance meeting to reconsider decisions before making them final.

Janis uses historical data to support his theory, analyzing six national political decision-making episodes in which outcomes were either good or bad, depending on the extent of groupthink. The negative examples include the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Korean War, Pearl Harbor, and the escalation of the Vietnam War. Positive examples include the Cuban missile crisis and the Marshall Plan.[37]

One of Janis's cases of successful decision making is the Kennedy administration's response to

the Cuban missile crisis. In October 1962, Cuba was caught building offensive nuclear weapon stations and arming them with Soviet missiles. President Kennedy had already suffered through one instance of groupthink in the Bay of Pigs invasion the year before, and he seemed to have learned what not to do in these kinds of international crises. In the missile crisis, Kennedy constantly encouraged his advisors to challenge and debate one another. He refrained from leading the group too early with his own opinion, and he set up subgroups to discuss the problem independently so as not to reinforce members' opinions. Various members, including Kennedy, talked with outsiders and experts about the problem to make sure that fresh opinions were heard. In the end, Kennedy successfully invoked a military blockade and stopped the Cuban-Soviet development.

Without abandoning the essential assumptions of cybernetics, the theories classified here as sociocultural focus on group work. In other words, these theories emphasize the social construction of groups—what they do and how this action results in something larger than individuals or even groups. Structuration theory is a clear example of the unintended consequences of group action. You will see in this theory a strong cybernetic base as well, as the consequences of action within a group create constraints or structures that further limit group action. Groupthink is a specific example of this kind of effect. We turn now to critical work within the group context.

◼ The Critical Tradition

Within the critical tradition, a substantial critique of small groups has come from feminist scholars, starting with some of the basic distinctions made by Bales, between, for example, task and socioemotional effort. In particular, group scholars working from feminist perspectives suggest that Bales's distinction, which influences much work on small-group communication, may be too arbitrary. For instance, Bales classifies the statements "agrees" and "disagrees" as "emotional," while they also could move a task

agenda forward. Feminist scholars question the fundamental division of much group work into the equation of male with task and female with emotion, suggesting this division could be the result of Bales's coding system.[38] Similarly, these scholars question findings that suggest that male task groups outperform female ones. Again, they suggest that definitions and tasks used are critical in making these distinctions—if highly social tasks are required, for example, female groups typically outperform male ones.[39]

Pursuing other concerns, feminists have also questioned research that suggests that women display more sex-stereotypic behavior in groups than do men. Feminist critical scholars ask that researchers examine the assumptions they make about sex and gender in small groups and not make decisions based on expected or traditional views of sex and gender.[40] Rather, they suggest that sex and gender complicate our understandings of how groups function and that every effort should be made to understand how all of the intervening dimensions function in groups.

In addition to the basic divisions that get made in groups based on sex and gender, feminist critiques of traditional approaches to groups also center on the limitations of customary descriptions of input-process-output models. Feminists focus on how language interacts with gender identities to form particular outcomes[41]— an arena not investigated by many traditional group theorists. For example, how do group projects become gender typed and how does that gender typing then affect outcomes and future group processes? Feminist rsearchers disagree about whether such gender differences are causal—these differences are observed in women and men and are apparent in groups as well—or whether gendered differences are the outcome of social structures. Regardless of the perspective, feminist scholars, by introducing gender as an inescapable and intervening variable, have made important contributions to our understanding of group functioning as a cybernetic process.

The clearest intersection between feminist and communication group scholars occurs with bona fide groups, especially in terms of the focus on boundary permeability and interdependence

of group and context. Feminist scholars have raised various questions about group processing that support the interdependence of group and context for women's groups in particular. Many feminist scholars suggest that a task focus is androcentric (male centered) and capitalistic and may not represent the reason for the formation of many women's groups. Women's groups often are less interested in outcomes and traditional group tasks—less interested in doing and more interested in being. The context in which groups exist has much to do with such a focus. Many women in U.S. culture have spent their lives doing for others—husbands, children, workplace—and the groups they are interested in as they grow older are quite antithetical to traditional images of groups.[42]

A good example of this is the popular Red Hat Society for women over 50 years old. It takes its name from a poem by Jenny Joseph called "Warning," which begins, "When I am an old woman, I shall wear purple/With a red hat which doesn't go and doesn't suit me."[43] The society has no bylaws and has banned meetings; conventions feature "playshops" rather than workshops. No group is told what to do or when to do it. "Purple and red is a very strong suggestion . . . and that about sums up the rules."[44] Research on group performance, then, according to feminist scholars, should be expanded to include notions of well-being, support, and fun in addition to traditional group productivity.

Feminist scholars also support efforts such as the effective intercultural work group theory, with its focus on equal participation and respectful cooperation as ways to negotiate diverse work groups effectively. In light of their desire to develop strategies to end oppression and to reduce power and status, feminists see this theory as an articulation of more egalitarian communication practices in group settings.

Within the sociocultural tradition, feminist scholars have elaborated in particular on structuration theories of groups because of the ways these recognize and depend on outside processes for understanding group dynamics. To this end, feminist group scholars have researched the ways power and status in society at large affect who assumes leadership in groups,[45] the role of increasingly anonymous and technological contexts for influencing group membership and contributions,[46] and how external forces such as time, power, and status affect group formation in the first place.[47]

Feminist scholars interested in groups, then, have challenged simplistic sex divisions and assumptions that informed the earliest group work. They have affirmed approaches that take into account societal forces that affect group formation, processing, and norms, ultimately seeking ways to diminish the unequal social structures that continue to promote existing gender hierarchies.

APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Groups are important to individuals and society. As a person moves about in the world, cooperation becomes essential in achieving individual goals. People use communication to share resources to solve problems, and group communication becomes not only an instrument for accomplishing tasks but also a means of building relationships.

Theories of small group communication form a distinct tradition. Their common threads and lines of influence are clear and provide a kind of coherence that binds this work.[48] As we survey the theories summarized in this chapter, several generalizations are apparent.

1. Groups cannot be separated from the context in which they work.
Group communication can be viewed as a system of inputs, internal processes, and outputs. Inputs include information, group resources, and task characteristics. The process includes group interaction and decision development, and the outputs include completed tasks as well as interpersonal relationships. Pervasive in this field, the input-process-output model alerts us to the fact that groups exist within larger systems. When we communicate in groups, we need to pay attention to the nature and quality of inputs and become more aware of the ways in which our actions within a group create effects that influence the larger environment in some way, not to mention the group itself.

Traditionally, we think of groups as a setting for live, face-to-face interaction. This common understanding of groups is changing rapidly, as the Internet allows groups to form and work together without being in the same room and without interacting directly and simultaneously. The rise of communication technology expands the ability of groups, but, whether live or computer-assisted, groups still are part of a large environment and can be characterized with the basic input-process-output model.[49]

Although commonly used, this simple input-process-output model belies the complexity of real groups in context. Even though it acknowledges a larger system, this model relies on the idea that groups are like a container. You may pour things into it and pour things out of it, but the boundary of the container is still impermeable. In an extended critique of traditional group studies, Putnam and Stohl wrote that a bona fide group could not be separated from its context. In the 15 years or so since they originally presented the idea of bona fide groups, research has become more contextual. As one example, Lawrence Frey has recently published a volume of case studies of bona fide groups illustrating the expanding focus of this work.[50]

The studies in Frey's volume show that a complete analysis of the functioning of a group requires careful attention to interfaces among groups. When you are working within a group, think about the constraints and opportunities that overlapping groups provide. What resources flow into the group because of its fluid membership? What special challenges does the group face in managing the bona fide, systemic nature of groups? Can you anticipate what effect the group will have on other groups and how this may later open opportunities or cause constraints for the groups involved?

We once worked in a university department that had a rotating department chair. Every three years, another member of the department would become chair, so that eventually, most faculty had rotated into that position at one time or another. This system was a terrific resource for the department because it recognized that department chairs encounter several administrative groups that ordinary faculty do not, and in doing so, develop perspectives that can be extremely valuable to the department. As more and more faculty developed this experience, the overall resources of the department expanded, making the group increasingly effective. The rotating-chair system simply built upon the bona fide group process, so that a cybernetic loop was created, always maintaining a fresh input of perspectives.

All groups — from families to community clubs — are bona fide, but the significance of context is nowhere as obvious as in organizations. David Seibold

believes that organizational and group researchers have conducted their work in ways that tend to separate these contexts, when in fact they are so closely associated that they should not be divided.[51]

In the following chapter (Chapter 9), we present a number of theories of organizational communication. Since organizations are built through networks of groups, the line between the organization and group is fine, and the distinction between organizational communication and group communication is fuzzy, indeed.

2. Effective group work accomplishes tasks and builds interpersonal relationships.

This idea appears in almost all of the theories discussed in this chapter. Task energy is directed at problem solving, and interpersonal energy is directed at group maintenance and relationships. Group effectiveness seems to depend on the balance between these two aspects of communication, and inadequate attention to either can lead to dissatisfaction and poor decision making. Task and relational functions are thoroughly mixed. You often fulfill both task and social functions in a single statement, and in classifying group behavior, validly separating these functions is difficult.

This powerful lesson from group-communication theory teaches the need for balance. You simply cannot do a good job as a group without paying attention to relationships as well as task, in a way that acknowledges the connection between the two. We work on relationships, not just to make us feel good but because relational bonds allow us to work effectively on the task. The opposite is also true: successful completion of a task can help build strong relationships. Think about the best groups you have known. These groups were probably good for different reasons, but one common element was surely an appropriate mix of strong working relationships combined with successful task accomplishment.

3. Process and structure are intimately tied together.

The idea of structuration is actually quite simple: the practices of the group create structures that affect future practice. In other words, actions have consequences for future action. Because we are most concerned about the content of our discussion at any given moment, it is hard to keep an eye on this larger issue; yet, the process used by a group does create a certain kind of social world that presents both opportunities and constraints on the group in the future. For this reason, groups need to pay attention to process.

Group members most frequently ask "what" questions: What do we need to talk about? What do we want to accomplish? What are we trying to do? To these, groups should add "how" questions: How shall we address this issue? How shall we work as a group? How should we structure our time? How should we divide our energy? No matter what you do, structuration will occur, but if you are not conscious of it, the results may be unwanted and unproductive. "How" questions are critical because process matters.

Structuration can have several kinds of effects. It will determine, for example, what individuals can and do say in a group. Even Bales's research in the early 1950s showed that group comments are not evenly distributed. Bales showed how certain types of statements shape the group's interaction and the roles assigned to individuals.

As another example, interactional patterns in groups define the structure of decision development. Interaction combines into activity segments, which, in turn, combine into phases. Several theories in this chapter address this concern, and it seems clear that careful, critical consideration is an important ingredient.

4. Effective group work requires careful attention to the quality of communication, creative thinking, and critical thinking.

The fourth trend in small-group theory is its interest in effectiveness, as the functionalist tradition so well illustrates. For example, Janis's and Hirokawa's theories provide guidelines for improved group functioning. They suggest ways of guarding against various hazards in groups. Consistent with the everyday experience of groups in our society, such theories have practical potential in helping groups become more effective.

Dennis Gouran, a leader in functional-group theory, outlines several areas in which skill can matter in the effectiveness of a group.[52] Consistent with the task-relationship distinction, Gouran outlines a number of skills in these areas. To these, he adds the third category of procedural skills. Task skills include (1) problem recognition and framing; (2) inference drawing; (3) idea generation; and (4) argument. Relational skills include (1) leadership; (2) climate building; and (3) conflict management. Procedural skills include (1) planning; and (2) process enactment. Within the field of group communication, then, pragmatics has been important. Much of this work has been powerful in helping us teach group participants how to be more effective in their work. The same is true within organizational communication, as we will see in the following chapter.

▮●NOTES

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38. See W. Wood and N. Rhodes, "Sex Differences in Interaction Style in Task Groups," in *Gender, Interaction, and Inequality*, ed. Cecilia L. Ridgeway (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), 97–121.

39. W. Wood, "Meta-Analytic Review of Sex Differences in Group Performance," *Psychological Bulletin* 102 (1987): 53–71.

40. For a review of this literature, see Renee A. Meyers and others, "Understanding Groups From a Feminist Perspective," in *Theories of Small Groups: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Marshall Scott Poole and Andrea B. Hollingshead (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 252.

41. For a review of this literature, see Meyers and others, "Understanding Groups From a Feminist Perspective," 251.

42. One of us, Karen, recently taught a women's studies senior seminar class (spring 2005, University of New Mexico), in which the final project was to interview members of a group that does not consider itself feminist or that feminists usually do not consider so. Class members interviewed women from a wide range of women's groups, including female hip-hop performers, belly dancers, the Junior League, Mormon women's relief society,

La Leche League, and the Sweet Potato Queens. The common finding across the groups was that the women joined because of the support and camaraderie of other women—the stated task was inconsequential.

43. Jenny Joseph, "Warning," in *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*, 4th ed., ed. Sandra Martz (Watsonville, CA: Papier-Mache Press, 2003), 1.
44. Elisabeth Deffner, "A Sorority of Sisters," *American Profile*, 23 (April 2006), 6.
45. See, for example, L. L. Carli, and A. H. Eagly, "Gender Effects on Social Influence and Emergent Leadership," in *Handbook of Gender and Work*, ed., G. Powell (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 203–22.
46. This literature is summarized in Meyers and others, "Understanding Groups From a Feminist Perspective," 256.
47. See Meyers et al., "Understanding Groups From a Feminist Perspective," 260.
48. For an integration of a broad range of interdisciplinary work in groups, see Janet Fulk and Joseph E. McGrath, "Touchstones: A Framework for Comparing Premises of Nine Integrative Perspectives on Groups," in *Theories of Small Groups: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Marshall Scott Poole and Andrea B. Hollingshead (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 397–426.
49. For an application of the input-process-output model in group communication technology (GCT), see Craig R. Scott, "Communication Technology and Group Communication," in *The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research*, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 432–74.
50. Lawrence R. Frey, ed., *Group Communication in Context: Studies of Bona Fide Groups* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003).
51. David R. Seibold, "Groups and Organizations: Premises and Perspectives," in *Communication: Views from the Helm for the 21st Century*, ed. Judith S. Trent (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), 162–68.
52. Dennis S. Gouran, "Communication Skills for Group Decision Making," in *Handbook of Communication and Social Interaction Skills*, ed. John O. Greene and Brant R. Burleson (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003), 834–70.

9
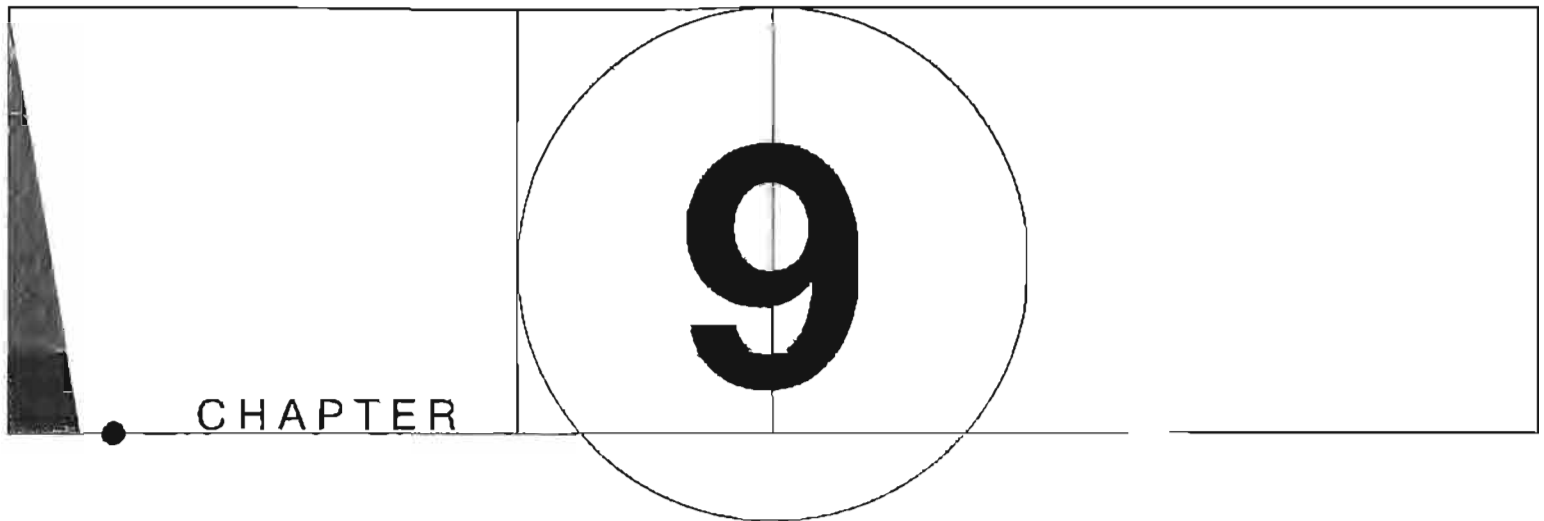
THE ORGANIZATION

As we begin this chapter, we cannot think of any form of society that does not require organization. Whenever we collaborate to achieve collective action, organization emerges. Organizational communication can be thought of as "that field that conceptualizes organization as symbolically achieved cooperation."[1] Individuals connect to others in some kind of structure, which provides organizational form. But form is more than lines of connection on some organizational chart. It also implies directions of influence within a complex system, so that certain individuals exert influence over others, certain groups exert influence over other groups, and certain systems exert forces that control or manage other systems.

Hierarchies of forces and connections still do not do justice to organizations. Organizations do consist of human beings, after all, and every organization has a certain feel to it. What do you feel free to do within an organization? What are you constrained from doing? What do people like and appreciate within an organization? How do people communicate? Is there a sense of formality or informality?

As we think of organizations in these ways, three general aspects emerge: (1) organizational structure, form, and function; (2) management, control, and power; and (3) organizational culture. A large body of literature has emerged in organizational communication within each of these three areas, and we will explore them in greater detail in this chapter.[2]

Topics	Sociopsychological Theories	Cybernetic Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Critical Theories
Organizational structure, form, and function	Weber's theory of bureaucracy	The process of organizing Co-orientation theory Network theory	Structuration	
Management, control, and power			Organizational control theory	Discourse of Suspicion Managerialism and democracy Gender and race in organizational communication
Culture			Organizational culture	

Another useful way to think about organizations is through the use of metaphor. Gareth Morgan outlines a number of metaphors that help us understand organizations. These are machines, organisms, brain, political system, psychic prisons, and culture.[3] Morgan's first metaphor is the *machine*. Like machines, they have parts that produce products and services. You can take a machine apart, lay its parts along a bench, and, if you are skilled enough, put them back together again. The parts of the machine articulate with one another in ways that allow it to do something, just like an organization. Of course, in this information age, this metaphor may be less and less useful since machines now have parts such as electronic impulses, which you could not really lay out on a bench. And such parts actually reorganize themselves to adapt to the environment much like any open, living system. Even virtual machines have structure and function.

Morgan's second metaphor is the *organism*. Like a plant or animal, the organization is born, grows, functions, adapts to changes in the environment, and eventually dies. Organizational structures never remain static but must continually be in process. The whole idea of the learning organization, one that maintains flexibility In a world in flux, emphasizes the need to adapt constantly to a changing environment.[4] For this reason, organizations also embody a sense of *flux and transformation* — the third metaphor — because they adjust, change, and grow on the basls of Information, feedback, and logical force.

Yet another metaphor is the *brain;* organizations process information, they have intelligence, they conceptualize, and they make plans. The brain is the control system of the body — a centralized organ that has neurological connection to every other aspect of the body. Organizations also have control centers that might be likened to the "brain" of the organization.

But control is never a one-way flow of influence from a single brain to other organs. Instead, it is accomplished by patterns of influence, or control systems, which make organizations like a *political system*, the next metaphor, in which power is distributed, influence is exerted, and decisions are made. You often hear about the "politics" of an organization, which is nothing more than a useful reference to this metaphor.

Because people are constrained in organizations, the metaphor of *psychic prisons* also applies. Organizations can shape and limit the lives of their members. The element of management, control, and power can make organizations feel like instruments of domination because they possess competing interests, some of which dominate others.

Finally, Morgan treats *culture* itself as a metaphor. Think of the cultures with which you identify. These might be ethnic, national, racial, or some other cultural forms. A culture has an identity as a culture because of shared values, norms, beliefs, and practices. When you think about it, organizations have all of these things. If you say that you work for Boeing, you have a strong sense of what that means culturally, precisely because of the values, norms, beliefs, and practices that define this organization.

Each of the metaphors summarized by Morgan offers different insights into organizational life. And each of the traditions that have studied organizations interprets these metaphors in different ways.[5] The chapter map on page 252 outlines the chapter.

THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

Sociopsychological theories of organizations tend to focus on individual and group attributes, or characteristics, rather than communication patterns. As a result, this tradition is not very influential in the communication literature today. This is not to suggest, however, that this tradition has been unimportant, since both sociology and psychology have had considerable impact on organization studies. Because of its previous influence on organizational thought, we do think it necessary to provide a sense of the sociopsychological tradition in this chapter. Consequently, we use this section as an opportunity to introduce the foundational work of Max Weber.

Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy

Max Weber, who was most concerned about how human beings act rationally to achieve their goals, aimed to explain social processes in a way that links individual human motivation to social outcomes. Because of his emphasis on the individual as the driver of action and his interest in causal and rational explanation, his work does manifest a certain quality of the sociopsychological tradition. Also, Weber's theories provide a framework for the traditional view of organizational structure as hierarchical and rule driven. As you read through Weber's principles in this section of the chapter, you will recognize immediately that these principles are alive and well in organizations today, a full century after they were written.[6] You will also notice that they do not say much about communication per se, but Weber's principles did lay down a base of powerful assumptions that affected the image of communication in organizations.

In his lifetime (1864–1920), Max Weber produced a great quantity of work on human institutions, among which is his theory of bureaucracy.[7] Weber's ideas, developed at the beginning of the century, are part of what we now refer to as "classical organizational theory."[8] We all have a common idea of what a bureaucracy is like—hierarchical and layered, rule-driven, and insensitive to individual differences and needs. Although our reaction to bureaucracies is often negative, the principles that govern most complex organizations still have these qualities, which were anticipated and, indeed, advocated as an organizational ideal by Max Weber. Weber attempted to identify the best way for organizations to manage the complexity of work of individuals with a common aim, and his principles have had staying power over the years. Weber defines an organization as a system of purposeful, interpersonal activity designed to coordinate individual tasks.[9] This cannot be done without authority, specialization, and regulation.

Authority comes with power, but in organizations, authority must be "legitimate" or authorized formally by the organization. Organizational effectiveness depends upon the extent to which management is granted *legitimate power* by the organization. You tend to do what your boss says because the organization grants your boss the legitimate authority to give orders. In other words, managers do not necessarily have power because of birth, intelligence, persuasiveness, or physical strength, as might be the case in other settings, but because the organization gives them authority. When you become a member of the organization, you "agree," at least tacitly, to follow the rules that grant this authority. The organization is established as a rational system by force of rule, making it a kind of *rational-legal authority*. When you "report to" someone, you understand that this individual has the authority

to tell you what to do. At the same time, however, administrators must be able to back up their authority by allocating resources within their respective domains. Although we all know managers who are ineffective, a principle of bureaucracy is that administrators must be appointed on the basis of qualifications.

The best way to organize rational-legal authority, according to Weber, is by hierarchy. In other words, bosses have bosses, who themselves have higher bosses. This hierarchy is carefully defined by regulation within the organization. Each layer of management has its own legitimate authority, and only the head of the organization has ultimate, overall authority. Although Weber said that managers should be appointed on the basis of qualifications, the absolute head is rarely appointed on this basis. More likely, the head is elected or even inherits the position.

In the executive branch of U.S. government, for example, the head is the president, who is elected by the people, while directors and secretaries are appointed to administer various departments. In corporations, the owners elect the board of directors, which in turn elects the chairperson of the board. The CEO is appointed, and so is every manager below the CEO. In family businesses, the chairperson of the board can be an inherited position, but managers will be appointed to carry out the CEO's directives.

A related principle of bureaucratic authority, according to Weber, is that employees of the organization do not share in ownership of the organization because this would disrupt the flow of legitimate authority. This is one aspect of organizations that has changed since Weber's time; employees often have stock plans, which means they do own part of the company. Even more direct forms of ownership exist as well, such as when the employees of United Airlines literally purchased the company by buying up the majority of shares.

The first large principle of bureaucracy, then, is authority. The second principle is *specialization*. Individuals are divided up according to division of labor, and people know their jobs within the organization. The proliferation of titles and job descriptions is a perfect example of specialization.

Notice the difference between a bureaucracy and other types of organization in this sense. In a small hardware store, employees may do everything from running the cash register to cleaning the toilet. Once the store reaches a certain size, however, it begins to take on bureaucratic characteristics, so that one person may be hired just to keep stock and sweep the floor, someone else is hired to be a cashier, and others are salespersons. In very large organizations, division of labor is often extensive, resulting in employees having little or no idea of what their task contributes to the overall organization. While in college, one of us worked in an aerospace firm, where his job was to copy numbers onto tags. While he knew that the company was involved somehow with the space program, he had no idea of how his job contributed to the organization's goals. This is typical of bureaucracies. (He eventually discovered that the tags he was producing were used by electronics assemblers to identify wires correctly.)

A third aspect of bureaucracy is the necessity of *rules*. What makes organizational coordination possible is the implementation of a common set of regulations that govern everyone's behavior. Organizational rules should be rational, according to Weber, meaning that they are designed to achieve the goals of the organization. In order to track everything that happens, careful records must be kept of all organizational operations.

Weber's bureaucratic model nicely illustrates the machine metaphor of organizations. It follows a top-down, mechanistic view of how large groups should coordinate their activities to achieve common goals. The cybernetic tradition, which has had an immense influence on organizational communication theory, views the coordination process in more complex ways than does this theory of bureaucracy.

THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

Weber's theory, summarized in the previous section, defines the structure of an organization in terms of where people are placed in a hierarchy

and the kinds of authority and roles given to the organizational members. This is a rather individualistic view of structure. In clear contrast to this approach, cybernetic theories see structure as emerging from patterns of interaction within the organization. You may be able to specify a formal organizational structure that forces certain interaction patterns, but—more interesting from a communication perspective—many forms and structures "get made" by how people interact with one another in various ways. Cybernetic theories have been powerful in showing how this is the case. They also place communication in the foreground as the key process by which organizational structure is accomplished, in contrast to sociopsychological theories that see it as simply one variable. Here we look at three representative theories of this tradition—Weick's process of organizing, Taylor's co-orientation theory, and a theory of networks.

The Process of Organizing

One of the most influential theories of the cybernetic tradition is that of Karl Weick.[10] Weick's theory of organizing is significant in the communication field because it uses communication as a basis for human organizing and provides a rationale for understanding how people organize. According to this theory, organizations are not structures made of positions and roles but communication activities. It is more proper to speak of "organizing" than of "organization" because organizations are something that people accomplish through a continuing process of communication. When people go through their daily interactions, their activities *create* organization. Behaviors are interlocked, since one person's behavior is contingent on another's.

Specifically, the interaction that forms an organization consists of an *act*, or a statement or behavior of an individual. By itself, the act has no significance. What matters is how others respond to it. An *interact* involves an act followed by a response, and a *double interact* consists of an act followed by a response and then an adjustment or follow-up by the person who first acted. Weick believes that all organizing activities are double interacts.

Consider an executive and an administrative assistant as an example. The executive asks the assistant to undertake an activity (act); the assistant then asks for clarification (interact); and the executive explains (double interact). Or the executive asks a favor of the administrative assistant (act), and the administrative assistant follows through (interact), after which the executive responds with a thank-you (double interact). Simple? Yes, but these simple activities are the building blocks with which organizations are made. Interaction serves to achieve common meanings among group members, and the meanings that individuals together assign to information provide the mechanism by which we come to some amount of common understanding.

Organizing activities function to reduce the uncertainty of information. Weick's key theoretical term is *equivocality*, meaning uncertainty, complication, ambiguity, and lack of predictability. All information from the environment, according to Weick, is equivocal or ambiguous to some degree, and organizing activities are designed to reduce this lack of certainty. Not all interaction is equally important in reducing uncertainty, but every effort contributes. The degree of equivocality experienced will vary from situation to situation, but often it is quite large, and reducing it will have major organizational implications.

Let's take an example that is a bit more complicated than the simple one we just looked at between the executive and the administrative assistant. Suppose that you get an e-mail from your boss indicating that there is a safety problem in the plant. As you read the e-mail, you see that your boss is asking you to take leadership in solving this problem. You are faced with a situation that is full of equivocation. What is the nature of this safety problem, and how should you go about solving it? Have others also been asked to help address this issue? What kind of timeline does your boss have in mind for solving this problem? The answers to these questions are not clear, inasmuch as the problem can be defined and solved in a number of ways. You will reduce the confusion by communicating with others—your boss, others involved in plant safety, and so on. Over time, through interaction, you will move from high equivocality to lower equivocality.

This process of removing equivocality is an evolutionary process with three parts—enactment, selection, and retention. *Enactment* is the definition of the situation, or registering the presence of equivocal information from outside. In enactment, you pay attention to stimuli, and you acknowledge that equivocality exists. When you accepted the task of dealing with safety problems in the plant, you focused on one problem, which already removed some uncertainty from the field of all possible problems that you could have addressed. For you, then, saying, "Okay, I'll concentrate on this safety problem," was a form of enactment, because it helped you focus.

The second process is *selection*, in which organizational members accept some information as relevant and reject other information. Selection narrows the field, eliminating alternatives with which the participants do not wish to deal at the moment. This process therefore removes even more equivocality from the initial information. For example, in dealing with the safety problem, you may decide to consider only the aspects of safety that present serious hazards and to delay work on situations that are only minor. Notice that you have moved already from a fuzzy, highly equivocal situation to a much clearer one.

The third part of the process of organizing is *retention*, in which certain things will be saved for future use. Retained information is integrated into the existing body of information on which the organization operates. Your group may decide to deal with safety problems that are caused strictly by machinery, rejecting all other kinds of problems. Information on how to deal with machine safety becomes part of the organization's knowledge, to be used in solving future problems. As you can see, the problem has become much less ambiguous; it has moved from equivocality toward even greater clarity.

After retention occurs, organization members face a *choice point*. They must decide first whether to look again at the environment in a new way. Here, they address the question, "Should we (or I) attend to some aspect of the environment that was rejected before?" You may decide, for example, to have your safety group review the rate of accidents that are not related to machinery.

So far this summary may lead you to believe that organizations move from one process of organizing to another in lockstep fashion: enactment, selection, retention, choice. Such is not the case. Individual subgroups in the organization are continually working on activities in all these processes for different aspects of the environment. Although certain segments of the organization may specialize in one or more of the organizing processes, nearly everybody engages in each part at one time or another. While one group is concentrating on one of the factors, another group may be working on a second one.

As people communicate to reduce uncertainty, they go through a series of *behavior cycles*, or routines, that enable the group to clarify things for them. Thus, for example, you might set up a series of meetings to discuss safety problems and decide how to proceed. Behavior cycles, such as these safety meetings, are part of all aspects of organizing—enactment, selection, retention, and choice.

Within a behavior cycle, members' actions are governed by *assembly rules* that guide the choice of routines used to accomplish the process being conducted (enactment, selection, or retention). Rules are sets of criteria on which organizers decide what to do to reduce equivocality. The question answered by assembly rules is this: out of all possible behavior cycles in this organization, which will we use now? For example, in the selection process you might invoke the assembly rule that "two heads are better than one," and on this basis, you decide to call a meeting of plant engineers.

The basic elements of Weick's model—environment, equivocality, enactment, selection, retention, choice points, behavior cycles, and assembly rules—all contribute to the reduction of equivocality. Weick envisions these elements working together in a system, each element related to the others. With this theory, then, we begin to see an expansion from single acts, to interacts, to double interacts, to cycles. Interactional patterns bring individuals together into groups and tie groups together into larger networks. We turn now to a theory that continues this line of thought.

Taylor's Co-orientation Theory of Organizations

Following Weick, James Taylor and his colleagues see organizing as a process of interaction, but they elaborate this idea in a different way.[11] In a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary theory drawn from linguistics, discourse, and organizational theory, Taylor and associates create a picture of how organizations are constructed in conversation.[12] Actually, Taylor's theory includes strong influences from the sociocultural and phenomenological traditions, but because of its clear cybernetic emphasis and its natural extension of Weick's thinking, we include it within this section.

Taylor begins his thinking with the idea that organizing happens when two people interact around a particular focus of concern. Taylor calls this process *co-orientation*,[13] the idea that two people orient to a common object (a topic, issue, concern, situation, idea, goal, person, group, and so on). When co-orienting to a shared concern, communicators try to negotiate a coherent meaning toward that object. Sometimes they are successful in doing so, and sometimes they are not, and it can take considerable interaction to achieve some sort of common meaning. Nevertheless, persons become connected to one another in what Taylor calls an A-B-X triad. A is person 1, B is person 2, and X is the shared concern or focal object of their interaction.

In most cases the two individuals bring different perspectives to the encounter. Taylor describes these as differing *worldviews*. A manager, for example, may feel that a policy change is vital, while an employee feels that it would be harmful. The manager brings the worldview of operational success, while the employee brings a worldview of workload. The manager thinks the policy is needed to improve the process, but the employee resists because it would mean an increase in her workload. Each is evaluating the policy on the basis of different perspectives. These varying orientations toward the shared concern are natural because people have different spheres of concern and differing interests.

Notice that our hypothetical manager and employee, in a dispute about a proposed policy,

must do at least three things in establishing coherent meaning: (1) they must come to some kind of agreement about the facts they jointly face; (2) they must agree on who will do what about these facts; and (3) they must establish a context or basis for ongoing interaction. These three outcomes are always necessary for any A-B-X triad within an organization. For example, they may come to share the opinion that the policy is needed in order to reduce errors (facts), that a change in work practice is needed (who will do what), and that the manager has the authority to make the change (basis of interaction).

Once these outcomes are achieved—a "positive co-orientation" gets established—the two individuals are a kind of "team." They move from being individual agents to collective ones and then enter interactions with other individuals and groups about objects of common concern. The organization is thus built in a process of "scaling up," interaction upon interaction. Taylor uses the analogy of interlinked tiles to get across this idea. Each tile is like an interaction, and each interaction in turn is connected to others, just as one tile is connected to others in tile work. This metaphor contrasts with the more traditional, top-down view, which suggests that the organization is "made" by those in command who direct the activities below.

Although there is some truth to the management model, in fact the actual structure of the organization is constantly reproduced or reinvented by interactions at every level. Managerial interactions are just one type among many, and all interactions contribute to the organization. The macro (overall large view of the organization) and micro (minute daily interactions) each affect the other, so that you cannot really separate overall structure from daily interaction, or conversations.

The process of interpreting back-and-forth conversations give form and life to the organization. According to Taylor, organizing is a circular process, with interaction and interpretation affecting one another. In other words, interaction leads to shared meaning, which in turn shapes our interactions. This will be easier to understand if we can make a distinction

between two theoretical terms—*conversation* and *text.*

Conversation is interaction, or participants' behavior toward one another—what words they use, their demeanor, their gestures. *Text* is what is said—the content and ideas embedded in the language used. Think of it this way: When you are talking to another person, the two of you behave in a variety of ways, back and forth. But these behaviors mean something—they have content, purpose, and effect. When you are concentrating on the interaction behaviors, you are focusing on the conversation; when you are concentrating on what is being said or accomplished, you are focusing on text. The language of the text—whether an employee manual or a joke someone tells—provides a structure of words and grammar that allows you to interpret the meaning of what was written or said. Think of conversation and text not as separate things but as two sides of a coin, each entailing or implicating the other. You cannot have conversation without text, and you cannot have text without conversation. The conversation is understood in terms of the text, and the text is understood in terms of the conversation. This is a process Taylor and associates call *double translation.*

When you look at how organizational texts (such as policy statements) affect or are expressed in interaction, you are engaged in the first translation—from text to conversation—or from the meaning to expression. This would be a concern, for example, whenever you look at the ways in which policies, procedures, roles, and norms affect the nature of interaction within the organization. You would be involved in the second translation—conversation to text—when you assign meaning to the actual conversations within the organization. This translation happens whenever you ask, "What are they doing? What does this pattern of interaction mean?"

Although we do have freedom to communicate in a variety of ways, we are more or less constrained in how to say things because of the conventions of the language and the forms of communication already established in the organization. The same is true of interpretation. We do interpret texts differently, but within a range

of possibilities determined largely by the structure of the language and pre-established forms of discourse. A manager may want to tell employees about the new policy and has choices in how to do this, but the organization has established certain acceptable types of discourse for this sort of communication, and the discourse form selected has certain embedded meanings. So, for example, the manager might send out an email with the subject line, "Change of Policy," which will carry a certain force of authority.

Now let's put all of this together in a second example. Imagine that you are a firefighter and work about 40 hours a week for the city fire department. What do you do every day? You talk, give and take directions, maintain the station and equipment, give fire permits, visit schools, respond to emergency calls, and engage in many other often-regular activities. Each of these activities is done in a series of conversations in which you must have co-orientation with others. The fire department as an organization is more than just a bunch of actions. Something results from all of this that defines and structures the organization itself. Something bigger is happening.

How do you know, then, exactly what characterizes the fire department as an organization? This question shows why text is so important. It is the texts—written and spoken—that represent symbolically how members are defining the organization. Theoretically, you could "listen in" to what people are saying to get a sense of the way they understand their structures and functions. In addition to these more or less ephemeral forms of interaction, you could also look at more permanent texts. Certain individuals will take the role of *agent* for the organization and codify aspects of the organization in a more or less formal text that is taken as a sort of *map* of some aspect of the organization. For example, the human resources department may write an employee manual, the executive committee may draft an organizational chart, the fire chief might give a speech to a community group, a department might write an annual report, a hiring committee might write up a description as part of a job announcement, a work group might keep a log of what they do, or an outside researcher may write a book about the

fire department. These texts are especially important as maps because they provide a generally accepted picture of the organization's boundaries, activities, and the roles of members.

If you observe people actually communicating and see their patterns of interaction and their relationships, you are noticing the *surface structure* of the organization—the daily activities of the members. But these are not random or unconnected interactions. Rather, they are generated from the *deep structure* of the organization. The deep structure is like a grammar or structural arrangement that gives the organization its character and guides its actions—a complex network of rules about the patterns of interaction that are permissible in the organization, obligations of members, and expected duties and responsibilities. It is a moral order or a sense of how things should be done.

There is a recursive relationship between the deep structure and the actual conversations (surface structure) of an organization. The deep structure is made by people communicating with one another, and that deep structure in turn guides the communication itself. This is a circle of influence, a reciprocal back and forth between the deep structure and the surface structure, involving the intimate connection between the two forms of translation—from text to conversation and from conversation to text. At times this relationship is highly stable, which makes organizational life very predictable. Other times it is less stable, as the texts and conversations of the organization undergo changes.

Of course, some master designer does not rationally plan all of this. Indeed, it happens incrementally and over time as real people interact with one another in their daily organizational lives. The structures that are created in the process are largely unintended, and we look more closely at how this happens in the following section. In Taylor's work, you see the influence of structuration theory, which is described later in this chapter.

Network Theory

You can easily see from Weick's and Taylor's theories that patterns of communication will develop over time within an organization. One

way of looking at organizational structure is to examine these patterns of interaction to see who communicates with whom. Since no one communicates equally with all other members of the organization, you can see clusters of communication relationships that link together to establish overall organizational networks.

Networks are social structures created by communication among individuals and groups.[14] As people communicate with others, links are created. These are the lines of communication within an organization. Some of these are prescribed by organizational rules (such as the bureaucratic structure advocated by Weber) and constitute the *formal network*, but these channels reveal only part of the structure of an organization. In contrast, *emergent networks* are the informal channels that are built, not by the formal regulations of an organization, but by regular, daily contact among members.

We used to participate in creating emergent networks by putting memos in interoffice envelopes, picking up the phone, or walking down the hall to talk other employees. Today, our capability of generating links beyond the physical office has exploded with the invention of e-mail. Relationships are constantly formed through ongoing communication, and there is no way to capture this ephemeral and dynamic state of affairs in an organization chart. Researchers, however, do take snapshots of organizational networks and have been able to delve into complex, emergent networks, including such scattered ones that exist via e-mail.[15]

Network research tools enable researchers to conduct *synchronous* analyses, which look at the networks in effect at a given time, and *diachronic* analyses, that show how networks change over time. Here, we only have space to summarize some basic ideas from the vast theoretical literature on networks.[16]

The basic structural idea of network theory is *connectedness*—the idea that there are relatively stable pathways of communication among individuals. Individuals who communicate with one another are linked together into groups that are in turn linked together into the overall network. Every person has a unique set of connections with

others in the organization. These are *personal networks*. Your personal network is the connections you have among the many others with whom you communicate within an organization, and your set of personal networks will look at least a bit different from those of your co-workers.

Because individuals tend to communicate more frequently with certain other organizational members, *group networks* form. Organizations typically consist of many smaller groups, linked together in larger groups in *organizational networks*. Figure 9.1 is a simple drawing of a network. Notice that individuals are linked into groups, and groups are linked into a larger organization.

If you were to analyze a network, you would be able to look at several things. For example, you could look at the ways in which any two persons are linked together. This would be an analysis of *dyads*. You could look at how three individuals are linked, focusing on the *triad*. Beyond this, you might look at *groups* and how these are divided into *subgroups*. Finally, you could look at the ways in which groups link to one another in a *global network*. Analyzing a network into its parts is helpful, but network analysis can do much more. For example, beyond identifying parts, it can look at the qualities of

those parts or actually describe the multiple functions that the same links within a network can fulfill, such as friendship, information sharing, or influence. This aspect of networks is called *multiplexity*.

The basic unit of organization, then, according to network theory, is the *link* between two persons. The organizational system consists of innumerable links that cluster people into groups and connect them to the organization. A link can be defined by its purpose or purposes, how much it is shared, and its functions within the organization. Most links have more than one purpose. You might, for example, use a link for both information sharing and friendship. This is certainly the case in our organizational lives. For example, a few members of our department meet outside of the university as part of a knitting group. Occasionally, a link may be exclusive, but usually it is shared with many others.

Links can also define a particular *network role*, meaning that they connect groups in particular ways. As the members of an organization communicate with one another, they fulfill a variety of roles vis-à-vis the network. For example, a *bridge* is a member of a group who is also a member of another group. A *liaison* connects two groups but is a member of neither. An *isolate* is an individual who is not linked to anyone else. You can also look at the *degree* to which one is linked to others. *In-degree* reflects the number of contacts other people make with you, while *out-degree* involves the number of links you initiate with others. *Centrality* is the extent to which you are connected to everyone else. Network researchers have looked at many variables related to individuals' connectedness within the network.

Researchers also analyze certain qualities of the links among persons. For example, links can be *direct*, involving a straight link between two people, or *indirect*, in which case two people are connected through a third person. The number of links between you and any other person is called *degrees of separation*. You might have heard it said that there are only six degrees of separation between you and any other person in the world—in other words, if this is true, it would require only six links to locate any other person

FIGURE **9.1**

A Simple Network
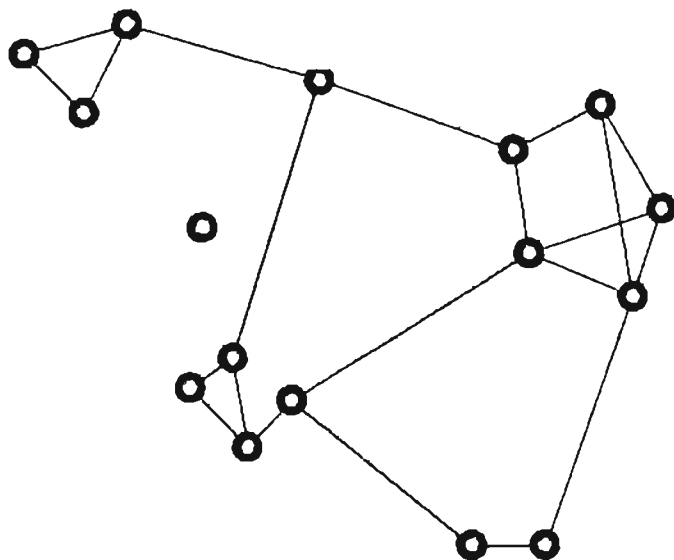
you are looking for. Links also vary in terms of *frequency* and *stability*, or how often they occur and how predictable they are.

An organization never consists of a single network but is shaped by numerous overlapping ones. Although most networks are multifunctional, or *multiplex*, they may concentrate more on one function than another. For example, you may find networks that exert power or influence, often called *authority or instrumental networks*. Others include friendship or affiliation, information, production, and innovation.

A network can be characterized by a number of qualities. One is *size*, or the sheer number of people. Another is *connectedness*, the ratio of actual links to possible links. A highly connected network is strong and close, and such networks can exert much influence by establishing norms for thought and behavior. You will feel closer and be more influenced by a group of students · you see and interact with every day in the residence hall than you will by students you only see occasionally in classes.

Another characteristic of a network is its *centrality*, or the degree to which individuals and groups are connected to just a few go-betweens. A highly centralized organization has lines going from groups into a small number of hubs. A *decentralized* system has more connectedness among members overall, with no one group controlling those links. If you have to go through the same small group of individuals every time you need something, you will not be very connected to other members of the organization. On the other hand, if you have freedom to contact just about anyone, you will be more connected generally throughout the organization.

There is a great deal of theoretical work addressing the ways in which networks function in organizations.[17] For example, networks can (1) control information flow; (2) bring people with common interests together; (3) build common interpretations; (4) enhance social influence; and (5) allow for an exchange of resources. Network theory paints a picture of an organization, or, perhaps more accurately, a variety of pictures, each capturing an aspect of organizational functioning.

The theories in this section help us see a system in action. Weick provides a microview, in which interaction—back-and-forth responses—create clarity and define the system for its members. Taylor shows how co-orientation builds up to create organizational agreements. At the same time, interaction organizes itself into lines of communication and influence that spread out through the organization, as network theory so nicely illustrates.

You can clearly see the effects of the cybernetic tradition on this line of work. Interaction creates mutual influence, and the resultant networks form the overall system itself. As we move in the next section from the structure of connections into the meanings and understandings that are established within these connections, we start to feel the influence of the sociocultural tradition.

◖ THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

Sociocultural theories are less concerned with the network of connections among individuals and more focused on the shared meanings and interpretations that are constructed within the network and the implications of these constructions for organizational life. Part of what gets made is a sense of what the organization is—its structure and form. In other words, our conversations create maps for understanding the structure of the organization, but these guides or common understandings are made possible by deeper structures of meaning that emerge in talk.

Organizational talk creates a certain amount of control within the organization and thereby may exert power as well. Talk is not just about information but establishes patterns of influence that affect who we are and what we do within the organization.

Conversations over time give the organization a feel or character that will differ from that of other organizations. The character of an organization is often called its culture, which consists of shared rules, norms, values, and practices that are commonly used and accepted within the organization. In this section, we present four representative

theories of the sociocultural tradition—structuration theory, organizational control theory, and organizational culture.

Structuration Theory

In Chapter 8, we presented the ideas of Anthony Giddens on structuration. You will recall that structuration is a process in which the unintended consequences of action create norms, rules, roles, and other social structures that constrain or affect future action. Structuration occurs constantly in all social systems. Marshall Scott Poole and Robert McPhee have applied this idea further to organizational communication.[18] For Poole and McPhee, structure is both a manifestation and a product of communication in the organization. The formal structure of an organization, as announced in employee manuals, organizational charts, and policies, enables two types of communication. First, it is an indirect way of telling employees about the organization—its values, procedures, and methods. Second, it is a way in which members can talk about the communication within their organization.

Organizational structure is created when individuals communicate with others in three metaphorical "sites" or *centers of structuration*.[19] The first includes all those episodes of organizational life in which people make decisions and choices that limit what can happen within the organization. This is the site of *conception*. A university's decision to establish a new college of creative arts, for example, will affect the lines of communication within the organization.

The second site of organizational structuration is the formal codification and announcement of decisions and choices—the site of *implementation*. Once the decision is made to establish the new college, the provost may send out a formal memorandum to the faculty and staff announcing the change. That formal announcement itself will be instrumental in shaping the structure of the organization in the future.

Finally, structuration occurs as organizational members act in accordance with the organizational decisions, which is the site of *reception*. To continue the example, after the decision is made to establish a college of creative arts, a dean will be recruited, certain department heads will meet with the new dean, and faculty lines of communication will change as the new college is put in place within the organization.

Although anyone in an organization may from time to time participate in communication at any or all three sites, structuration tends to be specialized. Top management usually is involved in conceptual communication, various staff personnel perform the job of implementation, and the general workforce itself participates in reception. While this makes it sound easy, it rarely is. The communication activities at these three sites are often difficult, overlapping, and conflict laden. Indeed, rarely is a new college established at a university without considerable disagreement and resistance at all three stages and across all employees, which is the case with major changes in any kind of organization. The outcome of any new decision in an organization is very much affected by communication patterns in place and the communication skills of the people involved.

In addition to organizational structure, the climate also emerges from structuration.[20] Traditionally, climate has been viewed as one of the key variables affecting communication and the subsequent productivity and satisfaction of employees. For Poole and McPhee, *climate* is the general collective description of the organization that shapes members' expectations and feelings and therefore the organization's performance. The members of the organization enact climates as they go through their daily activities, and any organization may actually have a variety of climates for different groups of people.

Poole and McPhee define climate structurationally as "a collective attitude, continually produced and reproduced by members' interaction."[21] In other words, a climate is not an objective "variable" that affects the organization, nor is it an individual's perception of the organization. Rather, climate arises out of the interaction among those who participate in or affiliate with the organization. Climate is a product of structuration: it is both a medium and an outcome of interaction.[22]

Poole sees climate as a hierarchy of three strata. The first is a set of terms that members use to define and describe the organization: the *concept pool*. The second is a basic, highly abstract shared conception of the atmosphere of the organization: the *kernel climate*. Finally, the groups' translations of the kernel climate into more concrete terms affecting their particular part of an organization constitute the third element: the *particular climate*. The kernel climate permeates the entire organization, but particular climates may vary from one segment of the organization to another. The three layers in the hierarchy are related in a linear way: (1) the concepts create an understanding of what is going on in the organization; (2) from these basic understandings, the kernel climate arises; and then (3) subgroups translate these general principles into specific elements of climate that in turn affect the thinking, feeling, and behavior of the individuals.

An example of this process is found in a study of a consulting firm.[23] The firm consisted of two generations of employees—a group that had

been with the firm a relatively long time and a group of more recent employees. Though the two groups shared a common set of concepts, they seemed to experience different climates. From these core concepts, four key elements of a kernel climate emerged in this organization:

1. "The firm has a rigid formal structure that is often constraining."
2. "Contribution to profits is very important."
3. "Creative work is valued over routine work."
4. "Commitment of employees is important."

These four elements of the kernel climate were translated differently into the particular climates of the two groups. The first-generation employees believed that "pressure is manageable," and that "there is room for growth." The second-generation employees, however, believed that "pressure hinders performance" and that "there is little room for growth." Figure 9.2 illustrates this example.[24]

How do the elements of climate develop in an organization? We know already from a structurational perspective that the climate is produced by

Concept pool	Kernel climate	Particular climates	Behavorial/ affective reactions
Profit	"The firm has a rigid formal structure that is often constraining"	[For First-Generation Employees:]	[For First-Generation Employees:]
First generation–second generation		"Pressure is manageable"	"High commitment"
Specialist-generalist	"Contribution to profits is very important"	"There is room for growth"	"High evaluation of own performance"
Commitment			"High satisfaction"
Creative-routine	"Creative work is valued over routine work"	[For Second-Generation Employees:]	[For Second-Generation Employees:]
Structure		"Pressure hinders performance"	"High commitment"
Bureaucracy	"Commitment of employees is important"	"Little room for growth"	"Uneven evaluation of own performance"
Renaissance man			"Low satisfaction"

FIGURE 9.2

Schematic of Climate Structure

the practices of organizational members; and, in turn, climate affects and constrains those practices. Thus, climate is not static but is constantly in the process of development. Three interacting factors enter into this developmental process.

The first is the *structure of the organization* itself. Because structure limits the kinds of interactions and practices that can be engaged in, it limits the kind of climate that can result from these interactions and practices. For example, if the organization is highly segmented with strong differentiation among employees and departments, individuals will have a limited pool of co-workers with whom they can communicate, which increases the chance of a "restrained" climate.

The second factor that affects climate is various *climate-producing apparatuses,* or mechanisms designed to affect employee perceptions and performance, such as newsletters, training programs, and the like. The third factor is *member* characteristics—the skills and knowledge of the members. For example, if employees are sufficiently intelligent and reflective, they may challenge existing authority and "see through" apparatuses. Member characteristics also include the degree of agreement or coordination within work groups.

It is interesting to reflect on the ways in which structuration achieves control in the organization. You cannot do anything you want in an organization, because of the structure and climate that is produced in everyday communication. In other words, structuration creates control. The theory discussed in the following section expands on this idea in more detail.

Organizational Control Theory

Phillip Tompkins, George Cheney, and their colleagues have developed a useful and fresh approach to organizational communication.[25] These theorists are interested in the ways in which ordinary communication establishes a certain amount of control over employees. Actually, control is exerted in organizations in four ways.[26] The first is *simple control,* or use of direct, open power.

The second is *technical control,* or use of devices and technologies. For example, if employees are given a cell phone and told to use it for their work, they become under the technical control of the phone. They can, for instance, be contacted on it literally 24 hours a day. The third form of control is *bureaucratic,* which involves the use of organizational procedures and formal rules, much as Weber envisioned. Employees may be given a manual that includes policies to be followed, and memos, reports, meetings, and performance reviews are used to communicate additional expectations.

The fourth, and most interesting to Cheney and Tompkins, is *concertive control*—the use of interpersonal relationships and teamwork as a means of control. This is the subtlest form of control because it relies on a shared reality and shared values: "In the concertive organization, the explicitly written rules and regulations are largely replaced by the common understanding of values, objectives, and means of achievement, along with a deep appreciation for the organization's 'mission.' This we call . . . the 'soul of the new organization.'"[27]

Although the four types of control are normally found in various combinations, there is a trend away from simple, direct control toward this more subtle, complex, concertive form. Concertive control is a kind of "discipline," or force, which maintains order and consistency through power.[28] Power can never be avoided and is always in the system, but power is not an external force. Instead, it is always created by various forms of interaction within the organization. Power, then, accomplishes control, but by submitting to control, the workers themselves reinforce the same sources of power.

In concertive control, discipline is accomplished by "normalizing" behaviors, making certain ways of operating normal and natural, something organizational members want to do. An unwritten dress code is a good example. People just notice how others dress and a common "uniform" begins to emerge. So again, we see that discipline reinforces the very power relations that make discipline possible. In contemporary organizations, disciplinary control is best accomplished in four ways.

First, it involves unobtrusive methods. Discipline is not necessarily obvious or conscious but is part of the ongoing daily activity of the organization. For example, something as simple as work hours is a form of control, and to the extent that employees accept these hours, they are participating in their own control. In many universities, for example, there are no formal rules—at least not obvious ones—about when professors should be on campus, but everyone understands implicitly that they must be there to meet their classes, hold office hours, and attend meetings of committees of which they are a member.

Second, discipline is collaboratively produced. Organizational members work together to make a set of practices normal, to establish a set of standards, a discipline. Meetings are a good example. In many organizations, meetings tend to start on the hour and end on the hour. Whether one, two, or three hours in length, this pattern is common. People collaborate in making this a normal state of affairs. They come on time and when the hour is up, they follow their expectations by packing up and heading for the door. They tend to schedule meetings at 11:00 or 2:00, not 11:05 or 2:23.

Third, discipline is a part of social relations. What people say and do to one another is both governed by and produces normalized practices. The unacknowledged rules in an organization tell you what topics you can and cannot talk about on the job, when and where interaction can take place, what nonverbal behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate, and who can initiate conversations. With the advent of e-mail, things can get said that would not necessarily be said in face-to-face situations, and organizations quickly develop informal rules about what is and is not appropriate.

Finally, the most effective means of control are based on the values that motivate organizational members—the very things for which they strive. These may include money, time, accomplishment, a sense of teamwork, and so forth. Being part of a team you really enjoy at work may be far more motivating than traditional rewards like money.

According to Tompkins and Cheney, organizational decision making follows a syllogistic pattern, in which participants reason deductively from general premises and in which choices are based on those premises.[29] Control is exerted when workers, who accept certain general premises, reason to the conclusions desired by management. The premises are accepted because of incentives like wages and the authority of people with legitimate power—very much in line with Weber's notion of bureaucracy. This acceptance does not come automatically, however, because conflict often results from differences between employees' personal beliefs and the premises of the organization. Indeed, a substantial amount of industrial strife results from such differences. How, then, do organizations achieve concertive control in the face of potential conflict? The answer lies in the process of constructing personal identity.[30]

Among many things created through interaction in organizations is identity. Naturally, we have complex personal identities, and much of who we are is based in the relationships we establish with others within groups and organizations. One's identity is tightly connected to identification. *Identification* is a process of linking oneself with others. You might identify with a relative or friend, with a group, or with an entire organization.

In organizational life, we identify, or link ourselves, with many different sources. Here, theorists rely largely on the work of Kenneth Burke (Chapter 5).[31] *Identification* occurs when individuals become aware of their common ground. We identify with individuals with whom we share something in common; and the more we share with one another, the more the potential identification between us. When employees identify with the organization, they are more likely to accept the organization's premises and make decisions consistent with organizational objectives.

Who we are in the organization, our identities, determines to a certain extent the identifications we forge. At the same time, our identifications shape who we are, our identities. This two-way street is referred to in the theory as the *identity-identification duality*. Tompkins and Cheney believe that the identity-identification process is structurational (as explained in the previous

section). In other words, in the process of actively seeking affiliations with others, we unwittingly create structures that in turn affect our identities. Many a professor has been made this way. A student finds a professor he really likes, identifies with that person, establishes a relationship with the professor, starts to take on academic values, and becomes the professor's research assistant. The effect of all of this is a set of expectations between the student, the professor, and perhaps others that lead to the student's development of an academic identity, which leads the student to the decision to go to graduate school to become a professor and teach in a university, where the pattern is continued.

What will begin to happen within an organization over time is that members create a mutual identification with the organization. Because their personal identity is shaped in part by this identification, they begin to take on the values, ideas, and ideals of the organization. This identification shapes members' assumptions and behaviors, and this is the essence of concertive control, in which members come to "reason" jointly with shared premises. The acceptance of organizational premises is part of a process of organizational identification.[32]

Once a certain amount of identification is achieved, organizational enthymemes make concertive control possible. Described by Aristotle more than 2,000 years ago, the *enthymeme* is a rhetorical device used to involve audiences in the advocate's reasoning process.[33] In an enthymeme, one or more premises in a reasoning chain are left out and supplied by the audience. In organizations, members are a kind of audience that reaches particular conclusions based on shared implicit premises. Sometimes the suppressed premises are widely accepted cultural values; other times they are inculcated through persuasion.

For example, a speaker advocating the prohibition of offshore drilling might reason that (1) offshore drilling endangers the fragile coastal ecology; (2) coastal ecology is valuable and should be protected; and (3) therefore, offshore drilling should be prohibited. In addressing fellow members of an environmental organization, this speaker would not need to be explicit about

this argument and could rely on members' acceptance of these premises, leading to an almost automatic acceptance of the claim. The members would readily work against offshore drilling because of their identification with the environmental organization.

Tompkins and Cheney are especially interested in how enthymemes are used in organizations for unobtrusive control of decision making. These authors point out that when members display loyalty and behave "organizationally," they are essentially accepting key organizational premises. Often organizations directly sell their premises to employees through company newsletters, training programs, and the like. Other times, organizations employ a variety of incentives to induce employees to become loyal.

In any case, once employees accept certain premises, their conclusions and decisions are controlled. For example, one premise of many industrial firms is that obsolescence is positive because it maintains progress, sustains the market, and protects jobs. Once engineers buy this idea, they opt automatically for designs that include planned obsolescence because they accept the basic organizational premise.

To explore organizational identification, Michael Papa, Mohammad Auwal, and Arvind Singhal studied the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.[34] Grameen (meaning *rural bank*) was founded in 1976 as an experiment in rural development and empowerment. It was designed to extend banking services to the poor; eliminate exploitation; create an employment base; and establish small, local banking institutions run by the people themselves.

From the beginning, participants, including loan applicants, were recruited to support the mission of the bank. Through such means as inspirational talks, new employees were induced to establish identification and buy into the values and goals of the organization. They were invited to buy into a team concept, in which all employees, and even clients, were to be working together to achieve the permanent elimination of poverty. The bank has been very successful and has received international acclaim, an honor that is shared with employees at every level. The workers are the

strongest advocates for the mission and values of the organization, and they enforce very high standards (not mandated by management) on themselves and other employees.

The organization represents the epitome of concertive control through identification. Members work hard to ensure that loan recipients make their payments. Because employees' identities are so wrapped up in the bank, they exert tremendous peer pressure to work hard on behalf of the organization. Employees, then, identify both with the bank mission of uplifting the poor and with other employees at their local branch office. This very strong level of concertive control is paradoxical. It seems to empower employees to establish their own standards, but in the process, their procedures and work ethic have become institutionalized, which ironically disempowers employees, who might otherwise want to establish new ways of working. Employees are emancipated from oppression, but they are oppressed anew by the very forms they themselves have created.

Concertive control is one of several mechanisms used by organizations to manage multiple identities. The complex organization today does not have a single image with a single set of consistent interests. Rather, it is a complex system of interacting, sometimes contradictory, identities, and organizational communication must manage this multiple state of affairs. George Cheney explains the difficulty: "To speak of collective identity is to speak of collective or shared interests—or at least of how the interests of a collective are represented and understood. This is a fundamental concern of contemporary organizations. Large bureaucratic organizations are in the business of identity management; their controlling members must be concerned about how to (re)present the organization as a whole *and* how to connect the individual identities of many members to that embracing collective identity."[35]

Thus the organization must have a way of inducing individuals, with all their variable interests, into a common identification with the organization. A diversity of identities, even conflicting ones, can be handled if there is at least some level of overall identification with the organization as a

whole. Sometimes organizations must change, which means altering an identity, but to survive, the organization must create a new identity based in part on the interests of a substantial portion of its membership.

For these reasons, unbridled pluralism and diversity cannot be tolerated by an organization, and concertive control through identification is therefore essential. One of the unifying factors of an organization can be its culture, and we explore a theory with this focus next.

Organizational Culture

Theories of organizational culture emphasize the ways people construct an organizational reality. As the study of an organization's way of life, this approach looks at the meanings and values of the members. It examines the way individuals use stories, rituals, symbols, and other types of activity to produce and reproduce a set of understandings.[36] The organizational culture movement has become incredibly broad, touching upon almost all aspects of organizational life.[37]

John Van Maanen and Stephen Barley outline four "domains" of organizational culture.[38] The first domain, the *ecological context*, is the physical world, including the location, the time and history, and the social context within which the organization operates. The second domain of culture consists of networks, or *differential interaction*. Then there are the common ways of interpreting events, or *collective understanding*. This is the "content" of the culture—its ideas, ideals, values, and practices. Finally, there are the practices or actions of individuals, which constitute the *individual domain*. Few large organizations comprise a single culture. In most cases, subcultures identified with particular groups will emerge. You can imagine an organization as a set of Venn diagrams or overlapping cultural circles.

Work on organizational culture marks an important shift in this field from functionalism to interpretation—from the assumption that the organization has pre-existing elements that act on one another in predictable ways to the assumption that there is a constantly changing set of meanings constructed through communication.

Organizational culture theory has been greatly influenced by the sociocultural tradition within communication. Within this tradition, organizations present opportunities for cultural interpretation;[39] the organizations create a shared reality that distinguishes them from organizations with other cultures. Gareth Morgan explains: "Shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense making are all different ways of describing culture. In talking about culture we are really talking about a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways. These patterns of understanding also provide a basis for making one's own behavior sensible and meaningful."[40]

Organizational culture is something that is made through everyday interaction within the organization—not just task work but all kinds of communication. As one example, Michael Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo in their work on culture ask particular kinds of questions designed to uncover cultural patterns in an organization. Following the lead of Victor Turner (Chapter 11), these authors note that "performances are those very actions by which members constitute and reveal their culture to themselves and others."[41] These scholars explain the difference between this approach and traditional methods in these terms:

> We believe that an intriguing thing about communication is the way in which it creates and constitutes the taken-for-granted reality of the world. Social activity, as we see it, is primarily the communicative accomplishment of interrelated actions. So whereas the underlying motive of traditional research is coming to an understanding of how to make organizations work better, the underlying motive of the organizational culture approach is coming to understand how organizational life is accomplished communicatively. To understand how organizational life is brought into being, we cannot let ourselves be limited to asking questions that require some implicit or explicit link to organizational productivity for their legitimacy.[42]

What do organizational members use to create and display their understanding of events within the organization? According to these theorists,

there are many indicators, including relevant constructs and related vocabulary, perceived facts, practices or activities, metaphors, stories, and rites and rituals. All these are performances because they display the lived experience of the group. However, performances, like stage plays, are also accomplishments. They bring about the reality of the culture: "performance brings the significance or meaning of some structural form—be it symbol, story, metaphor, ideology, or saga—into being."[43]

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo outline four characteristics of communication performances. First, they are interactional, more like dialogues than soliloquies. In other words, they are social actions, not solitary ones. Organizational performances are something people participate in together. Second, performances are contextual. They cannot be viewed as independent acts but are always embedded in a larger frame of activity; the performance, in other words, both reflects and produces its context. Third, performances are episodes. They are events with a beginning and an end, and the performers can identify the episode and distinguish it from others. Finally, performances are improvised. There is flexibility in how a communication episode is played out, and although the same performances may be given again and again, they are never repeated in exactly the same way.

The authors present a suggestive list of organizational communication performances. The first is *ritual*—something that is repeated regularly. It is familiar and routine, such as staff meetings or company picnics. Rituals are especially important because they constantly renew our understandings of our common experience, and they lend legitimacy to what we are thinking, feeling, and doing. Here is an example "Each and every day, Lou Polito, owner and general manager of Lou Polito Dodge, opens all the company mail. On those occasions when he is 'free,' he personally delivers this mail to the appropriate divisions in the company. This is just his way of letting his people know that he is keeping in touch with what they are doing."[44] This is an example of a *personal ritual*.

Another type is a *task ritual*, which is a repeated activity that helps members do their jobs. The following example from Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo shows a task ritual operating among members of a police department:

> When a Valley View patrolman stops a driver for some traffic violation, he launches into a conversational routine that involves a question-answer sequence. "May I see your driver's license please?" "Is this your correct address?" "May I see your registration please?" "Do you know why I stopped you?" "Do you know what the speed limit is on this street?" "Do you know how fast you were going?" "Do you want to see the reading on the radar gun?" Although the officer has been taught this routine at the Police Academy as a way of being polite and professional, the Valley View police use it in order to see how the driver responds, to "size him up," and decide whether or not to give him any "breaks" in issuing a citation or warning.[45]

Social rituals are not task related, yet they are important performances within organizations. The after-work drink is a good example: "Every Friday afternoon, the foremen from Steele Manufacturing go to the 'Pub,' one of the few places in their part of town that serves beer. The conversations are often filled with 'shop talk' but can range from sports . . . to politics."[46]

Finally, *organizational rituals* are those in which an entire work group participates with some regularity: "Each year, the department of communication has its annual picnic, highlighted by the traditional softball game which pits the graduate students against the faculty. Competition is typically fierce; but alas for the graduate nine, they have had but one win in the last five years."[47]

The second category of performances is what Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo call *passion*. Here, workers put on performances that make otherwise dull and routine duties interesting or passionate. Perhaps the most common way this is done is by *storytelling*. Almost everybody tells stories about their work, and the telling is often lively and dramatic. Further, these stories are told over and over, and people often enjoy telling one another the same stories again and again. New members of an organization quickly hear about the time the manager forgot to come to the monthly staff meeting, about how the CEO unexpectedly inherited the company from her grandfather, or the time the boss let everyone go home early one day because he won a big award. We tell stories about ourselves (personal stories), about other people (collegial stories), or about the organization (corporate stories).

Another way drama is created on the job is by means of *passionate repartee*, which consists of dramatic interactions and the use of lively language: "The Valley View police, for example, do not deal with 'civilians,' but rather with 'assholes,' 'dirtbags,' 'creeps,' and 'maggots'—labels which serve as reminders that the 'negative element' is so much a part of the everyday experience of being a police officer."[48]

A third category of performance involves *sociality*, which reinforces a common sense of propriety and makes use of social rules within the organization. Courtesies and pleasantries are examples. *Sociabilities* are performances that create a group sense of identification and include things like joking, "bitching," and "talking shop." *Privacies* are sociality performances that communicate sensitivity and privacy. They include such things as confessing, consoling, and criticizing. The department administrator who tells her manager on Monday morning about the difficulties she had with her teenaged son that weekend is engaging in privacies.

A fourth category of performance involves *organizational politics*. These performances, which create and reinforce notions of power and influence, may include showing personal strength, cementing allies, and bargaining. These performances typically involve moves designed to strategically position oneself in a certain way within the organization for political reasons.

A fifth category is *enculturation*, or processes of "teaching" the culture to organizational members. Enculturation is ongoing, but certain performances are especially vital to this process. Orientation of newcomers is an example. On a less formal scale, "learning the ropes" consists of a series of performances in which individuals teach others how things are done. Although this can be accomplished by direct instruction

("That's how we do it here"), most often this kind of learning occurs when people talk about things that happened in a way that helps other individuals learn how to interpret events. A new faculty member, recently hired in our department, asked a colleague whether she was going to the department's graduation. The colleague, who had to be out of town, said no, and the new professor formed the mistaken impression that attendance at graduation was optional. She ended up sitting in her office during the ceremony, thinking it no big deal, and planned instead to attend the reception afterward.

In the police department that Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo studied, officer Davis tells rookie Benson how to handle a rowdy drunk. Benson says he heard that Davis almost got in a fight with a drunk, and Davis replies, "Not really. I didn't give the guy a chance to get mad at me." Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo present the following interpretation of this exchange: "We take Davis' interaction with Benson as a unique enculturation performance, a metacommunicative commentary that instructs Benson in how he should interpret the prior performance. This metacommunication informs the rookie that the prior exchange was not an endorsement of fighting but was backstage 'play.' And, as the rookie observes more instances of this backstage 'tough' talk, he comes to understand it as 'not real,' but serious nonetheless."[49]

Coming to understand the cultural meanings of organizational performances such as this exchange between officers proceeds like any ethnography. The researcher first describes the actions of the organizational members and then constructs an interpretation of them in terms that are not only faithful from the native's point of view but are also understandable by people outside the organization. This is in every way a hermeneutic process, which illustrates the crossover between the sociocultural and phenomenological traditions within the organizational culture literature.

All of the theories in this section focus on the outcomes of social interaction in organizations. Something is constructed when people interact, and these theories outline a variety of meanings that are worked out in daily organizational

communication. The topic of each theory is somewhat different. Some are broader in describing the overall process of social interaction and its outcomes, while others are narrower in identifying the specific forms that interaction takes as well as what gets made in the process. Notice how consistent these theories are with the tenets of the cybernetic tradition. Indeed, all, except possibly organizational culture, combine both the sociocultural and cybernetic traditions.

Because sociocultural theories rely mostly on an interpretive approach, they are influenced by the tradition of phenomenology. At some level, these theories must rely on data gathered by participants or observers' experiences, which allow them to cross over into the phenomenological. This overlap with phenomenology is not trivial, as the interpretive approach has had a major impact on organization studies. Dennis Mumby believes that this shift has brought forth a series of challenges to mainstream organization theory. One outcome is the emergence of what Mumby calls a "discourse of suspicion," which challenges existing interests and power arrangements in organizations.[50] With this challenge, we move from the sociocultural to the critical tradition.

◖ THE CRITICAL TRADITION

The critical tradition in organizational communication also is concerned with culture, but more specifically with the power relations and ideologies that arise in organizational interaction. Recognizing that mainstream organizational research dealing with organizational structures and functions privileges largely managerial interests such as productivity and effectiveness, critical/cultural scholars of organizations began to take such interests into account. Dennis Mumby states: "One of the principal tenets of the critical studies approach is that organizations are not simply neutral sites of meaning formation; rather, they are produced and reproduced in the context of struggles between competing interest groups and systems of representation."[51] Critical communication scholars have addressed social

realities less as physical sites and more as environments in which competing voices and interests vie for dominance.[52]

To suggest the directions of critical organizational communication theory, we describe Dennis Mumby's concern more specifically in terms of how power functions ideologically in organizations. We then move to Stanley Deetz's theory of organizational democracy. Feminist perspectives on organizational power have been particularly prominent in the last decade and provide an example of the particular links between theory and practice that critical theories of organizations advocate, and we conclude this section with a look at feminist approaches.

Dennis Mumby's Discourse of Suspicion

Dennis Mumby's work in organizational communication embodies a shift from approaches that attempt merely to describe the organizational world to an approach that highlights the ways in which the organizational world creates patterns of domination. Mumby calls for a "discourse of suspicion," or an attitude of questioning about, and an examination of, the deep structure of ideology, power, and control within the organization. Adapted from Paul Ricouer's phrase, "hermeneutics of suspicion," Mumby uses the phrase *discourse of suspicion* to suggest how surface meanings and behaviors obscure deep structure conflict and constraints that limit the possibilities of a democratic society.[53] In other words, such discourses are suspicious of the normal order within organizations, seeking to understand the underlying structures and especially the power relations at work.

It is one thing to describe an organization as having a certain structure, function, and culture; it is another thing to question the moral correctness of that structure, function, and culture. For example, you might question the highly valued Weberian bureaucracy as antithetical to the interests of workers, you might challenge a process of concertive control because it subverts what employees most want and need, or you might criticize the culture of an organization as promoting

the power of one group over another. All of these are examples of a discourse of suspicion.

Mumby himself undertakes such a critical examination using the concept of hegemony from classical critical theory. *Hegemony* in organizational communication involves "relations of domination in which subordinated groups actively consent to and support belief systems and structures of power relations that do not necessarily serve—indeed may work against—those interests."[54] For example, in traditional capitalism, companies work to reduce costs and increase profits. Within this scheme, employees are a "cost," and one way of increasing profitability is to downsize, or lay off employees. Notice that this practice is not value neutral but reflects a particular way of thinking about human beings. The interests of the corporation are clearly higher in priority than those of its employees. And the reasoning goes that by increasing profits, the organization actually helps people in the long run because profits are not just profits but are a resource for future expansion and development of the organization. As the organization grows, the expanded profits mean more jobs in the future, which mean more people can be hired. This is a classic example of hegemony, a "story" or set of understandings that promote the interests of one group over those of another.

Hegemony is rarely a brute power move but is instead a "worked out" set of arrangements in which stakeholder buy-in actually contributes to domination. Power is established within an organization by the domination of one ideology over others. This occurs through rituals, stories, and the like, and Mumby shows how the culture of an organization involves an inherently political process. Through storytelling, for example, narratives form certain kinds of texts that create and perpetuate ideologies.

For example, there is a story that has been repeatedly told and retold at IBM. As the story goes, a 22-year-old female security guard stopped the chairman of the board because he did not have the appropriate badge to enter the area she was guarding. Although you might think that the boss would pull rank, he quietly secured the proper badge and gained entry.[55] One reading of this

story is that the chairman was a nice guy who wanted to follow the rules. But the story would not be noteworthy at all if power relations were not important. The immense power difference between these two individuals, built into the system, is evident when the chairman of the board can choose to go along rather than pull rank. If he had not been a higher up, there would have been no power differential, no choice, and thus no story.

Hegemony is normally considered a negative influence in the critical tradition, but Mumby suggests that we have forgotten that resistance and transformation are also involved. Viewed in this way, hegemony can provide a more nuanced way to understand conflicting interests as they play out in organizations. The introduction of the notion of resistance shifts attention away from structures of domination that control to the productive ways organizational members resist, and thus reconfigure, the terrain of struggle.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of organizations as a huge playing field between two teams—domination and resistance—with each trying to "beat" the other. More accurately, hegemony involves a continuum between a single, all-encompassing ideology at one end and widespread resistance on the other; it is a process of struggle rather than a state of domination, which ultimately offers scholars a more adequate way to discuss this dynamic. Critical communication scholars are more concerned with the everyday hegemony and resistance that happens in ordinary organizational life than with the more obvious forms of resistance.

For example, a manager may tell his employees, "If you have too much to do, just come to me, and I'll give you a set of priorities." For many employees, this is a solution to the workload problem: let management decide. This is a minor example of hegemony in operation. However, if you talk to employees, they may tell you that they want more control over prioritizing their own work and may resist asking the manager for help. This is a small act of resistance.

Mumby's notion of hegemony, then, is a pragmatic, interactive, and dialectical process of assertion and resistance. Hegemony is not so much a question of an active and powerful

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I am continually fascinated by the subtle and complex ways in which communication symbolically constructs organizational realities that both enable and constrain people. This construction process doesn't just happen but involves a complex and ongoing "struggle over meaning," in which different groups compete to define what counts as "reality." The "hermeneutics of suspicion," as Ricoeur described the struggle, allows us to get beneath the everydayness of communication to understand its deeper connection to the dynamics of control and resistance.

—Dennis K. Mumby

group dominating a passive and less powerful one, but a process of power arrangements emerging as an active process of multigroup social construction. Hegemony is a necessary result—neither always bad, nor always good—of struggle among stakeholder groups in everyday situated action.[56]

To provide a picture of the ideal way in which empowerment should occur, we turn to Stanley Deetz's theory of democracy in organizations.

Deetz on Managerialism and Organizational Democracy

Calling for a democracy of everyday action, Stanley Deetz shows that contemporary organizations privilege managerial interests over the interests of identity, community, or democracy.[57] Small examples such as setting daily work priorities are part of a larger picture in which the interests of management dominate those of the workers. Deetz imagines democracy as an alternative, an "ongoing accomplishment" in which stakeholders can reclaim responsibility and agency in the corporation.[58] Democracy, in other words, should occur in the daily practice of communication, and it is here that change in organizational cultures begins. For example, a manager could invite employees to set workplace goals and negotiate priorities. Deetz believes, however, that this kind

of effort is not typical or normal in today's organization.

In contrast to a democratic value, the normal discourse of organizations, according to Deetz, tends to be one of domination. Normal discourse in organizations embodies four dimensions of domination—naturalization, neutralization, legitimation, and socialization. *Naturalization* is the assumption of truth on the part of powerful stakeholders. Players assume that what they believe about organizations, the goals of organizations, and the structure of organizations is natural, normal, and accepted by all. The organizational ethic that management sets priorities is a clear example. *Neutralization* is the idea that information is neutral, or value free. For example, when the human resources department sends out an e-mail describing a new health insurance program, the assumption is that this is just "neutral" information that in no way asserts power. *Legitimation* is the attempt of the organization to privilege one form of discourse as the voice of authority within the organization. Weber's idea of legitimate authority, defined earlier in the chapter, is exactly this: the management perspective is considered authoritative over other perspectives. Finally, *socialization* is the ongoing process of "training" employees to accept and follow the moral order of the organization. Cheney and Tompkins's idea of concertive control, discussed earlier in this chapter, is one example of this. Explicit indoctrination and training programs are also examples.

These processes—naturalization, neutralization, legitimation, and socialization—constitute a *systematically distorted communication* that serves the interests of managerial capitalism. *Managerial capitalism*, which permeates the modern organization, aims to reproduce the organization for the ultimate survival of management itself. Notice the difference between managerial capitalism and traditional production capitalism. The goal of traditional capitalism was to expand production and make money. While this interest is still alive and well, Deetz is concerned with a different set of interests that serve to preserve management as a stakeholder group. More than a conspiracy of self-aggrandizement, this managerialism is infused throughout the organization, in its forms,

rules, codes, and policies, as an overlay of arrangements that prevents conflict and inhibits what Deetz calls emancipatory democracy.

The solution to this state of affairs is a constant, everyday effort to create an "ideal speech situation" within the organization. The *ideal speech situation*, originally proposed by critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, is an ideal for communication in society, in which all discourses are legitimized in open dialogue.[59] Real democracy as manifest in the ideal speech situation is a "balanced responsiveness"; it does not involve trying to create any kind of permanent structure, but rather the enactment of an attitude of constant critique and empowerment in everyday life. Unlike such processes as collective bargaining or other structures established in the organization to implement democratic processes, organizational democracy happens every day in small ways. For example, a manager who invites employees to collaborate on goal setting and negotiate work priorities is engaged in democracy of this kind.

Deetz recently has offered a critical studies metatheory as a way to assess the concrete situations encountered in life.[60] While he does not address organizational contexts explicitly, his metatheory clearly is intended to be comprehensive. This metatheory consists of three tensions in which he believes a fully engaged human being operates: a tension of care, a tension of thought, and a tension of humor.[61] Imbalance among these creates characteristic difficulties for producing change—caring too much, acting without careful thought, or engaging in cynicism as a life perspective. Deetz suggests that critical theory "has been at its best when it begins with deep care but doesn't end there, explores social-historical constructionism without forgetting the concrete other, and makes general claims without becoming smug, pretentious, or simplistic."[62]

Gender and Race in Organizational Communication

Mumby's and Deetz's efforts to understand the domination-resistance continuum have been enhanced by feminist scholarship in organizational

communication. A relatively new addition to critical scholarship, feminist organizational communication began in the 1990s, following a fairly standard trajectory for feminist scholarship. Early studies established a binary model of gender differences, focusing on the ways in which women and men, usually framed as universal and timeless categories, operated in organizations. A second trend was the study of women as different—attending to gender meant attending to women as other than the norm, as different. A third characteristic of feminist organizational communication scholarship was to treat women's issues as a uniform and uncontested set of interests applicable to all women; and finally, gender differences were seen as an individual and interpersonal matter within organizations.[63]

A 1990 study by Joan Acker, which argued that organizations are constituted by gender, argued that organizations are fundamentally gendered social formations. This insight shifted attention from issues of gender *in* organizations to studies of gendered organizations.[64] To illustrate this work, we focus on three examples—the work of Angela Trethewey, Karen Ashcraft and colleagues, and that of Robin Clair.

Angela Trethewey is a feminist organizational communication scholar who has articulated the notion of organizations as gendered sites in a series of research studies. In each case, she goes into an organization and talks to women about their experiences rather than viewing the organization from the outside. In one study, for example, she interviewed professional women, seeking to understand how women perceive their professional bodies and the strategies they use to manage those bodies.[65] Among her findings is "a tendency to overflow"—that "women never know when their bodies may display messages and meanings that were not intended."[66] Trethewey found that the majority of these unintended messages have to do with femininity—whether expressing emotions, sexuality, pregnancy, or menstruation. For these women, not being in control of bodily presentations of self was really about revealing a feminine body because it exposed gendered differences and could destroy a woman's credibility. To succeed professionally,

then, is a paradox of embodied experiences for women.

Trethewey has been particularly influential in theorizing resistance within largely female organizations and the forms such resistance assume. In one study, she looked at client resistance to a social-services organization designed to assist low-income single parents in obtaining the education and work necessary to support their families without the assistance of welfare.[67] Positioned as passive and deficient by the organization, the clients in fact found a variety of ways to resist this construction of themselves. Among many different forms of resistance, they made fun of the organizational mandate that they participate in counseling, suggesting that the organization simply make a cardboard cutout of Freud to whom they could talk; they "bitched" about their social workers and the organization; and they transformed client-client relationships into mentoring ones, not sanctioned by the organization. Trethewey suggests that these forms of resistance enabled the women to feel empowered about themselves and to envision alternatives to the conditions of their everyday lives.[68]

Trethewey adds to her work on resistance by explicitly articulating a theory of contradiction for organizational life. Using as a case study the same social-services organization described previously, Trethewey describes the paradoxes present in the organization.[69] For instance, designed to empower its clients to be self-sufficient, the organization only selected as clients individuals who already demonstrated a considerable degree of self-sufficiency. The client must have goals and the motivation to pursue those goals—capabilities that point to self-sufficiency already. This leads to yet another paradox: selected on the basis of self-sufficiency, clients accepted into the program are defined as incapable of determining appropriate plans of action or monitoring their own progress toward goals. Instead, a social worker is considered necessary in order for the clients to realize these goals. In complex organizations, understanding the role irony plays in allowing different discourses to remain present at the same time is a way to capture and analyze the complexities, ambiguities, and diversities of

contemporary organizational life. Trethewey, then, has taken seriously the call to examine organizations as gendered sites that contain often overlooked hegemonic practices.

Karen Ashcraft and her colleague Brenda Allen extend the feminist work on organizations, suggesting that not only are organizations fundamentally gendered but they are also "fundamentally raced."[70] Examining organizational communication textbooks because they disseminate the canons of the field, Ashcraft and Allen found that the books offer several implicit messages about race: (1) race is a separate, singular concept, of interest only to people of color; thus issues of race often are segregated in textbooks, confined to a chapter at the end; (2) race is relevant when it serves organizational interests such as creativity or productivity; (3) cultural/racial differences are seen as synonymous with international differences; (4) racial discrimination stems from personal bias and the lack of racial minorities in the workplace (as numbers increase, discrimination will naturally diminish); and (5) white workplaces and workers are the norm.

Robin Clair's work extends the interest in the complexities of organizational life and the ways gender, race, and other identity categories play out strategically in response to the various layers of meaning. Beginning with the silence-voice binary, she uses narratives of the Cherokee nation to show how narratives are embedded in one another—there are always layers of potential contradiction to be addressed.[71] So, for instance, in one of these narratives, a British philanthropist attempts to save the Cherokee by providing one Cherokee boy with an education. Paradoxically, of course, the education meant to save the Cherokees from destruction forced the boy to silence his Cherokee heritage. Silence and voice exist in a complex tension, and there can be voice in silence and silence in voice: "interests, issues, and identities of marginalized people are silenced and . . . those silenced voices can be organized in ways to be heard."[72]

Clair continues her work on the paradoxes of the voice-silence tension with the issue of sexual harassment. In her analysis, she found that resistance and oppression are a particular kind of

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Over the years, we had heard many calls for closer attention to gender and race in organizational communication studies. Yet despite repetitive summons, we didn't see issues of race finding much traction. Instead, we began to notice how Brenda Allen's work was cited as evidence that organizational communication scholars did study race (ironically, most touted was a piece in which she criticized the dearth of such work). Meanwhile, studies of gender enjoyed a sharp rise. So our intent was to invite us all to take a closer look at how our own system turned good intentions into silence.

— Karen Lee Ashcraft

voice and silence—complicated communication phenomena that simultaneously contain and oppose the organization in which they occur. In an account of a male nurse's experience with sexual harassment, for example, Clair found that "Oppression becomes resistance when the female nurses *oppress* Michael through sexual harassment in order to *resist* being infiltrated by a male. Furthermore, the female nurses contribute to their own oppression through their reliance on and use of sexual orientation as well as racism to taunt Michael."[73] There is not just oppression and just resistance, in other words, and scholars of organizational culture are finding ways to study the shifting terrains of organizational life.

Critical perspectives on organizational communication are a rich area for investigation. Feminist scholarship has led the way in investigating the pitfalls and possibilities of organizational life—its gendered and raced dimensions and the interlocking ways communication functions to preserve and oppose dominant organizational ideologies.

In this chapter, then, we see a strong affinity between sociocultural and critical theories of organizational communication. The sociocultural tradition tends to concentrate on descriptions or

representations of organizational behavior, while the critical tradition exemplifies Mumby's discourse of suspicion, critically assessing all aspects of organizational life. Both promote the idea that various social arrangements, including culture itself, are created jointly in ongoing everyday communication. Both see that these social structures and arrangements are significant in the lives of organizational members, but critical theories go further in pointing out that such arrangements are hegemonic and far from democratic in most situations.

Structuration theory is harder to classify than other theories in this chapter. It is clearly sociocultural in orientation, but it also has elements of cybernetics too. Structuration theory is sometimes considered critical as well because it shows how patterns of power and morality are worked out, and how these constrain freedom in social life. Once again, as with most of the areas covered in this book, the traditions of theory are not discrete and mutually exclusive, but interface with one another in ways that help to broaden our understanding of the communication process.

APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

We learn from the theories in this chapter that organizations are created through communication as people interact to accomplish individual and joint goals. The process of communication also results in a variety of outcomes such as authority relations, roles, communication networks, and climates. The outcomes of organizing are results of the interaction among individuals and groups within the organization, and all in turn affect future interactions within the organization. As we review the theories that elaborate this idea, several points emerge:

1. Organizations are made through communication.

All mainstream organizational communication theory today acknowledges that organizations arise through interaction among members over time. In other words, communication, which is considered an instrumental tool by organizational members, is actually the medium that makes organizations possible. Weick had it right: Communication is a process of organizing, and because communication is dynamic, an "organization" is just a snapshot of an evolving process over time.

Always remember, then, that your communication in an organization is a vital part of an ongoing organizing process. The way in which you respond to your boss, for example, makes a link and has a certain quality that contributes to the nature of the organization itself. You can actually get a feel for your place in the organization by thinking about the individuals with whom you have the most contact, the nature of those contacts, what gets accomplished by interaction in your personal network, and the role that you and others take in this network.

If you stop to think about these questions for a few minutes, you will see that individual interactions among people create microstructures and macrostructures that define the organization. Network theory shows us that an organization is never just one structure, but many, all overlaid on one another, accomplishing a variety of functions. It also helps us see that these forms are never permanent. Though they are patterned, they do change as interactions evolve.

A formal network reflects one way in which the organization is built, but for the communication scholar, the formal network omits a great deal. Classical theories such as that of Weber contributed to a powerful cultural norm about how organizing should occur, but they do not provide a sense of how the interaction among members can result in the rich tapestries that define modern organizations. The theories in this chapter describe many of the threads and patterns in these tapestries.

2. Organizational activities function to accomplish individual and joint goals.
Organizing activities have purpose, as organizational life is infused with goals and tasks. Working in an organization is an eminently practical experience. We participate in organizations precisely because they enable us to accomplish something personally important. The most obvious example is income, but we have lots of other goals as well, and many organizations that have nothing to do with income — churches, civic clubs, community associations, educational institutions, and professional organizations — allow us to pursue many other values. Two goals that might not come immediately to mind are social life and structuring time. Many retirees go through a hard period of adjustment precisely because they lose these valued commodities when they leave the organization. Organizations bring you in touch with other people, allow you to make friends, and structure a very large part of your week.

Much of your communication in organizations, then, helps you to meet your personal goals. Much of your communication, as well, is directed at accomplishing organizational goals. Organizations do have their own goals, and these can support, contradict, or ignore individual goals. Often these days, the goals of the organization are written out in mission and vision statements, but these rarely do justice to the richness of an organization's actual goals. Long-range plans are more precise about what the organization thinks it is up to at any given time. Weber's theory of bureaucracy was aimed to help organizations learn how to accomplish their goals in spite of any individual goals workers may have. How can organizational and individual goals be integrated? Organizational control theory looks at natural processes of concertive control that develop when communication creates organizational identity to bring individual goals into line with organizational ones. In other words, there is something seductive about the daily work in an organization that brings personal goals into alignment with organizational goals. Mumby would be suspicious of this state of affairs as a possible site of hegemony, and Deetz would question whether integration of goals is done in a way that creates domination or democracy. Feminist scholars would look carefully at the ways private meanings get integrated into public settings, especially in gendered ways.

3. In addition to achieving goals, communication activities create patterns that affect organizational life.
A strong theme of the theories in this chapter is that communication is double-faced. The first face of organizational communication is its role in allowing us to accomplish goals. The second face is its role in creating structures and arrangements that organize, constrain, and focus our activities. Structuration theory teaches that the unintended consequences of action come back to bite us. In other words, communication acts are purposeful, but they contribute to outcomes that influence future interaction in ways that are often outside of our awareness.

One of the outcomes of interaction is structure in the sense of lines of communication, as network analysis reveals. However, lines of communication are only one of many structuring elements of an organization. You can look at an organization in terms of behavior cycles, identity and control, culture, climate, power relations, and many others. On the dark side, structuration can create forms of oppression based on race, gender, and other factors.

The lesson we can learn from this theme is that communication matters. It is more than an instrument for achieving personal and organizational goals. Whenever you communicate, something is made, and it behooves us to pay attention to what we are creating by how we interact with others in organizations.

4. Communication processes create an organizational character and culture.

The organizational culture movement recognizes the humanizing aspect of the organization. Indeed, apart from work structure, organizations are also human cultures, rich with tradition, shared meaning, and ritual. People's actions create and reflect the underlying culture of the organization.

The cultural approach to organizational theory is a major advance in theories of organizations. Traditionally, management was seen as a rational process of manipulating "things" for the benefit of the organization. The culture approach shows us that this is only partly true. The cultural approach refutes the ideas that managers can somehow manipulate "objects" (like materials and machines) that are independent from the organization itself. The objects are only known through the meanings of the organizational culture, and those meanings will change from one organization, or even suborganization, to another. Organizations do more than adapt to environments; they create their own environments based on shared conceptions and interpretations.

The character and feel of an organization is determined by its culture. Culture gives life to daily activities, and when you think about it, you will enjoy, or deplore, your involvement with an organization primarily because of its "feel," or the kind of life it makes possible. Perhaps some organizations are production "machines," but they are also a place where human beings spend most of their time out of the home, making the quality of life within an organization very important to most workers.

The culture of an organization is reflected in both work processes and collateral communication. In other words, the way in which an organization structures its work (the constraints, control processes, and values it promotes) and the informal contacts and styles of communication present in encounters not directly related to the work (coffee breaks, parties, car pools, chats at the water cooler, and other informal moments) reflect and produce the organization's culture.

5. The patterns of power and control that emerge in organizational communication open possibilities and create constraints.

The empirically minded manager may think of culture as just another variable to be manipulated and managed.[74] After all, managers are primarily responsible for ensuring the accomplishment of organizational goals, so why not bring culture into the service of goals? All forms of management exert some kind of ideological control. Even if not manipulated consciously by management, an organization's culture will include power relations. This is unavoidable.

Power, then, is an inevitable outcome of organizational interaction. Power is necessary to get things done. It provides structure, reduces confusion, and lessens uncertainty. Empowerment allows people to use their most valuable personal and community resources to accomplish goals. The question, then, is not how to avoid power and influence but who is in and who is out. What interests get privileged, and which are marginalized?

Once you acknowledge that all interactions contribute to a cascading construction of culture within the organization, it is a small step to begin wondering about how the network of associations within an organization might be made more humane and inclusive. This question has led to the workplace democracy movement, in which the voices of multiple stakeholder groups, including all employees and important groups "outside" the organization, are recognized as important in organizational decision making.[75] The various theories of organizational democracy constitute a deep critique of structural and positional approaches to the organization. Instead of a top-down, managerial approach to control in which conflict is suppressed, democratic theories call for dialogue, participation, and valuing conflict as a way of enhancing the organizational life of everyone involved.

There is a kinship between much of the work in workplace democracy and that of critical theory. Mumby alerts us to the need to address three issues in critical studies.[76] First, because the act of research is itself political, the researchers must become more aware of their own power over those studied and the ways research studies shape organizational relations. Second, organizational communication scholars must look at how the field has constructed a view of organizations that promotes certain interests over others. Finally, organizational communication has been seemingly oblivious to developments in feminist theory and should incorporate feminist insights into the critique of organization.

Communication theory has made a tremendous contribution to our understanding of organizations. By showing the importance of communication patterns in the construction of network connections, power structures, and culture, this work has greatly enhanced the field of organizational studies.

⬛ NOTES

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11. James R. Taylor, "Engaging Organization Through Worldview," in *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. Steve May and Dennis K. Mumby (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 197–222; James R. Taylor, "Dialogue as the Search for Sustainable Organizational Co-Orientation," in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, ed. Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, and Kenneth N. Cissna (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004), 125–40; James R. Taylor and others, "The Communicational Basis of Organization: Between the Conversation and the Text," *Communication Theory* 6 (1996): 1–39. See also James R. Taylor, "Shifting from a Heteronomous to an Autonomous Worldview of Organizational Communication: Communication Theory on the Cusp," *Communication Theory* 5 (1995): 1–35; James R. Taylor, *Rethinking the Theory of Organizational Communication: How to Read an Organization* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993).

12. For a thorough discussion of the details of this theory and its antecedents, see James R. Taylor and Elizabeth J. Van Every, *The Emergent Organization: Communication as its Site and Surface* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000).

13. This idea is adapted from the popular work of social psychologist Theodore Newcomb. See, for example, "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts," *Psychological Review* 60 (1953): 393–404.

14. This metaphor is suggested by Cynthia Stohl, *Organizational Communication: Connectedness in Action* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995). See also Peter R. Monge, "The Network Level of Analysis," in *Handbook of Communication Science*, ed. Charles R. Berger and Steven H. Chaffee (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987), 239–70.

15. Peter R. Monge and Noshir S. Contractor, *Theories of Communication Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

16. For summaries of network theories, see Monge and Contractor, *Theories of Communication Networks*. The material in this section of the chapter relies primarily on this source along with Peter R. Monge and Noshir S. Contractor, "Emergent Communication Networks," *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, ed. Fredric M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 440–502.

17. For a detailed account of network functions, see Monge and Contractor, *Theories of Communication Networks*.

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19. Robert D. McPhee, "Organizational Communication: A Structurational Exemplar," in *Rethinking Communication: Paradigm Exemplars*, ed. Brenda Dervin and others, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1989), 199–212.

20. Poole, "Communication and Organizational Climates"; Poole and McPhee, "Structurational Analysis."

21. Poole and McPhee, "Structurational Analysis," 213.

22. For a contrast of the structurational approach to climate with traditional approaches, see Poole and McPhee, "Structurational Analysis."

23. This model of climate is based on a reinterpretation of a case study by H. Johnson in "A New Conceptualization of Source of Organizational Climate," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 3 (1976): 275–92.

24. Poole, "Communication and Organizational Climates," 98.

25. George Cheney and Phillip K. Tompkins, "Coming to Terms with Organizational Identification and Commitment," *Central States Speech Journal* 38 (1987): 1–15; Phillip K. Tompkins and George Cheney, "Account Analysis of Organizations: Decision Making and Identification," in *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach*, ed. Linda L. Putnam and Michael E. Pacanowsky (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), 123–46; Phillip K. Tompkins and George Cheney, "Communication and Unobtrusive Control in Contemporary Organizations," in *Organizational Communication: Traditional Themes and New Directions*, ed. Robert D. McPhee and Phillip K. Tompkins (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 179–210. For a summary and extension, see James S. Sass and Daniel J. Canary, "Organizational Commitment and Identification: An Examination of Conceptual and Operational Convergence," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 55 (1991): 275–93.

26. Tompkins and Cheney base this conceptualization on the work of R. Edwards, "The Social Relations of Production at the Point of Production," in *Complex Organizations: Critical Perspectives*, ed. M. Zey-Ferrell and M. Aiken (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1981).

27. Tompkins and Cheney, "Communication and Unobtrusive Control," 184.

28. James R. Barker and George Cheney, "The Concept and the Practices of Discipline in Contemporary Organizational Life," *Communication Monographs* 61 (1994): 19–43.

29. This idea is based on Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1976).

30. This process is detailed in Craig R. Scott, S. R. Corman, and George Cheney, "Development of a Structurational Model of Identification in the Organization," *Communication Theory* 8 (1998): 298–336. For a broad discussion of organizational identity, see George Cheney and Lars Thøger Christensen, "Organizational Identity: Linkages Between Internal and External Communication," in *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, ed. Fredric M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 231–69.

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32. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 143–58.

33. Lane Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* (New York: Meredith, 1932). See also Lloyd Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (1959): 399–408; Jesse Delia, "The Logic Fallacy, Cognitive Theory, and the Enthymeme: A Search for the Foundations of Reasoned Discourse," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 140–48.

34. Michael J. Papa, Mohammad A. Auwal, and Arvind Singhal, "Organizing for Social Change Within Concertive Control Systems: Member Identification, Empowerment, and the Masking of Discipline," *Communication Monographs* 64 (1997): 219–49.

35. George Cheney, *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society: Managing Multiple Identities* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 14.

36. See James A. Anderson, ed., *Communication Yearbook 11* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), 310–405; Michael E. Pacanowsky, "Creating and Narrating Organizational Realities," in *Rethinking Communication: Paradigm Exemplars*, ed. Brenda Dervin and others, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 250–57.

37. For an excellent discussion of the breadth of this field, see Eric M. Eisenberg and Patricia Riley, "Organizational Culture," in *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, ed. Fredric M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 291–322.

38. John Van Maanen and Stephen R. Barley, "Cultural Organization: Fragments of a Theory," in *Organizational Culture*, ed. P. J. Frost and others (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 31–54.

39. For a brief description of this approach, see Pacanowsky, "Creating and Narrating Organizational Realities," 250–57.

40. Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1986), 128.

41. Michael E. Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Organizational Communication as Cultural Performance," *Communication Monographs* 50 (1983): 131. See also Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

42. Michael E. Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Communication and Organizational Cultures," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 46 (1982): 121.

43. Michael E. Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Organizational Communication as Cultural Performance," *Communication Monographs* 50 (1983): 129.

44. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Organizational Communication," 135.

45. Pacaonwsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Organizational Communication," 136.

46. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Organizational Communication," 137.

47. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Organizational Communication," 137.

48. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Organizational Communication," 139.

49. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Communication and Organizational Cultures," 145.

50. Dennis K. Mumby, "Critical Organizational Communication Studies: The Next 10 Years," *Communication Monographs* 60 (March 1993): 18–25; Dennis K. Mumby, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Communication Studies: A Rereading of an Ongoing Debate," *Communication Theory* 7 (1997): 1–28.

51. Mumby, "Critical Organizational Communication Studies," 21.

52. Carlone and Taylor, "Organizational Communication and Cultural Studies," 339.

53. Mumby describes his notion of a discourse of suspicion in "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Communication Studies." In this essay, he articulates four discourses that characterize the relationship between modernism and postmodernism; the discourse of suspicion represents the critical theory tradition. The other discourses are a *discourse of representation*, a *discourse of understanding*, and a *discourse of vulnerability*, representing positivism, interpretivism, and postmodernism respectively. Paul Ricoeur used the phrase *hermeneutics of suspicion* to describe the work of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. D. Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 32–36.

54. Dennis K. Mumby, "The Problem of Hegemony: Rereading Gramsci for Organizational Communication Studies," *Western Journal of Communication* 61 (Fall 1997): 344.

55. Dennis K. Mumby, "The Political Function of Narrative in Organizations," *Communication Monographs* 54 (1987): 120–25; and Dennis K. Mumby, *Communication and Power in Organizations: Discourse, Ideology, and Domination* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988), 115–24.

56. Mumby, "The Problem of Hegemony."

57. Stanley A. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 333.

58. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization*, 338. Deetz's ideas are further developed in "Disciplinary Power in the Modern Corporation," in *Critical Management Studies*, ed. Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 21–45; "The New Politics of the Workplace: Ideology and Other Unobtrusive Controls," in *After Postmodernism: Reconstructing Ideology Critique*, ed., Herbert W. Simons and Mick Billig (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 172–99; and *Transforming Communication, Transforming Business: Building Responsive and Responsible Workplaces* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 1995).

59. Among Habermas's chief works are *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1971); *Theory and Practice*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1973); *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1975); *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984); *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, *Lifeworld and System*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

60. Stanley A. Deetz, "Critical Theory," in *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. Steve May and Dennis K. Mumby (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 85–112.

61. Deetz, "Critical Theory," 101–103.

62. Deetz, "Critical Theory," 104.

63. These four trends are nicely summarized in Karen Lee Ashcraft, "Feminist Organizational Communication Studies: Engaging Gender in Public and Private," in *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. Steve May and Dennis K. Mumby (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 146–47.

64. J. Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender and Society* 4 (1990): 139–58. The role of Acker's essay as catalyst for this shift in feminist organizational scholarship is described in Ashcraft, "Feminist Organizational Communication Studies," 148.

65. Angela Trethewey, "Disciplined Bodies: Women's Embodied Identities at Work," *Organizational Studies* 20 (1999): 423–50.

66. Trethewey, "Disciplined Bodies."
67. Angela Trethewey, "Resistance, Identity, and Empowerment: A Postmodern Feminist Analysis of Clients in a Human Service Organization," *Communication Monographs* 64 (1997): 281–301.
68. Trethewey is, of course, not the only scholar to explore resistance in the workplace. As another example, Elizabeth Bell and Linda Forbes examined the folklore among women support staff at their university, collecting examples that were posted behind desks and hidden away in file cabinets. Ranging from "Are We Having Fun Yet?" to "I Have PMS and a Handgun. Any Questions?" these collections of folklore reveal women's forms of resistance. But because the resistance is "safely ensconced in an 8 1/2 by 11" format, it articulates a point of view without expressly disrupting the hierarchy. See Elizabeth Bell and Linda C. Forbes, "Office Folklore in the Academic Paperwork Empire: The Interstitial Space of Gendered (Cont)Texts," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 14 (1994): 181–96.
69. Angela Trethewey, "Isn't It Ironic: Using Irony to Explore the Contradictions of Organizational Life," *Western Journal of Communication* 63 (1999): 140–67.
70. Karen Lee Ashcroft and Brenda J. Allen, "The Racial Foundation of Organizational Communication," *Communication Theory* 13 (February 2003): 6.
71. Robin Patric Clair, "Organizing Silence: Silence as Voice and Voice as Silence in the Narrative Exploration of the Treaty of New Echota," *Western Journal of Communication* 61 (1997): 315–37.
72. Clair, "Organizing Silence," 323.
73. Robin Patric Clair, *Organizing Silence: A World of Possibilities* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).
74. A discussion of this possibility is presented by Sonja A. Sackmann, "Managing Organizational Culture: Dreams and Possibilities," in *Communication Yearbook 13*, ed. James Anderson (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 114–48.
75. George Cheney and others, "Democracy, Participation, and Communication at Work: A Multidisciplinary Review," in *Communication Yearbook 21*, ed. Michael E. Roloff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 35–91.
76. Mumby, "Critical Organizational Communication Studies." See, for example, Judi Marshall, "Viewing Organizational Communication from a Feminist Perspective: A Critique and Some Offerings," in *Communication Yearbook 16*, ed. Stanley A. Deetz (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 122–43.

10
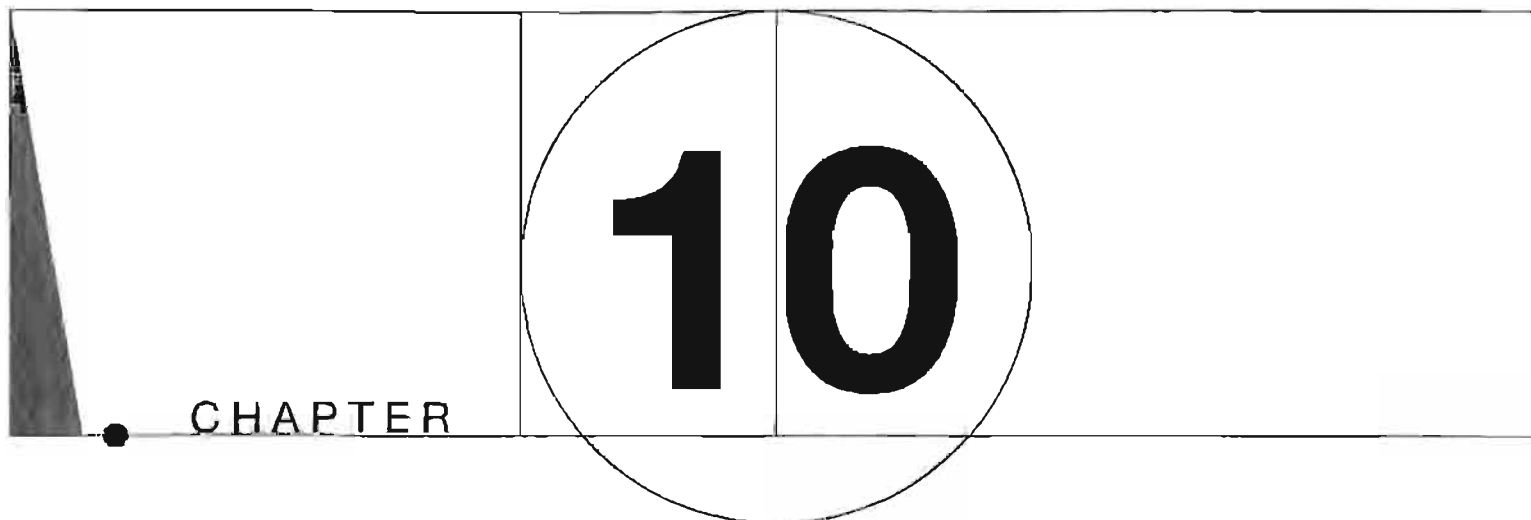
THE MEDIA

With the remote control, you can move through, maybe, 50 television channels within a few minutes and get impressions very quickly about what is on. Even if you pause at various stations for just a few moments, you will be brought in touch with a huge world of subjects, from surgery to animals to wars to cooking to science to art. We are living in what Marshall McLuhan calls the "global village"; modern communication media make it possible for millions of people throughout the world to be in touch with nearly any place on the globe. Mass media not only transmit information around the world, they also construct agendas, telling us what is important to attend to. George Gerbner summarizes the importance of mass media this way: "the ability to create publics, define issues, provide common terms of reference, and thus to allocate attention and power."[1]

Mass communication is the process whereby media organizations produce and transmit messages to large publics and the process by which those messages are sought, used, understood, and influenced by audiences. One of the earliest models to depict this view is that of Harold Lasswell. In his classic 1948 article, he presented the simple and often-quoted model of communication:[2]

Who

Says what

In which channel

Topic	Semiotic Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Sociopsycho- logical Theories	Cybernetic Theories	Critical Theories
Media content & structure	Baudrillard and the semiotics of media	Medium theory McLuhan New media theory		Spiral of silence	
Society & culture		Agenda-setting function Social action	The effects tradition Cultivation theory		Critical media theories Feminist media studies bell hooks's critique
Audience		Media studies	Uses, gratifications, & dependency		

To whom

With what effect

Using this model, Lasswell listed the parts of the mass communication system. He went on to identify major functions of the media of communication, including *surveillance*, providing information about the environment; presenting options for solving problems, or *correlation;* and socializing and education, referred to as *transmission.*[3] Central to any study of mass communication, then, are the media themselves.[4] Media organizations distribute messages that affect and reflect the cultures of society, and they provide information simultaneously to large heterogeneous audiences, making media part of society's institutional forces.

Various metaphors have been created to capture different aspects of media. For example, Denis McQuail refers to eight metaphors: media are *windows* that enable us to see beyond our immediate surroundings, *interpreters* that help us make sense of experience, *platforms* or carriers that convey information, *interactive communication* that includes audience feedback, *signposts* that provide us with instructions and directions, *filters* that screen out parts of experience and focus on others, *mirrors* that reflect ourselves back to us, and *barriers* that block the truth.[5]

Joshua Meyrowitz presents three metaphors that identify major ways of thinking about media — medium as *vessel*, medium as *language*, and medium as *environment*.[6] The first metaphor — "medium-as-vessel" — is the idea that media are more or less neutral containers for content. Many of the theories presented later in this chapter assume this metaphor.

The second metaphor is "medium-as-language." Here each medium has its own structural elements or grammar, like a language. Print media, for example, have page design, font style, and so on. Other media may have various sound and visual compositional elements that themselves can affect consumers in various ways. The effects of a medium rely in large measure on these structural features.

The third metaphor is "medium-as-environment," the idea that we live in a milieu of certain kinds of media-determined sensory information that comes to us with a certain level of speed, directionality, interactivity, physical requirements, and ease of learning. These media environments shape human experiences in significant and often unconscious ways. Medium theory, which we will discuss later in this chapter, is based on this metaphor.

In addition to conceptualizing the nature and content of media, media scholars recognize two faces of mass communication.[7] One face looks from the media to the larger society and its institutions. Theorists interested in the media-society link are concerned with the ways media are embedded in society and the mutual influence between larger social structures and the media. This is the *macro side* of mass-communication theory. The second face looks toward people, as groups and individuals, who make use of the media. This face reflects the link between media and audiences. Theorists interested in the media-audience link focus on group and

individual effects and outcomes of the media transaction. This is the *micro side* of mass communication theory.[8]

In a landscape, then, media theory addresses three large thematic areas — media content and structure, society and culture, and audience. The theme of media content and structure covers the effects of the medium as well as its content. This theme gives special attention to signs and symbols used in media messages. The second theme, society and culture, covers the functions of mass communication in society, the dissemination of information and influence, public opinion, and power. Finally, the theme of audience looks at individual effects, audience communities, and audience uses of media.

As always, we organize this chapter in terms of the traditions of communication theory. Five traditions have had an impact on theories of mass communication, including the semiotic, sociocultural, sociopsychological, cybernetic, and critical. These are outlined in the chapter map on page 286.[9]

■◖ THE SEMIOTIC TRADITION

Recall from Chapter 3 that semiotics deals with the relationship among the sign, the referent, and the human mind. This tradition has been especially influential in helping us see how signs and symbols are used, what they mean, and how they are organized. Any study that looks at the organization of symbols within a message is grounded in semiotic thinking.

Media messages are especially intriguing from a semiotic perspective because they usually consist of a fascinating blend of symbols that are organized spatially and chronologically to create an impression, transmit an idea, or elicit a meaning in an audience.[10] If you have had a class in media analysis, you probably spent time looking at magazine articles, television programs, and commercials to examine the various forms, compositions, texts, and other symbolic forms that constitute these messages.

Semiotics has provided a powerful tool for examining the impact of mass media. For the semiotician, content is important, but content is a product of the use of signs. This approach focuses on the ways producers create signs and the ways audiences understand them.[11] Most would agree that signs take on special significance in

the media, and the media shape, to a large degree, how signs function for us. As an example of a semiotic theory of media, we look to the work of Jean Baudrillard, who believes that media have forced increasing distance between symbols and the actual world of experience.

Jean Baudrillard and the Semiotics of Media

Jean Baudrillard, a French scholar, believes that signs have become increasingly separated from the objects they represent and that the media have propelled this process to the point where nothing is real.[12] At first, a sign was a simple representation of an object or condition. The sign had a clear connection with what it signified. Baudrillard calls this the stage of the *symbolic order,* common in feudal society. In the second stage, that of *counterfeits* (common from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution), signs assumed a less direct relationship to the objects of life. Signs actually produced new meanings that were not necessarily a natural part of the experience of that which was signified. For example, status, wealth, and prestige were connected to things because of how they were signified. The next stage, during the Industrial Revolution, is what Baudrillard calls *production;* in it, machines

were invented to take the place of humans, making objects independent of any human use of signifiers. In the era of production, once you push the right button, the metal press shapes the metal, no matter what you might think about it.

Today we are in an era of *simulation*, in which signs no longer represent—but create—our reality. Simulation determines who we are and what we do. We no longer use tools to represent our experience: signs establish it. The metal press may continue to shape metal parts, but what we program the machine to make is very much determined by the predominant signs in our culture today.

Disneyland epitomizes the era of simulation. Theme parks are fantasies constructed from signs. The real things—pirates, the frontier, and so on—can be reproduced anytime anywhere. Rather than have genuine communication involving interaction among people, the media dominate our lives with information that forms what we perceive to be genuine experience but that is far removed from the natural order of things. This leads us to obscenely exaggerated forms of life. We begin to treat the pirates at Disneyland as real experiences, but in fact they are experiences within the simulations created by the media. We think Baudrillard would especially appreciate the fact that movies are now being based on the rides at Disneyland. We are used to movies based on books—something that had a real existence. With the making of *The Pirates of the Caribbean* series, based on a Disneyland ride, however, we can see a movie whose content is about the sign of a sign.

Our commodity culture, which the media foster, is one aspect of the simulation in which we live. The simulated environment tells us what we want—it forms our tastes, choices, preferences, and needs. Consumption takes on value in and of itself. That we are consuming becomes most important, not what we are consuming or what we actually want. Most people's values and behaviors, then, are highly constrained by the "reality" simulated in the media. We think that our individual needs are being met, but these are actually homogenized needs shaped by the use of signs in the media.

Because objects are separated from their original natural state, they take on bizarre meanings for us. Possession is more important than use. Where once we needed farm animals to do work for us, we now value pets as a matter of ownership. Our lives are full of objects that have no real use but that sit on shelves for us to possess and look at and make a life of pure "symbolicity." We buy a watch, not really to tell time but to wear as a form of apparel. Exaggeration, hype, and excess become the criteria governing our interpretations; any literal connections to, or meanings for, signs themselves are gone. Expensive automobiles are status symbols, clothing is purchased for fun, and people consume snacks just to kill time.

Media messages are filled with carefully designed symbolic images formulated to influence individuals and society. Baudrillard's work has a sharply critical edge and is part of a line of work sometimes called "the critique of mass society," which reacts to the large, complex, bureaucratic nature of the modern state. This line of work envisions a malleable mass of people in which societywide depersonalized relations replace individuality, community life, and ethnic identity.[13] Baudrillard's ideas, then, really cross the semiotic and the critical traditions, and the concern with the state of contemporary society anticipates the sociocultural tradition as well.

THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

We summarize three bodies of work within the sociocultural tradition that help us understand how the functions of, and responses to, the media are part of larger cultural contexts. The first of these, medium theory, examines the sociocultural effects of media apart from content. The second, agenda-setting, explores the effect of media on social agendas. Finally, we include social action media studies, which probe media communities per se.

Medium Theory

Without question, media productions respond to social and cultural developments and in turn influence those very developments. The mere

existence of certain kinds of media like television affects how we think about and respond to the world. And while the media function in a variety of ways for different segments of society, audiences are not uniformly affected but interact in unique ways with the media. This thesis is developed in the theories summarized in this section.

Classical Medium Theory. Marshall McLuhan probably is best known for calling our attention to the importance of media as media. McLuhan, a well-known figure in the study of popular culture in the 1960s, received attention because of his unusual writing style and his startling and thought-provoking ideas.[14] Although the specifics of McLuhan's theory are often rejected in mainstream media theory, his general thesis has received widespread acceptance: media, apart from whatever content is transmitted, impact individuals and society. This idea in its various forms is what we mean by "medium theory." Television affects you regardless of what you watch. The Internet impacts society, regardless of what sites people visit. Personal media (e.g., iPods) change society; it doesn't matter what musical selections an iPod user makes.

McLuhan was not the first to write about this idea. Indeed, his ideas were greatly influenced by the work of his mentor, Harold Adams Innis, who taught that communication media are the essence of civilization and that history is directed by the predominant media of each age.[15] For McLuhan and Innis, media are extensions of the human mind, so the predominant media in use biases any historical period. Ancient heavy media such as parchment, clay, or stone are durable and therefore *time binding* because they last over time. Something written on stone, for example, is durable, unchanging, and will last a long time but it is hard to move and so does little to bind people across vast expanses of space. Because they facilitate communication from one generation to another and don't change much, time-binding media are biased toward tradition. In contrast, *space-binding* media such as paper

are light and easy to transport, so they facilitate communication from one location to another, fostering empire building, large bureaucracies, and the military.

Because it is produced one sound at a time, speech as a medium encourages people to organize their experience chronologically. Speech also requires knowledge and tradition and therefore supports community and relationship. Written media, which are spatially arranged, produce a different kind of culture. The space-binding effect of writing produces interests in political authority and the growth of empires across the land.

McLuhan's thesis is that people adapt to their environment through a certain balance or ratio of the senses, and the primary medium of the age brings out a particular sense ratio, thereby affecting perception.[16] McLuhan sees every medium as an extension of some human faculty, exaggerating that sense: "The wheel . . . is an extension of the foot. The book is an extension of the eye. . . . Clothing, an extension of the skin. . . . Electric circuitry, an extension of the central nervous system."[17]

Building on McLuhan. Donald Ellis presents a set of propositions representing a contemporary perspective on the basic ideas of Innis and McLuhan.[18] Ellis notes that the predominant media at any given time will shape behavior and thought. As media change, so do the ways in which we think, manage information, and relate to one another. There are sharp differences among oral, written, and electronic media, each with different effects in terms of how we interact with each medium.

Oral communication is highly malleable and organic. Oral messages are immediate and ephemeral, so that individuals and groups must keep information in their minds and pass it on through speech. Because everyday experience cannot really be separated from the oral medium of transmission, life and knowledge cannot be separated. The telling and retelling of stories over time privilege narrative as a form of communication and require group memory as the "holder" of society's knowledge. This can lead

to a collective consciousness in which little distinction is made between self and group. Group identification and cohesiveness are high when oral media predominate.

Writing, and especially the advent of printing, led to profound changes in society. When you can write something down, you can separate it from the moment. You can manipulate it, change it, edit it, and recast it. In other words, you can "act on" information and knowledge in a way that is not possible in the oral tradition. This leads to a separation of knowledge (what is known) from the knower (who knows it). Those who can read and write have special status, so that formal education takes on an important role. Knowledge, then, becomes objectified and can assume the status of truth, and individuals and groups can be divided among those who "have" the truth and those who do not. Further, information can be stored, or saved, which makes literacy a tool of conservation. Importance is assigned to that which is "stored" in written language.

Another shift occurred when electronic media came to the fore. Electronic media such as television can be immediate and ephemeral, but they are not tied down to a particular place because they can be broadcast. Broadcast media extend your perception beyond where you are at any given moment, creating what McLuhan called the "global village." At the same time, like print, electronic media allow information to be stored. Because they are more readily available than print, electronic media create an information explosion, and a great competition occurs among various media to be heard and seen. Information in electronic media is sold like a commodity, which creates pressure for information to be attractive. Knowledge in the electronic age changes rapidly, and we become aware of different versions of truth. The constant change created by electronic media can make us feel confused and perhaps unsettled.

If orality creates a culture of community and literacy creates a culture of class, then electronic communication creates a culture of "cells," or groups pitted against one another to promote their special interests. A new kind of public not bound to place comes into being. The politics of interest and a commodity-based economy separate people by accentuating their differences. This change highlights the importance of the older values of participatory democracy that are accompanied by civility and collegiality rather than competition and division.

If you were a member of a primarily oral culture, differences would be minimal, and decisions would be made collectively based on the wisdom of tradition as it has been passed down generation to generation. If you were a member of a primarily print-oriented culture, decisions would rely on "truth" stored in documents, and those who had access to information would have great influence as a class in society's decision making. But today, you are likely a member of a primarily electronic culture in which you identify with interest groups that vie against one another. You hear many voices at once, and your challenge is to integrate these in some way.

Another shift—the rise of the Internet and related technologies and computer-mediated communication (CMC)—has created yet additional forms of reality. These are generally referred to today as the "new media." Although McLuhan and his mentors began to identify various media environments and their potential effects, the stark shift from broadcast to interactive media with the rise of the Internet brought media environments to the fore, with a renewed interest in medium theory among communication scholars.

New Media Theory. In 1990, Mark Poster published his landmark book, *The Second Media Age*, which heralded a new period in which interactive technologies and network communications, particularly the Internet, would transform society.[19] The idea of the second media age, which really has developed from the 1980s to the present time, signaled important changes in media theory. For one, it loosened the concept of "media" from primarily "mass" communication to a variety of media ranging from very broad to quite personal in scope. Second, the concept drew our attention to new forms of media use that could range from individualized information

and knowledge acquisition to interaction. Third, the thesis of the second-media age brought medium theory from the relative obscurity of the 1960s to renewed popularity in the 1990s and beyond. The power of media in and of themselves came back into focus, including a renewed interest in characteristics of dissemination and broadcast media.[20]

The first media age was said to be characterized by (1) centralized production (one to many); (2) one-way communication; (3) state control, for the most part; (4) the reproduction of social stratification and inequality through the media; (5) fragmented mass audiences; and (6) the shaping of social consciousness. The second media age, in contrast, can be described as: (1) decentralized; (2) two-way; (3) beyond state control; (4) democratizing; (5) promoting individual consciousness; and (6) individually oriented.[21]

There are perhaps two dominant views of the differences between the first media age, with its emphasis on broadcast, and the second, with its emphasis on networks. These are the *social interaction* approach and the *social integration* approach.[22]

The *social interaction approach* distinguishes media in terms of how close they come to the model of face-to-face interaction. Older forms of broadcast-oriented media are said to emphasize transmission of information, which reduces the possibility of interaction. Such media are thought of primarily as informational and therefore mediate reality for the consumer. New media, in contrast, are more interactive and create a new sense of personalized communication.

Perhaps the most well-known advocate of this point of view is Pierre Lévy, whose now-famous book is *Cyberculture*.[23] Lévy sees the World Wide Web as an open, flexible, and dynamic information environment, which allows human beings to develop a new orientation to knowledge and thereby engage in a more interactive, community-based, democratic world of mutual sharing and empowerment. The Internet provides virtual meeting places that expand social worlds, create new possibilities for knowledge, and provide for a sharing of perspectives worldwide.[24]

Of course, new media are not the same as face-to-face interaction, but they are said to provide new forms of interaction that bring us back into

personal contact in ways that older media could not have done. There are problems in trying to make this comparison, and some believe that new media are more "mediated" than proponents would like to believe. They also contain powers as well as limits, disadvantages along with advantages, and dilemmas. For example, new media may provide openness and flexibility of use, but they can also lead to confusion and chaos. New media greatly widen choice, but choice is not always a virtue when we need structure and guidance. Diversity is one of the great values of new media, but it can also lead to division and separation. New media may allow us flexibility in how we use time, but they also create new time demands.[25] For example, you can now check your e-mail at any time of day, but you might have to spend a couple of hours a day checking e-mail today—which was not the case even 10 years ago.

The second way in which media are distinguished is in terms of *social integration*. This approach characterizes media not in terms of information, interaction, or dissemination, but in terms of ritual, or how people use media as a way of creating community.[26] Media are not primarily an instrument of information nor a means for achieving self-interest but rather allow us to come together in some form of community and offer us a sense of belonging.

This happens by using media as a shared ritual, which may or may not involve actual interaction. According to the social-integration view, interaction is not even a necessary component of social integration through ritual. Face-to-face interaction, then, is no longer the gold standard or baseline for comparison of communication media. We interact not so much with other people but with the medium itself. We use media not so much to tell us about something else but because using media is a self-contained ritual that has meaning in and of itself. For example, you might set *Washington Post Online* as your home page and check it several times a day, not so much because you want to know the news, but because you have ritualized the action.

Every medium has potential for ritual and integration, but media accomplish this function in different ways. With older broadcast-oriented media, such as television and books, centralized

sources produce situations and characters with which audiences can identify. Yet broadcast media allow for little interaction other than controlling the remote or deciding what stories to read or not read. You listen and view, but media do not talk back, or interact, with you.

In contrast, we use new media as a kind of shared ritual that makes us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. Media are ritualized because they become habitual, formalized, and take on values that are larger than media use itself. A personal data assistant (PDA) such as a BlackBerry or Palm Pilot is indeed useful for keeping track of and exchanging information with others, but it is much more. It makes us feel that we are part of a social community of users; we identify with something that transcends ourselves. Maybe this is why certain people love to check their e-mail on a BlackBerry while traveling along a country road in France on vacation. Newer media, then, permit something that looks like interaction but is not similar to actual face-to-face presence. Instead, the newer media create computer simulations of presence. There is a high level of interaction, but with the computer, not with specific individuals. This idea is supported by *media-equation theory*, which suggests that we treat media like people and interact with media as if they were persons. This explains why, for example, your computer may seem to have a personality, why you talk to your computer, why you appreciate what it does for you, and even get angry at it when it "misbehaves."[27]

In this section we have looked at various versions of medium theory. We see here, in summary, that particular kinds of media prevalent in society at various times in history have had a serious impact on individuals and social structure. We move now to a very different set of theories, still within the sociocultural tradition, that take the content of media and the "medium-as-vessel" metaphor very seriously. The first of these is agenda-setting theory.

The Agenda-Setting Function

Scholars have long known that media have the potential for structuring issues for the public.[28] One of the first writers to formalize this idea was Walter Lippmann, a prominent American journalist.[29] Lippmann took the view that the public responds not to actual events in the environment but to "the pictures in our heads," which he calls the *pseudoenvironment*: "For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And altogether we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it."[30] The media offer us that simpler model by setting the agenda for us.

The agenda-setting function has been described by Donald Shaw, Maxwell McCombs, and their colleagues, who wrote:

> Considerable evidence has accumulated that editors and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day-to-day task of choosing and displaying news.... This impact of the mass media—the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking—has been labeled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about.[31]

In other words, agenda setting establishes the salient issues or images in the minds of the public.

Agenda setting occurs because the media must be selective in reporting the news. News outlets, as gatekeepers of information, make choices about what to report and how to report it. What the public knows about the state of affairs at any given time is largely a product of media gatekeeping.[32] Further, we know that how a person votes is determined mainly by what issues the individual believes to be important. For this reason some researchers have come to believe that the issues reported during a candidate's term in office may have more effect on the election than the campaign itself.

There are two levels of agenda setting. The first establishes the general issues that are important, and the second determines the parts or aspects of those issues that are important. In

many ways the second level is as important as the first, because it gives us a way to frame the issues that constitute the public and media agendas. For example, the media may tell us that worldwide oil prices are an important issue (first level), but they also tell us how to understand this development as it impacts U.S. economics (second level).[33]

Media framing, then, is not trivial but is critical to producing the world as we know it. Framing has received a good deal of research attention over the past 25 years.[34] Todd Gitlin first applied the term *framing* to mass communication when he studied the way in which CBS made the student movement of the 1960s seem unimportant.[35]

The idea of media framing was picked up by agenda-setting theorists as a natural way in which second-level agenda setting occurs.[36] Media depictions frame events in ways that constrain how audiences can interpret these events. This can happen by various textual features of the "story" such as headlines, audio-visual components, metaphors used, and the way in which the story is told, to name only a few of the ways framing functions.[37]

The agenda-setting function is a three-part process.[38] First, the priority of issues to be discussed in the media, *or media agenda*, must be set. Second, the media agenda in some way affects or interacts with what the public thinks, creating the *public agenda*. Finally, the public agenda affects or interacts in some way with what policy-makers consider important, called the *policy agenda*. In the theory's simplest and most direct version, then, the media agenda affects the public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda.

Although a number of studies show that the media can be powerful in affecting the public agenda, it is still not clear whether the public agenda also affects the media agenda. The relationship may be one of mutual rather than linear causation. Further, it appears that actual events have some impact on both the media agenda and the public agenda.

The prevailing opinion among media researchers seems to be that the media can but

does not always have a powerful effect on the public agenda. The power of media depends on such factors as media credibility on particular issues at particular times, the extent of conflicting evidence as perceived by individual members of the public, the extent to which individuals share media values at certain times, and the public's need for guidance. Media will most often be powerful when media credibility is high, conflicting evidence is low, individuals share media values, and the audience has a high need for guidance.[39]

Karen Siune and Ole Borre studied some of the complexities of agenda setting in a Danish election.[40] Three kinds of political broadcasts on radio and television were aired in this election. These included programs made by the political parties, programs in which the candidates were asked questions by a panel of journalists and citizens, and debates. All of these programs were recorded and analyzed by counting the number of statements made about each issue in the campaign. In addition, about 1,300 voters were interviewed at various points in the campaign to establish the public agenda. Because in Denmark the election campaigns last only three weeks and the number of political broadcasts is more limited than in the United States, the researchers had an excellent opportunity to study the agenda-setting process.

Siune and Borre found three kinds of agenda-setting effects. The first is the degree to which the media reflect the public agenda, called *representation*. In a representational agenda, the public influences the media. The second is the maintenance of the same agenda by the public the entire time, which is called *persistence*. In a persistent public agenda, the media may have little effect. The third occurs when the media agenda influences the public agenda, referred to as *persuasion*. This third kind of effect—media influencing the public—is exactly what classic agenda-setting theory predicts.

If you determine agendas at three points in a campaign—at the beginning (time 1), at the middle (time 2), and at the end (time 3)—you can get a sense of these three effects. A correlation between the public agenda at time 1 and the

media agenda at time 2 suggests representation, or audience-influencing media. A correlation between the public agenda at time 1 and time 3 suggests persistence, or stability of the public agenda. Finally, a correlation between the media agenda at time 2 and the public agenda at time 3 suggests persuasion, or media influencing the public agenda. It is possible for any combination of these three to occur at the same time.

In their study, Siune and Borre found much persistence in the public agenda, but there was also some persuasion in the sense that the broadcasts seemed to affect the public agenda somewhat. The most persuasive effects seemed to come from programs in which citizens set the media agenda. There was also a fair agenda-setting effect from the reporters and from the politicians themselves. The researchers did not find a representation effect in which the public affected the media.

A natural question is who determines the media agenda in the first place? This is a complex and difficult question. It appears that media agendas result from pressures both within media organizations and from outside sources.[41] In other words, the media agenda is established by some combination of internal programming, editorial and managerial decisions, and external influences from nonmedia sources such as socially influential individuals, government officials, commercial sponsors, and the like.

The power of media in establishing a public agenda depends in part on their relations with power centers. If the media have close relationships with the elite class in society, that class will probably affect the media agenda and the public agenda in turn. Many critical theorists believe that media can be, and usually are, an instrument of the dominant ideology in society, and when this happens, that dominant ideology will permeate the public agenda.

Four types of power relations between the media and outside sources can be found. The first is a high-power source and high-power media. In this kind of arrangement, if the two see eye to eye, a positive symbiotic relationship will exert great power over the public agenda. This would be the case, for example, with a powerful public official who has especially good relations with the press. On the other hand, if the powerful media and the powerful sources do not agree, a struggle may take place between them.

The second kind of arrangement is a high-power source and low-power media. Here, the external source will probably co-opt the media and use them to accomplish its own ends. This is what happens, for example, when politicians buy airtime or when a popular president gives the press the "privilege" of interviewing him. In the third type of relation, a lower-power source and high-power media, the media organizations themselves will be largely responsible for their own agenda. This happens when the media marginalize certain news sources such as the student radicals and women's movements in the 1960s. The fourth type of relation is where both media and external sources are low in power, and the public agenda will probably be established by the events themselves rather than the media or the leaders. The media coverage of a disaster is an example of an event creating the agenda rather than the media, leaders, or the public doing so.

As the agenda-setting function shows, there is an interaction between the public and the media, each influencing the other. But what is "the public"? We can measure average opinions and call this "public opinion," but this oversimplifies the process at best. Instead of thinking of the public in monolithic terms, we can look at small media audiences, as the following theory shows.

Social Action Media Studies

Many media scholars believe that the audience cannot be characterized as an amorphous mass. Rather, it consists of numerous highly differentiated communities, each with its own values, ideas, and interests. Media content is interpreted within the community according to meanings that are worked out socially within the group, and individuals are influenced more by their peers than by the media.[42]

Gerard Schoening and James Anderson call the community-based approach *social action media studies*, and they outline six premises of this work.[43] First, meaning is not in the message

itself but is produced by an interpretive process in the audience. Different audiences will interpret or understand what they read and view in different ways. For example, talk-radio programs may be taken to mean many things, depending on who is listening.

The second premise is that the meaning of media messages and programs is not determined passively but produced actively by audiences. This means that audiences actually do something with what they view and read. They act as they view. Some listeners, for example, may turn on talk radio to combat boredom while driving, others may turn it on late in the evening as a sleep aid, and still others may listen to it actively during the day as a means of getting information about current events. What a particular talk radio program means, therefore, is a product of how listeners treat it and what they do with it.

The third premise is that the meanings of media shift constantly as the members approach the media in different ways. Sometimes the talk radio program may be strictly entertainment, sometimes serious information, and sometimes just background noise, depending on when and how it is listened to.

Fourth, the meaning of a program or message is never individually established but is communal. It is part of the tradition of a group, community, or culture. The implication of this is that when you join a community (by birth or membership), you accept the ongoing activities and meanings of that community or group. Fifth, the actions that determine a group's meanings for media content are done in interaction among members of the group. In other words, how we act toward the media and what meanings emerge from those actions are social interactions. This does not mean that you never watch TV by yourself, but it does mean that how you watch TV and what you do with the television set are part of an ongoing interaction between yourself and others. If you listen to talk radio in the car while you commute to work, this pattern is part of a larger web of interactions with people at home and at work. It is a routine that is made possible by a huge network of factors involving work, home, radio, boredom, cars, highways, and so on.

Finally, the sixth premise of social action media studies is that researchers join the communities they study, if only temporarily, and therefore have an ethical obligation to be open about what they are studying and share what they learn with those studied. Consistent with social action media studies, an increasingly popular way of approaching media is to think of the audience as consisting of numerous *interpretive communities*, each with its own meanings for what is read, viewed, or heard.[44] The researchers are part of such communities, and thus bring their own meanings about the media being studied to the research process.

In Chapter 5, we presented the theory of Stanley Fish, who discussed the ways in which readers assign meaning to texts. Because of the fact that many texts come through the media, Fish has had a significant impact on interpretive media studies.[45] For Fish, interpretive communities come into being around specific media and content. A community develops around a shared pattern of consumption: common understandings of the content of what is read, heard, or viewed, and shared outcomes. For example, a television audience consists of a number of "cultures," or communities of viewers, who use and perceive the medium—even individual programs—differently. Thus, if you want to discover how television affects an audience, you have to understand the cultures of these various communities. Because the outcomes of media consumption depend on the cultural constructions of the community, this approach requires cultural interpretation.[46] James Lull refers to this type of work as the "ethnography of mass communication."[47]

For example, a program like *Sesame Street* appeals to a variety of interpretive communities. One such community might be middle-class children whose parents encourage them to watch and discuss the show with them. Another community might be children who view the program on their own to kill time before dinner every evening. The *Harry Potter* books are another example where very different interpretive communities can be found. The books have a number of audiences, such as the children to

From the Source . . .

Social action theorists believe that humans make sense of themselves and the world through two great semiotic systems — language and action — both of which are human inventions and social products. It's a very different approach from the cognitivist-based theories you've been reading about. Instead of your mind shaping what you do, what you do shapes your mind. And what you can do is what your culture provides. Just try going to work (school) tomorrow in an entirely unique way.

—James A. Anderson

whom the books are directed, adults who resonate with the books, and people who form groups to read the books together.

Another example of an interpretive community would be people who get their news by listening to National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* in the car on the way home from work. Still another might consist of people who watch a lot of weekend football for relaxation, entertainment, and social life. And yet another might be the followers of the soap opera *Desperate Housewives*.

Any person may be a member of a variety of interpretive communities, and particular social groups, such as the family, may be a crossing point for a number of such communities. For example, various members of a family may enjoy television news, top-40 radio programming, sitcoms, children's programs, biographies, and sports and are therefore members of a variety of communities.

Thomas Lindlof outlines three genres of interpretive communities.[48] Because interpretive communities define their own meanings for media, these genres constitute general types of media outcomes created by interaction within the interpretive community. They are (1) content; (2) interpretation; and (3) social action.

The first genre that characterizes an interpretive community is *content*, which consists of the types of programs and other media consumed

by the community. One group shares an interest in televised football, another in mystery novels, and still another in music videos. It is not enough that a community share an interest in one type of medium content; it must also share some common meanings for that content. A mother who thinks *Sesame Street* is a cute and harmless pastime for her children, the children who become intimately involved with the characters day after day, the teenage son who thinks it is silly, and the grandfather who loves the Muppets do not constitute an interpretive community because they see very different things in the content of that program.

Genres of *interpretation*, then, revolve around shared meaning. Members of a community interpret the content of programs and other media in similar ways. The impact on their behavior, especially what they say about the media and the language used to describe it, is similar. The Tuesday morning quarterback is a good example. Members of the Monday night football club spend a good deal of time on Tuesday morning analyzing the game and constructing their shared meanings about it.

Finally, genres of *social action* are shared sets of behaviors toward the media in question, including not only how the media content is consumed (when and where it is viewed or read) but also the ways it affects the conduct of the members of the community. How are members' relationships among themselves affected by the media? Does a particular type of content facilitate the relationship in some way? Do people talk to one another about what they have seen or heard? Do they use relationships viewed on television as models for their own relationships?

An example of a cultural analysis of media is Linda Steiner's investigation of the "No Comment" section of *Ms.* magazine.[49] *Ms.* has regularly published a page titled "No Comment," featuring quotations and entries from other sources, sent in by readers, to illustrate the stereotyping and oppression of women in media. The title of the section implies that the advertisement and what is wrong with it stands by itself without the need for comment.

Items from other magazines (especially print ads), journals, newspapers, and even textbooks and manuals have found their way onto the "No Comment" page. All items were originally published with a particular meaning in mind, but the readers of *Ms.* interpret them differently, offended by the way the items depict women as the property of men, mock feminism as offensive, exploit women's bodies to sell products, and promote sexual abuse and violence against women. Steiner shows how contributing to and reading the "No Comment" section solidifies a set of values and views. That readers choose similar items again and again to make a point at odds with the original publisher's intent makes these readers an interpretive community, sharing attitudes and perceptions about the media's treatment of women.

Sociocultural theories of media are diverse in orientation. The three sample theories presented in this chapter take rather different approaches—looking at the structure, functions, and audiences of the mass media. What these theories share is a concern for larger social and cultural forces. They do not agree on what these forces are, but they do see the need to look beyond media content and individual effects. The primary contribution of the sociocultural tradition, then, is to capture large social and cultural outcomes of society-media interactions.

⬛ THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

In contrast with the sociocultural approach covered in the last section, much media theory has concentrated on individual effects of media. We turn now to how individuals are believed to be impacted, as depicted in the sociopsychological tradition.

Parents wonder how television is affecting their children. Educators want to know if children will learn from films, videos, magazines, and television programs. People sometimes even wonder about the consequences of cell phones and video games on children. There is a vast literature on how media affect us, and we can only take an aerial shot of it here by providing an overview of three large theoretical programs within this tradition. The first looks at the effects tradition in general, the second focuses on how individuals use media, and the third points to one cultural outcome of media effects.

The Effects Tradition

The theory of mass-communication effects has undergone a curious evolution in this century.[50] Early on, researchers believed in the "magic bullet" theory of communication effects. Individuals were believed to be directly and heavily influenced by media messages, since media were considered to be extremely powerful in shaping public opinion.[51] According to this model, if you heard on the radio that you should buy Geiko car insurance, you would.

Raymond Bauer observes that audiences are difficult to persuade and even calls them "obstinate."[52] He denies the idea that a direct hypodermic-needle effect operates between communicator and audience and suggests instead that many variables interact to shape effects in various ways.[53] Bauer foreshadowed much current work on media effects, with his insistence that many factors are influential in the kind and amount of effects available from the media.

The hypodermic-needle theory was followed by the "two-step flow hypothesis," which considered media effects to be minimal.[54] The two-step flow hypothesis is the idea that the media inform opinion leaders, who influence others through interpersonal communication. You might get Geiko car insurance because a friend recommends it, but not because of any direct influence from television advertising.

Later, in the 1960s, we came to believe that media effects are mediated by other variables and are therefore only moderate in strength. A Geiko commercial might or might not influence you, depending on other variables, such as who you see the commercial with, how satisfied you are with your present car insurance, and so on.

Perhaps the best-known work on this limited-effects approach was the reinforcement approach most notably articulated by Joseph Klapper.[55] In surveying the literature on mass communication effects, Klapper developed the thesis that mass communication is not a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects but that it is mediated by other variables. Thus, media are only one contributing cause.

The theory of selective exposure was another theory that emerged to explain moderate influence by the media. According to this theory, effects on an audience are mediated by selectivity, as well as group and interpersonal factors. This means that audience members are selective in their exposure to information.[56] In its simplest form, the hypothesis of selective exposure predicts that people in most circumstances will select information consistent with their attitudes.

Compared with the bullet theory, the reinforcement and selective-exposure theories viewed mass communication as more complicated than had previously been imagined. They envisioned situations rife with mediating variables that would inhibit media effects. The research in this tradition did identify some important mediating variables, completing a more elaborate puzzle than had previously been constructed.

Many scholars today, however, have returned to the powerful-effects model. Perhaps the most vocal contemporary spokesperson in favor of powerful effects is Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann.[57]

She believes that limited-effects theory has "distorted the interpretation of research findings over the years," and "that the 'dogma of media powerlessness' is no longer tenable."[58] Noelle-Neumann claims that the pendulum, which began swinging in the other direction after Klapper's famous work, has now reached its full extension and that most researchers believe that the media indeed have powerful effects. The following theory takes a special look at the effects of television viewing.

Cultivation Theory

The work of George Gerbner and his colleagues—cultivation theory—states that television brings about a shared way of viewing the world.[59] Through their studies of television, they developed what they call *cultivation theory*. They begin by contextualizing television and its importance as a medium:

> Television is a centralized system of storytelling. It is part and parcel of our daily lives. Its dramas, commercials, news, and other programs bring a relatively coherent world of common images and messages into every home. Television cultivates from infancy the very predispositions and preferences that used to be acquired from other primary sources. Transcending historic barriers of literacy and mobility, television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of an otherwise heterogeneous population. The repetitive pattern of television's mass-produced messages and images forms the mainstream of a common symbolic environment.[60]

Gerbner calls this effect *cultivation* because television is believed to be a homogenizing agent in culture, or cultivating a common culture. Cultivation analysis is concerned with the totality of the pattern communicated cumulatively by television over a long period of exposure rather than by any particular content or specific effect. In other words, this is not a theory of individual media "effects" but instead makes a statement about the culture as a whole. It is not concerned with what any strategy or campaign can do but with the total impact of numerous strategies and campaigns over time. Total immersion in television,

not selective viewing, is important in the cultivation of ways of knowing and images of reality. Indeed, subcultures may retain their separate values, but general overriding images depicted on television will cut across individual social groups and subcultures, affecting them all.

As you might imagine, the theory predicts a difference in the social reality of heavy television viewers as opposed to light viewers. Heavy viewers will believe in a reality that is consistent with that shown on television, even though television does not necessarily reflect the actual world. Gerbner's research on prime-time television, for example, has shown that there are three men to every woman on television; there are few Hispanics—and those shown are typically minor characters; there are almost entirely middle-class characters; and there are three times as many law enforcement officers as blue-collar workers.

One of the most interesting aspects of cultivation is the "mean-world syndrome." Although less than 1 percent of the population are victims of violent crimes in any one-year period, heavy exposure to violent crimes through television can lead to the belief that no one can be trusted in what appears to be a violent world. Nancy Signorielli undertook a study of the mean-world syndrome, analyzing violent acts in more than 2,000 children's television programs including 6,000 main characters between 1967 and 1985.[61] Signorielli found that about 71 percent of prime-time and 94 percent of weekend programs included acts of violence. Prime-time programs averaged almost five acts of violence each, and weekend programs averaged six. That amounts to over five acts per hour during prime time and about twenty per hour on weekends. The study established that a considerable amount of violence is presented on television.

A second part of this study sought to determine the effect of television violence on viewers. Signorielli surveyed people on five occasions between 1980 and 1986 regarding their views on the state of the world. The findings indicate that heavy viewers tend to see the world as gloomier and meaner than do light viewers, and heavy viewers tend to mistrust people more than light viewers do. Cultivation studies such as Signorielli's have found, then, that there is a general fallout effect from television to the entire culture. Television is not a force for change as much as it is a force for stability and uniformity.

Although cultivation is a general outcome of television viewing, it is not a universal phenomenon, despite the mainstreaming effect. In fact, different groups are affected differently by cultivation. Your interaction with others affects your tendency to accept TV reality. For example, adolescents who interact with their parents about television viewing are less likely to be affected by television images than are adolescents who do not talk with their parents about television. Interestingly, people who watch more cable television tend to manifest more mainstreaming—more tendency to adopt the views offered by television—than do people who watch less.

Cultivation theory presents a more complicated picture than a simple limited or powerful effects model. Although effects seem to be strong, there are intervening variables that can limit certain television viewing effects. In a recent survey of the entire theoretical literature, Paul Power, Robert Kubey, and Spiro Kiousis conclude: "Instead of maintaining the usual polarization between different 'camps' or, as disturbing, the complete neglect by one group of the other's work—the near complete talking past one another—we advocate drawing from the strengths and relevant theorizing and observations of various approaches."[62]

In the following section, we review theories that help to explain why media effects are complex. The uses, gratifications, and dependency models all place much more power in the audience members themselves in terms of the relationships they construct with the media.

Uses, Gratifications, and Dependency

One of the most popular theories of mass communication is the uses-and-gratifications approach.[63] The uses-and-gratifications approach focuses on the consumer—the audience member—rather than the message.[64] Unlike the powerful-effects

tradition, this approach imagines the audience member to be a discriminating user of media. The basic stance is summarized as follows:

> Compared with classical effects studies, the uses-and-gratifications approach takes the media consumer rather than the media message as its starting point, and explores his communication behavior in terms of his direct experience with the media. It views the members of the audience as actively utilizing media contents, rather than being passively acted upon by the media. Thus, it does not assume a direct relationship between messages and effects, but postulates instead that members of the audience put messages to use, and that such usages act as intervening variables in the process of effect.[65]

Here the audience is assumed to be active and goal directed. The audience members are largely responsible for choosing media to meet their own needs. In this view, media are considered to be only one factor contributing to how needs get met, and audience members are assumed to have considerable agency: they know their needs and how to gratify those needs.

Expectancy-Value Theory. Philip Palmgreen created an extension of this theory based on his own work, that of Karl Rosengren, and others.[66] The theory applies *expectancy-value theory*, which you read about in Chapter 4, to media use. The gratifications you seek from media are determined by your attitudes toward the media—your beliefs about what a particular medium can give you—and your evaluations of this material. For example, if you believe that sitcoms provide entertainment and you like to be entertained, you will seek gratification of your entertainment needs by watching sitcoms. If, on the other hand, you believe that sitcoms provide an unrealistic view of life and you don't like this kind of thing, you will avoid viewing them.

Of course, your opinion of sitcoms consists of several beliefs and evaluations, and whether you actually watch them will be determined by several things. Your entire cluster of beliefs and evaluations will determine your orientation to any type of program. Palmgreen's formula for

this, which mirrors the general expectancy-value formula presented in Chapter 4, is as follows:

$$GS_i = \sum_i^n b_i e_i$$

where

GS_i = gratification sought
b_i = belief
e_i = evaluation

The extent to which you seek gratifications in any segment of the media (a program, a program type, a particular kind of content, or an entire medium) would be determined by this formula. As you gain experience with a program, genre, or medium, the gratifications you obtain will in turn affect your beliefs, thus reinforcing your pattern of use.

Let's work an example. Assume for a moment that you have an insatiable desire for news. You are a news junky. News is GS (gratification sought) in the formula. Now assume that you like to explore news blogs and have made quite a study of them. You have developed a set of beliefs (b_i) about the kind of news that each blog can provide and how well it provides this (e_i). Over time, the extent to which you come to use blogs to gratify your need for news will be determined by the sum of these beliefs and evaluations.

To test the connection between expectancy values and media gratifications, David Swanson and Austin Babrow conducted a study of the viewing habits of students when it came to television news.[67] About 300 students at the University of Illinois were asked to fill out a questionnaire on their news viewing. To find out whether they watched the news and how they felt about it when they did, the students were asked how many times a week they viewed network and local news, how likely they were to view news in an average week, and whether other people thought they should watch the news. The questionnaire also tested the students' attitudes toward the news.

To find out the extent to which the news gratified various media needs, the questionnaire then asked the students whether any of a number of gratifications was met by watching the

news. These included such items as keeping up on current events, getting entertained, and giving them things to talk about. The researchers found that the students' expectancy values (their attitudes) toward the news did relate to how much they used the news to gratify certain media needs. As their expectations grew, their viewing increased.

Dependency Theory.   The uses-and-gratifications approach is a limited-effects theory. In other words, it grants individuals much control over how they employ media in their lives. Although media scholars are divided on just how powerful the media are, some scholars have argued that the limited-effects and powerful-effects models are not necessarily incompatible. Dependency theory takes a step toward showing how both may explain media effects.

Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur originally proposed dependency theory.[68] Like uses-and-gratifications theory, this approach rejects the causal assumptions of the early reinforcement hypothesis, the old idea that media simply reinforce previously held attitudes. To overcome this weakness, these authors take a broad systems approach. In their model, they propose an integral relationship among audiences, media, and the larger society.

Consistent with uses-and-gratifications theory, dependency theory predicts that you depend on media information to meet certain needs and achieve certain goals. But you do not depend on all media equally. Two factors determine how dependent you will become on media, according to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur.

First, you will become more dependent on media that meet a number of your needs than on media that satisfy just a few. Media can serve a number of functions, such as monitoring government activities, reporting news, and providing entertainment. For any given group of people, some of these functions are more important than others, and your dependence on information from a medium increases when it supplies information that is more central to you. If you follow sports carefully, you will probably become

dependent on ESPN or *Sports Illustrated.* A person who is not interested in sports will probably not even know where ESPN is on the dial, may never have looked at *Sports Illustrated*, and typically skips the entire sports section of the newspaper.

The second source of dependency is social stability. When social change and conflict are high, established institutions, beliefs, and practices are challenged, forcing a re-evaluation and perhaps new choices in terms of media consumption. At such times your reliance on the media for information will increase. At other, more stable times your dependency on media may go way down. During times of war, for example, people become incredibly dependent on news programming.

This model shows that social institutions and media systems interact with audiences so as to create needs, interests, and motives. These, in turn, influence the audience to select various media and nonmedia sources that can subsequently lead to various dependencies. Individuals who grow dependent on a particular segment of the media will be affected cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally by that segment. Consequently, people are affected in different ways and to different degrees by the media.

Of course, one's needs are not always strictly personal but may be shaped by the culture or by various social conditions. In other words, individuals' needs, motives, and uses of media are contingent on outside factors that may not be within the individuals' control. These outside factors act as constraints on what and how media can be used and on the availability of other nonmedia alternatives.

For example, an elderly person who does not drive and has few friends may come to depend on television in a way that other individuals, whose life situations are different, will not. A commuter may come to rely on radio for information and news. A teenager may become dependent on downloading music because of certain norms in the social group. In general, "the more readily available, the greater the perceived instrumentality, and the more socially and culturally acceptable the use of a medium is, the more probable that media use will be

regarded as the most appropriate functional alternative."[69]

Furthermore, the more alternatives an individual has for gratifying needs, the less dependent the individual will become on any single medium. The number of functional alternatives, however, is not just a matter of individual choice or even of psychological traits but is limited also by factors such as availability of certain media. At this time, for example, not very many people are using Internet telephones because this new technology is not highly available. In years to come, that could change because of the increased availability of the medium.

◐ THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

The interplay of public opinion and media content is an interesting phenomenon. In this section, we look at one popular theory that illustrates this relationship as a cybernetic process.

Public Opinion and the Spiral of Silence

The topic of public opinion has been of great concern in political science. It is defined as opinions publicly expressed, opinions regarding public affairs, and opinions of the public as a group rather than of smaller groups of individuals. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's theory of the "spiral of silence" continues this analysis by demonstrating how interpersonal communication and media operate together in the development of public opinion.[70]

As a political researcher in Germany, Noelle-Neumann observed that in elections, certain views seem to get more play than others. Sometimes people mute their opinions rather than talk about them. Noelle-Neumann calls this the *spiral of silence*. The spiral of silence occurs when individuals who perceive that their opinions are popular express them, whereas those who do not think their opinions are popular remain quiet. This process occurs in a spiral, so that one side of an issue ends up with much publicity and the other side with little.

In everyday life, we express our opinions in a variety of ways: we talk about them, we wear buttons, and we put bumper stickers on our cars. According to this theory, people are more apt to do these kinds of things when they perceive that others share their opinions and less apt to do so when they do not.

This thesis rests on two premises. The first is that people know which opinions are prevalent and which are not. In other words, people are not reluctant to make educated guesses about public opinion and have a sense of the percentages of the population for and against certain positions. This is called the *quasi-statistical sense* because while it is not scientific, there is a sense that it is the prevailing viewpoint. The second assumption is that people adjust their expressions of opinion to these perceptions.

Noelle-Neumann presents considerable evidence to support these assumptions. In political elections, for example, people usually perceive quite accurately the prevailing opinion about the candidates and issues, and they are likely to express their preferences when others share them. An interesting test of the tendency to remain silent on unpopular positions, devised by Noelle-Neumann is the "train test."[71] Here, respondents are asked to imagine that they are in a train compartment with a stranger for five hours and to decide whether they would be willing to discuss certain topics with this person. Respondents are told that they are to imagine that the other person mentions his or her opinion on a subject; the respondents then are asked whether they would prefer to talk to the other person about this topic or not. Topics range from spanking children to the government of Germany. Interviewers presented this problem to 3,500 respondents, covering numerous topics over several years. The overwhelming tendency was to freely discuss the topic when one agrees with the other person but to let it slide when one does not. People seem not to want to "make waves."

Of course, other factors enter into the decision to express one's opinion: young people are more expressive than older people; educated individuals will speak up more than uneducated ones;

and men are generally more willing to disclose their opinions than women. However, the spiral of silence is also a factor, and according to this research, a powerful one.

The spiral of silence seems to be caused by the fear of isolation. The spiral of silence is not just a matter of wanting to be on the winning side but is an attempt to avoid being isolated from one's social group. Threats of criticism from others were found to be powerful forces in silencing individuals. For example, smokers who are repeatedly criticized for advocating smokers' rights were found to remain silent rather than state their views on this subject in the presence of vocal nonsmokers. In some cases the threat of expressing an opinion is extreme, as Noelle-Neumann notes: "Slashed tires, defaced or torn posters, help refused to a lost stranger ... demonstrate that people can be on uncomfortable or even dangerous ground when the climate of opinion runs counter to their views. When people attempt to avoid isolation, they are not responding hypersensitively to trivialities; these are existential issues that can involve real hazards."[72]

One can easily see how this process affects public opinion. There are, of course, exceptions to the spiral of silence. There are groups and individuals who do not fear isolation and who will express their opinions no matter what the consequences—a characteristic of innovators, change agents, and the avant-garde.

The media themselves also contribute to the spiral of silence. When polled, individuals usually state that they feel powerless in the face of media. Two kinds of experience accentuate this feeling of helplessness. The first is the difficulty of getting publicity for a cause or point of view. The second is being scapegoated by the media in what Noelle-Neumann calls the *pillory function* of media. In each case the individual feels powerless against the media, making the media an important part of the spiral of silence.

The media, then, publicize which opinions are prevalent and which are not. As a result, individuals often cannot tell where their opinions

come from. They confuse what is learned through the media with what is learned through interpersonal channels. This tendency is especially true for television, with which so many people have a personal relationship:

> The longer one has studied the question, the clearer it becomes that fathoming the effects of the mass media is very hard. These effects do not come into being as a result of a single stimulus; they are as a rule cumulative, following the principle that "water dripping constantly wears away stone." Further discussions among people spread the media's messages further, and before long no difference can be perceived between the point of media reception and points far removed from it. The media's effects are predominantly unconscious; people cannot provide an account of what has happened. Rather, they mix their own direct perceptions and the perceptions filtered through the eyes of the media into an indivisible whole that seems to derive from their own thoughts and experiences.[73]

Media effects on public opinion, then, are cumulative and not always apparent.

It sometimes happens that journalists' opinions differ from those of the general public, so that media depictions contradict the prevailing expressions of individuals. When this occurs, a dual climate of opinion results. Here, two versions of reality operate—that of the media and that of the public. Noelle-Neumann likens this event to an unusual weather situation—interesting and seemingly bizarre. In the 2004 presidential election in the United States, for example, the incumbent George W. Bush was strongly supported by public opinion, yet many believed that the media projected a bias against the president.

The spiral of silence, then, is a phenomenon involving personal and media channels of communication. The media publicize public opinion, making evident which opinions predominate. Individuals express their opinions or not, depending on dominant points of view; the media, in turn, attend to the expressed opinion, and the spiral continues.

The theory of the spiral of silence could be considered part of the sociopsychological tradition

because of its emphasis on what individuals do in response to the conditions they face, but we think that this theory actually demonstrates cybernetic thinking quite well, as larger systemic interactions are at stake. An attraction of Noelle-Neumann's work is the complex interaction among individual statements, media depictions, and public opinion.

Media studies have generally embraced the cybernetic approach. One of the most influential ideas in media theory is that media affect opinion leaders, who in turn disseminate information and influence through interpersonal communication networks, which leads to the adoption of ideas throughout society, which in turn influences the media. In other words, a large cybernetic circle exists that includes media, opinion leaders, and interpersonal networks. We turn now to the critical tradition, which focuses on the ways the media privilege dominant ideologies in a culture.

◖ THE CRITICAL TRADITION

The media are more than simple mechanisms for disseminating information: they are complex organizations that comprise an important social institution of society. Clearly, the media are major players in ideological struggle. Most critical communication theories are concerned with mass media primarily because of the media's potential for disseminating dominant ideologies and their potential for expressing alternative and oppositional ones. For some critical theorists, media are part of a culture industry that literally creates symbols and images that can oppress marginalized groups.

Critical theory in general goes well beyond the study of media. Because of its broad cultural implications, we address this tradition in greater detail in the following chapter. In this chapter, however, we want at least to outline the major branches of critical media theory and to summarize some important developments in feminist media theory.

Branches of Critical Media Theory

According to McQuail there are five major branches of critical media theory.[74] The first is *classical Marxism*. Here, the media are seen as instruments of the dominant class and a means by which capitalists promote their profit-making interests. Media disseminate the ideology of the ruling classes in society and thereby oppress certain classes.

The second branch is *political-economic media theory*, which, like classical Marxism, blames media ownership for society's ills. In this school of thought, media content is a commodity to be sold in the marketplace, and the information disseminated is controlled by what the market will bear. This system leads to a conservative, non-risk-taking operation, making certain kinds of programming and certain media outlets dominant and others marginalized.

The third theoretical branch is the *Frankfurt School*. This school of thought, which sees media as a means of constructing culture, places more emphasis on ideas than on material goods. In this way of thinking, media lead to the domination of the ideology of the elite. This outcome is accomplished by media manipulation of images and symbols to benefit the interests of the dominant class.

The fourth school is *hegemonic theory*. Hegemony is the domination of a false ideology or way of thinking over true conditions. Ideology is not caused by the economic system alone but is deeply embedded in all activities of society. Thus, ideology is not forced by one group on another but is pervasive and unconscious. The dominant ideology perpetuates the interests of certain classes over others, and the media obviously play a major role in this process.

The first four schools—classical Marxism, political economy, Frankfurt, and hegemonic—are different approaches to media within the critical theory tradition. The critical tradition takes a somewhat different direction with the fifth of McQuail's approaches—"cultural studies." Relying largely on semiotics, this group of scholars

is interested in the cultural meanings of media products; they look at the ways media content is interpreted, including both dominant and oppositional interpretations. Cultural studies sees society as a field of competing ideas. What, for example, is the meaning of a music video? In cultural studies, a particular video could have various competing meanings, and each is a cultural production.

Cultural studies is becoming an increasingly popular and useful approach, and it can be used to integrate several insights from a variety of schools of thought.[75] Because of its broad social implications, we explore cultural studies in greater detail in the following chapter. For now, we would like to provide an overview of one variation of cultural studies with particular applications to the media—feminist media studies.

Feminist Media Studies

Feminist media studies have been a particularly strong research area within cultural studies. Feminist media studies have moved over the years from an interest in critiquing gender stereotypes (gender-depiction studies) to looking at how depictions of women in the media are understood by audiences (gender-reception studies). Most recently, feminist media studies have been interested in how audiences actually mold, or negotiate, the meanings of media messages (meaning-negotiation studies).[76] With these shifts, perspectives on gender have changed as well.

Depiction and Reception.   In early studies of stereotypes in the media, gender was conceived as a fairly stable category for distinguishing between characteristics and portrayals of women and men.[77] Men, for example, were observed to be depicted in more powerful roles, while women were in more subservient ones. In reception studies, the focus was on social and cultural factors in the family, institutions, and other forces that influenced how media depictions were received, or understood.[78] So, for example,

in viewing a male or female character on television, your perception would be influenced by a raft of social forces that you have experienced throughout your life. In other words, your meanings for what you view are not determined solely by the depictions themselves but by what you bring to the viewing situation.

Negotiation.   More recent theories look at how individuals negotiate the meaning of gender in the media by making choices about how they wish to orient to various aspects of media programming. For example, a person might (1) pay attention to a particular gender stereotype and take it seriously, as might be the case for a girl who comes to idealize the female form depicted in media by personas such as Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, or Jessica Simpson; (2) ignore those depictions, as might be exemplified by boys who think it is not cool to pay attention to female stars, high-school girls who take a critical view of female role models, or mothers who want something different for their children; (3) enjoy these images on some ironic level, as might be the case with satirists; (4) use these depictions to empower them to take social action, as could happen with activists; or (5) some combination of the above. At times, gender is important to the production of meaning; at other times it is not significant in the least. Its importance depends upon how viewers negotiate their orientations to the production.

Thus, feminist media studies offer an increasingly complicated understanding of gender in relation to the media. This move from simplistic analysis of representation to more complex views is the case with most branches of critical media studies. We turn now to one particular feminist media theory—the work of bell hooks.[79]

bell hooks's Critique of Media

The critique of the media that bell hooks advocates calls for the use of communication to disrupt and eradicate the ideology of domination—what

she refers to as white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. This ideology of domination involves interlocking systems of sexism, racism, class elitism, capitalism, and heterosexism.[80] For hooks, critiques of media are particularly important because of the pervasiveness and power of the media. She does not make the media responsible for the ideology of oppression; she believes everyone contributes to its continuation—even those who are oppressed.

For hooks, those at the margins have a special responsibility to disrupt hegemonic, or oppressive, discourse because they look "both from the outside in and from the inside out."[81] The standpoint of marginality nourishes the capacity to resist the ideology of domination and to raise "the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds."[82]

hooks advocates *decolonization* as the basic means for disrupting domination. Decolonization, which is the foundation of her approach to media critique, is a process of breaking with the assumptions of the reality of the dominant culture, including the tendency of oppressed people to internalize their inferior status. Decolonization involves the critical, analytic, and strategic creation of alternative models of a nondominant reality; hooks proposes two forms of decolonization—critique and invention.

Critique is crucial because of the pervasiveness of the media: "the politics of domination inform the way the vast majority of images we consume are constructed and marketed."[83] Television and film are most important because they socialize people into the ideology of oppression. When the television is on, whites "are always with us, their voices, values, and beliefs echoing in our brains. It is this constant presence of the colonizing mindset passively consumed that undermines our capacity to resist."[84] To counter this, critique should interrogate, challenge, and confront. For instance, hooks is not content to applaud the visibility of blacks in the media or the fact that a movie was made by a black person. Rather, she questions every aspect of representation.[85]

The second key to decolonization, according to hooks, is *invention* of nondominating cultural forms. The primary means for creating such forms is through *enactment*, or living and acting in nondominating and nonexploitive ways in one's own life. Critique is meaningless, according to hooks, "without changing individual habits of being, without allowing those ideas to work in our lives and on our souls in a manner that transforms."[86] Individual choices about media consumption are part of this strategy of enactment for hooks, and this is what she means by *decolonizing*. For hooks, then, decolonization is a thoroughly personal and personalizing process enacted in everyday life.

The critical tradition in media studies, now a dominant approach in terms of scholarship, has been greatly influenced by the cybernetic, the sociocultural, and the semiotic traditions. The influence of cybernetics is clear from the generally held belief in critical studies that domination is reproduced, or "articulated," by many interacting forces. No one force, such as the media, creates all of society's power structures; instead, these are a product of society-wide interaction of many institutions. At the same time, critical theory does tend to reject old-style system theory because it takes an "objective" and descriptive approach and fails to account for the social realities that are actually created through system interactions.

The sociocultural tradition has influenced critical approaches because of its emphasis on interpretation and social interaction as processes in which various structures and meanings get made. Sociocultural theories also emphasize discourse, an important element of most critical work on media. Finally, the critical tradition has been influenced by the semiotic tradition. Although most critical theorists would reject early semiotic theories, they freely acknowledge that symbols are powerful in producing cultural forms, including oppressive arrangements. In a sense, then, the critical tradition brings to bear all of the traditions in communication to our understanding of the media and how they function in society and in our lives.

APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Because of the diversity of thought about media, theoretical generalizations are difficult. Still, as you peruse the theories in this chapter, three themes emerge.

1. The medium in which communication occurs contributes to the shape of society.

McLuhan's theory is not much in favor anymore, but few would deny the legitimacy of his basic idea — that media forms in and of themselves do have an impact on culture. McLuhan's ideas are useful for stimulating a fresh look at the subject matter, but they provide little guidance on how to understand the process of mass communication. They are valuable in that they point to the importance of media forms in society, but they do not give a realistic picture of the variables involved in the effects of media forms. In sum, Kenneth Boulding points out, "It is perhaps typical of very creative minds that they hit very large nails not quite on the head."[87]

The line of work called medium theory, nicely summarized by Ellis, does call our attention to the impacts of media on society. How did things change as we went from being an oral society to a literate one? What is the difference between hearing news by word of mouth and sitting down to read a book? And how do things change again when we can simply switch on an electronic box to see images from around the world? If you read a novel, you will encounter many semiotic images created by words, but if you read a magazine, you will encounter a complex set of visual and textual signs that affect your mind in entirely different ways. Once those images begin to move, as in movies and television, then the complexity of the semiotic representation skyrockets. Apart from content, then, it behooves us to think critically and creatively about the media we consume, how these affect us as individuals, and how they shape our cultures and society.

2. Media institutions have a major role in the production of culture.

This generalization says a great deal, but it also says very little. The fact that media have an impact is a truism. Clearly, mass communication involves the dissemination of information and influence in society through media and interpersonal channels. It is an integral part of culture and is inseparable from other large-scale social institutions. Media forms like television, film, and print — as well as media content — affect our ways of thinking and seeing the world. Indeed, media participate in the very creation of culture itself, and many believe that media are instrumental in disseminating power and domination in society and are thereby instruments of ideology and hegemony.

The literature on media reflects a persistent conflict in the study of mass communication. How powerful are media in the control of culture? Some argue that media are powerful forces in determining the character of culture and individual life. Other theorists claim that individuals have much control over the outcomes of media transactions in their lives. Yet a third group believes that mass media are important but that they are only part of a complex of factors involved

in social domination, and that individuals are influenced by the entire system of dominating forces.

The media-influence process is complex. In the final analysis, the outcome of mass communication may be a product of the interaction among various societal structures and individual needs, desires, and dependencies, and it seems unlikely that this system will ever be reduced to a single or simple formula. The theories in this chapter emphasize different aspects of this complex relationship.

One of the most important lines of research on the cultural impact of media is critical theory, which maintains that media are powerful forces for dominant interests in society. The so-called media hegemony thesis maintains that media are instruments of the dominant ideology, and by representing the interests of those already in power, media subvert the interests of marginalized groups. Scholars opposing media hegemony claim that the media actually represent a diversity of values and often speak out in opposition to the ideology of the powerful in society.[88]

The uses-and-gratifications approach was like a breath of fresh air in media research. For the first time, scholars moved away from the traditional viewpoint of the passive, unthinking audience and instead focused on receivers as active participants in the communication process. This approach is certainly one of the most popular frameworks for the study of mass communication, but a good deal of criticism has been leveled against it.[89]

Dependency theory attempts to reconcile some of the problems of uses–and-gratification models with other powerful-effects models. This theory accounts for both individual differences in responses to media and general media effects. As a system theory, it shows the complexity of the interactions among the various aspects of the media transaction. The fusion of the uses-and-gratifications theory and the dependency theory provides an even more complete integration.

3. Audience members and communities participate in constructing the meaning of media messages.

No area in media theory has presented such quandaries and debates as studies of the audience. Media theorists are far from reaching consensus on how to conceptualize the audience and audience effects. Disputes over the nature of the audience seem to involve two related dialectics.

The first is a tension between the idea that the audience is a mass public versus the idea that it is a small community. The second and related debate is a tension between the idea that the audience is passive versus the belief that it is active. In the case of the former, audiences are viewed as a large population that can be molded by the media. In the case of the latter, audiences are viewed as discriminating members of small groups who are influenced mostly by their peers.

Many media scholars believe that the mass community and active-passive dichotomies are too simple — that they do not capture the true complexity of audiences. Rather than ask whether audiences are easily influenced by the media, it might be better to ask when and under what conditions they are influenced and when they are not. This view changes the debate from one about what the audience really is to what the audience means for people at different times and in different places.[90]

◖ NOTES

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8. This conceptualization is adapted from a discussion of mass communication theory by McQuail, *Mass Communication*, 53–57.

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10. For a more complete discussion of the semiotic tradition, see Donald L. Fry and Virginia H. Fry, "A Semiotic Model for the Study of Mass Communication," in *Communication Yearbook 9*, ed. Margaret L. McLaughlin (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1986), 443–62; Klaus Bruhn Jensen, "When Is Meaning? Communication Theory, Pragmatism, and Mass Media Reception," *Communication Yearbook 14*, ed. James A. Anderson (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991), 3–32.

11. Especially good summaries of this field are provided by Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, *Semiotics and Communication: Signs, Codes, Cultures* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993); Fry and Fry, "A Semiotic Model," 443–62; and Jensen, "When Is Meaning?," 3–32.

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13. The most prominent critics of mass society are Jose Ortega y Gasset, Karl Mannheim, Karl Jaspers, Paul Tillich, Gabriel Marcel, and Emil Lederer. Syntheses can be found in a variety of sources. See, for example, Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

14. McLuhan's best-known works are *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); *The Mechanical Bride* (New York: Vanguard, 1951); *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Bantam, 1967). We have relied on the synthesis of Bruce Gronbeck, "McLuhan as Rhetorical Theorist," *Journal of Communication* 31 (1981): 117–128.

15. J. W. Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," *Antioch Review* 27 (1967): 5–39. Innis's works include *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951); and *Empire and Communications*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

16. Good brief summaries of McLuhan's theory can be found in the following: Kenneth Boulding, "The Medium Is the Massage," in *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*, ed. G. E. Stearn (New York: Dial, 1967), 56–64; Tom Wolfe, "The New Life Out There," in *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*, ed. G. E. Stearn (New York: Dial, 1967), 34–56; Carey, "Innis and McLuhan."

17. McLuhan and Fiore, "Medium Is the Massage".

18. Donald G. Ellis, *Crafting Society: Ethnicity, Class, and Communication Theory* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999).

19. Mark Poster, *The Second Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

20. For an analysis of theoretical impact of the second media age, see David Holmes, *Communication Theory: Media, Technology and Society* (London: Sage, 2005).

21. Holmes, *Communication Theory*, 10.

22. Holmes, *Communication Theory*.

23. Pierre Lévy, *Cyberculture* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1997).

24. Charles Soukup, "Computer-Mediated Communication as a Virtual Third Place: Building Oldenburg's Great Good Places on the World Wide Web," *New Media and Society* 8 (2006): 421–40. See also James E. Katz and others, "Personal Mediated Communication in Theory and Practice," in *Communication Yearbook 28*, ed. Pamela J. Kalbfleisch (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), 315–71.

25. Ronald E. Rice, "Artifacts and Paradoxes in New Media," *Media and Society* 1 (1999): 24–32.

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28. For an overview, see Maxwell McCombs and Tamara Bell, "The Agenda Setting Role of Mass Communication," in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, ed. Michael B. Salwen and Don W. Stacks (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 93–110.

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30. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 16.

31. Donald L. Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs, *The Emergence of American Political Issues* (St. Paul, MN: West, 1977), 5. For a very good summary of this whole line of work, see Jian-Hua Zhu and Deborah Blood, "Media Agenda-Setting Theory: Telling the Public What to Think About," in *Emerging Theories of Human Communication*, ed. Branislav Kovácíc (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997): 88–114. See also Maxwell E. McCombs, "New Frontiers in Agenda Setting: Agendas of Attributes and Frames," *Mass Communication Review* 24 (1997): 4–24; Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas," *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 58–67; Everett M. Rogers and James W. Dearing, "Agenda-Setting Research: Where Has It Been, Where Is It Going?" in *Communication Yearbook 11*, ed. James A. Anderson (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), 555–93; Stephen D. Reese, "Setting the Media's Agenda: A Power Balance Perspective," in *Communication Yearbook 14*, ed. James A. Anderson (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991), 309–40. See also David Protess and Maxwell E. McCombs, *Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991).

32. Pamela J. Shoemaker, "Media Gatekeeping," in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, ed. Michael B. Salwen and Don W. Stacks (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 79–91.

33. The idea of framing as a media effect is explored by Dietram A. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999): 103–122. See also McCombs, "New Frontiers."

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37. June Woong Rhee, "Strategy and Issue Frames in Election Campaign Coverage: A Social Cognitive Account of Framing Effects," *Journal of Communication* 47 (1997): 26–48.

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41. Reese, "Setting the Media's Agenda."

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71. Noelle-Neumann, *Spiral*, 16–22.

72. Noelle-Neumann, *Spiral*, 56.

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74. McQuail, *Mass Communication*, 63–68.

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76. Lisbet van Zoonen, *Feminist Media Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 27.

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79. Gloria Watson is hooks's given name; Bell Hooks was the name of her maternal grandmother, a woman who was not afraid to talk back. Using the pseudonym of her grandmother allows hooks to claim a vocal, public identity. The decision to not capitalize the name is a reminder that the substance of what is said is more important than who is saying it.

80. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End, 1989), 173.

81. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End, 1984), preface.

82. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990), 149–50.

83. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End, 1992), 5.

84. bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 110.

85. In her video, *bell hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation*, hooks models the kind of critique she envisions. See *bell hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation* (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1997).
86. bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 42.
87. Boulding, "The Medium Is the Massage," 68.
88. There is considerable disagreement over the extent of the impact of media hegemony. For a summary of these debates, see Kevin Carragee, "A Critical Evaluation of Debates Examining the Media Hegemony Thesis," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (1993): 330–48.
89. See especially Philip Elliott, "Uses and Gratifications Research: A Critique and Sociological Alternative," in *The Uses of Mass Communication*, ed. Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974), 249–68; and David L. Swanson, "Political Communication Research and the Uses and Gratifications Model: A Critique," *Communication Research* 6 (1979): 36–53.
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11
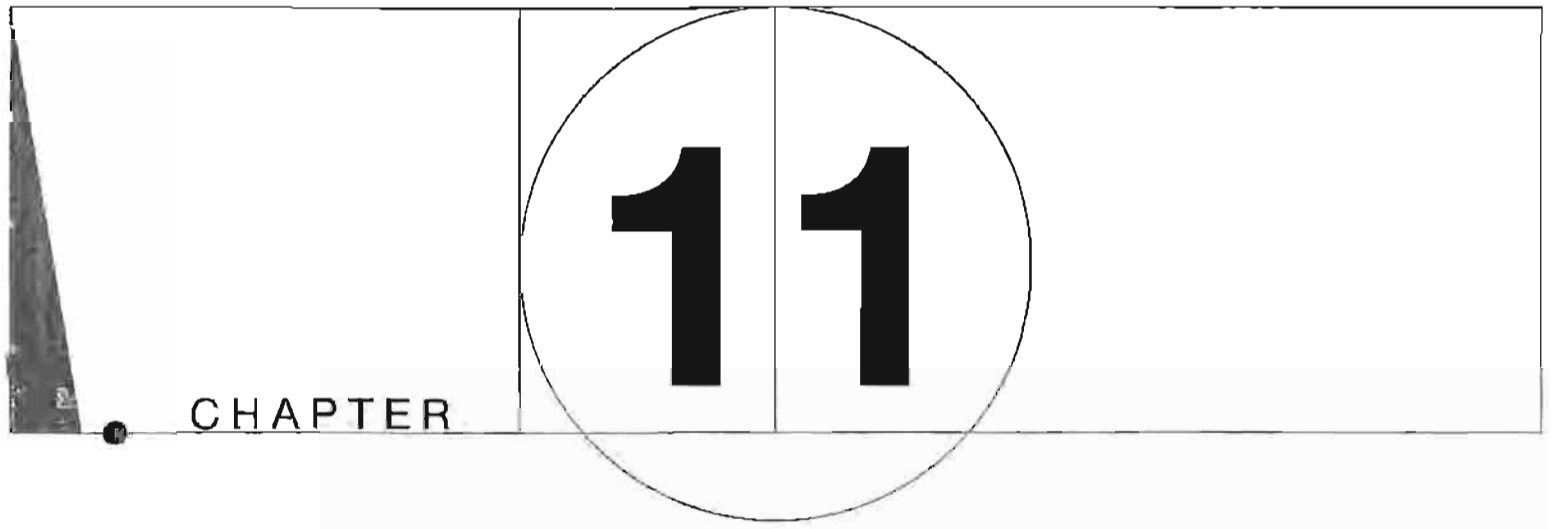
CULTURE AND SOCIETY

We started our survey of communication theories in this book by looking quite narrowly at the individual communicator and expanded our scope of concern from messages, conversations, and relationships to groups and organizations. In the previous chapter, we looked at the media as a broad social institution. In this chapter, we take the broadest perspective yet to look at communication within the context of society and culture. Every act of communication — whether personal or mediated — is affected by and contributes to large social forms and patterns. Because the social and cultural context of communication is so huge, we often don't see it. To risk a cliché, we lose our view of the forest when we concentrate too much on individual trees.

We forget, for example, that what we perceive, how we understand, and how we act are very much shaped by the language of our culture. Language is not an inert medium for transmitting information but affects and is affected by daily interaction. Patterns of interaction among friends, in communities, and throughout society determine lines of influence, which, in turn, shape our values, opinions, and behavior.

If you have traveled to other countries, you have been able to see dramatic changes in human culture, obvious in dress, food, and behavior. In most parts of the world today, you have to travel only to the closest street corner to experience diversity because most of us do not live in homogenous communities. Cultural difference

Topic	Semiotic Theories	Cybernetic Theories	Phenomeno-logical Theories	Sociocultural Theories	Critical Theories
Language	Linguistic relativity Elaborated & restricted codes			Spiral of silence	
Social Influence		Diffusion of information and influence			
Culture			Cultural hermeneutics	Ethnography of communication Performance ethnography	
Power and domination					Modernism • Marxism • Frankfurt School • Feminism Postmodernism • Cultural studies • Feminist cultural studies • Critical race theory Poststructuralism: Foucault Postcolonialism: Minh-ha

is palpable, but we may not be used to thinking of ourselves as cultural beings whose sense of identity and how we relate to others is a product of some combination of cultures that impact our lives. In this chapter, we will look at several theories from a variety of traditions that help us understand the context of society and culture. The chapter map on page 316 outlines the chapter.

THE SEMIOTIC TRADITION

What does your language enable you to see? If your language is gendered—that is, if it includes masculine and feminine nouns—you probably have a tendency to divide the world into male and female realms. Some languages have no tense, so past, present, and future must be inferred from context. Is the future "ahead of you"? Not all languages have that conceptual construction; in some languages, "the future is behind you," because you can't see it. Recall from Chapter 3 that semiotics is the study of how signs, including language, bridge the world of experience and the human mind. Since there is rarely a natural relationship between language and reality, language indeed shapes reality. One of the key differences among cultures is how language is used, as the two theories—linguistic relativity and elaborated and restricted codes—in this section show.

Linguistic Relativity

The *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, otherwise known as the theory of linguistic relativity, is based on the work of Edward Sapir and his protégé Benjamin Lee Whorf.[1] Known for his fieldwork in linguistics, Whorf discovered that fundamental syntactic differences are present among language groups. The Whorfian hypothesis of linguistic relativity simply states that the structure of a culture's language determines the behavior and habits of thinking in that culture. In the words of Sapir:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. . . . The

fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. . . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.[2]

This hypothesis suggests that our thought processes and the way we see the world are shaped by the grammatical structure of the language.

Whorf spent much of his life investigating the relationship of language and behavior. His work with the Hopi and their view of time illustrates the relativity hypothesis. Whereas many cultures refer to points in time (such as seasons) as nouns, the Hopi conceive of time as a passage or process. Thus, the Hopi language never objectifies time. The Hopi would not refer to summer as "in the summer." Instead, the Hopi would refer to the passing or coming of a phase that is never here and now but always moving, always accumulating. By contrast, in Standard Average European (SAE) languages, including English, we visualize time as a line. We use three tenses—past, present, and future—to indicate locations or places in a spatial analogy. Hopi verbs, however, have no tense in the same sense. Instead, their verb forms relate to duration and order.

Suppose, for example, a speaker reports that a man "is running." The Hopi would use the word *wari*, which is a statement of *running as a fact*. The same word would be used for a report of past running: "He ran." For the Hopi, the statement of fact is what is important, not whether the event is presently occurring or happened in the past. If, however, the Hopi speaker wishes to report *running from memory* (the hearer did not actually see it), a different form— *era wari*—would be used. The English sentence "He will run" would translate *warikni*, which

communicates *running as expectation.* Another English form, "He runs [on the track team]," would translate *warikngwe.* This latter Hopi form refers to *running as a condition.*[3] Again, it is not the location in past, present, or future that is important to the Hopi but whether it is observed fact, recalled fact, or expectation.

As a result of these linguistic differences, members of Hopi and SAE cultures will think about, perceive, and behave toward time differently. For example, the Hopi tend to engage in lengthy preparation activities. Experiences (getting prepared) tend to accumulate as time "gets later." The emphasis is on the accumulated experience during the course of time, not on time as a point or location. In SAE cultures, with their spatial treatment of time, experiences are not accumulated in the same sense. The custom in SAE cultures is to record events so as to objectify what happened in the past.

Notice that the theory of linguistic relativity is different from the social constructionist theories discussed earlier in the book. In social constructionism, people are believed to create their realities in the process of interaction, whereas Whorf and Sapir teach that reality is already embedded in the language and therefore comes preformed. Both theories deal with cultural reality, but they approach the topic in different ways.

To illustrate one way in which language difference prefigures cultural difference, Basil Bernstein, in a series of classic studies in the sociology of language, discovered important differences in language use between classes. This is the theory of elaborated and restricted codes, to which we turn next.

Elaborated and Restricted Codes

Basil Bernstein's theory of elaborated and restricted codes shows how the structure of the language employed in everyday talk reflects and shapes the assumptions of a social group.[4] Bernstein is especially interested in social class and the ways the class system creates different types of language and is maintained by language.

The basic assumption of this theory is that the relationships established in a social group affect the type of speech used by the group. At the same time, the structure of the speech used by a group makes different things relevant or significant. This happens because different groups have different priorities, and language emerges from what is required to maintain relationships within the group. In other words, people learn their place in the world by virtue of the language codes they employ.

For example, in one family where a strict authoritarian control system is used, children learn that they must respond to simple commands. In this kind of family, persuasive appeals would not only be irrelevant but counterproductive. For Bernstein, role and language go hand in hand. The kinds of roles that children learn are reinforced by the kind of language employed in the community, especially the family. The term *code* refers to a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a social group. Two children who both speak English might employ very different codes because their talk is different.

Bernstein's theory centers on two codes— elaborated and restricted. *Elaborated codes* provide a wide range of different ways to say something. These allow speakers to make their ideas and intentions explicit. Because they are more complex, elaborated codes require more planning, explaining why speakers may pause more and appear to be thinking as they talk. *Restricted codes* have a narrower range of options, and it is easier to predict what form they will take. These codes do not allow speakers to expand on or elaborate very much on what they mean.

Restricted codes are appropriate in groups in which there is a strongly shared set of assumptions and little need to elaborate on what is meant. Elaborated codes are appropriate in groups in which perspectives are not shared. Here, people are required to expand on what they mean. Restricted codes are oriented toward social categories for which everybody has the same meaning, whereas elaborated codes are oriented toward individualized categories that others might not share.

For example, in some groups everybody knows the difference between masculine and

feminine, and people are clearly identified in a male or female role. Everybody knows the place of a woman and a man, a girl and a boy in the social order. You can assume what people think and feel based on their gender identification, and there is little need to explore individual differences. In other groups, however, gender as a category is not as useful because there is not a common understanding of what masculine and feminine mean. In such situations, it would take more words to explore what is appropriate behavior for the individual child than it would to tell a girl to go to the kitchen and help her mother.

Thus, elaborated codes are used by speakers who value individuality above group identification. Because the intent of the speakers cannot be inferred from their roles, they have to be able to express themselves individually in some detail. Bernstein offers the example of a couple who has just come out of a movie and stops by to visit with friends. There, they discuss the film at some length. The other couple has not seen it but can understand their friends' ideas about the film anyway: "The meanings now have to be made public to others who have not seen the film. The speech shows careful editing, at both the grammatical and lexical levels. It is no longer contextualized. The meanings are explicit, elaborated and individualized. . . . The experience of the listeners cannot be taken for granted. Thus each member of the group is on his own as he offers his interpretation."[5]

A primary difference between the types of groups that use these two codes is their degree of openness. A *closed-role system* is one that reduces the number of alternatives for the participants. Roles are set, and people are viewed in terms of those roles. This understanding of who people are and how they should behave forms the basis of a common knowledge within the group. Because of this shared meaning in the group, an elaborated language is not necessary and therefore not cultured or learned.

An *open-role system* is one that expands the number of alternatives for individuals in the group. Roles are not categorical and simple; rather, they are individualized, negotiated, fluid,

and changing. Thus, there may be little shared understanding of a person's identity within an open system, and an elaborated code is necessary for communication to take place in this system.

Two major factors contribute to the development of an elaborated or restricted code within a system. The first is the nature of the major socializing agencies within the system, including the family, peer group, school, and work. Where the structure of these groups is well defined in terms of fixed roles, a restricted code is likely to develop. Where the structure of these groups is less well defined and has fluid roles, an elaborated code is more likely to be created. The second major factor is values. Pluralistic societies that value individuality promote elaborated codes, whereas narrower societies promote restricted ones.

Apparent, then, is how codes are so strongly associated with social class. Bernstein says that members of the middle class use both types of systems. They may, for example, be exposed to rather open roles at home but somewhat closed ones in the workplace. Or peer groups may use closed roles, whereas a school employs open ones. Members of the working class, however, are less likely to use elaborated codes. For working-class individuals, both the values and the role systems reinforce restricted codes, which leads Bernstein to write: "Without a shadow of a doubt the most formative influence upon the procedures of socialization, from a sociological viewpoint, is social class. The class structure influences work and educational roles and brings families into a special relationship with each other and deeply penetrates the structure of life experiences within the family."[6]

Bernstein tape-recorded young men from the working class and the middle class in England talking about capital punishment.[7] He analyzed samples of their speech and found interesting class differences. Even when the data were controlled for intelligence, the working-class speakers used longer phrases, shorter words, and less pausing than middle-class speakers. With an elaborated code, the middle-class boys needed more planning time, which explains their shorter phrases and longer pauses.

Many other differences found in this study illustrate elaborated and restricted codes. For example, middle-class speakers used "I think" significantly more than did working-class speakers. Working-class speakers made greater use of short phrases at the end of sentences to confirm the other person's common understanding; these included expressions like "isn't it?" "you know," and "wouldn't he?" Middle-class speakers had longer, more complex verb phrases, more passive verbs, more uncommon adverbs and adjectives. And middle-class speakers made more use of the personal pronoun *I*.

Elaborated codes are empowering because they enable speakers to adapt to a wide range of audiences and appeal to widely different types of people. On the other hand, elaborated codes can be alienating because they separate and distance feeling from thought, self from other, and personal belief from social obligation. Although he acknowledges the limitations of restricted talk, Bernstein does not devalue it: "Let it be said immediately that a restricted code gives access to a vast potential of meanings, of delicacy, subtlety and diversity of cultural forms, to a unique aesthetic the basis of which in condensed symbols may influence the form of the imagining."[6] However, Bernstein also notes that those in power in society often devalue this type of speech, which further perpetuates the class system.

The family is especially important in the development of code. Two types of families correspond to the two types of codes. *Position families* have a clear and formally determined role structure. They often have a closed communication system and use restricted codes. Such families tend to have sharp boundaries in their use of space and define objects and people in terms of their position. *Person-centered families* determine roles on the basis of individuals' personal orientations rather than formally defined divisions. They tend to use open communication and elaborated codes. Roles and relations within these families tend to be unstable and constantly in negotiation. These families do not maintain sharp boundaries in their use of space or in their ideas about people and things.

Although a family may have a variety of means of exerting control and regulating behavior, there seems to be a predominant or preferred method employed, depending on the type of family. Some families prefer an *imperative mode* of regulation, which is based on command and authority. In this type of family, when Dad says, "Shut up," you do. This is preferred in hierarchical families in which certain members are defined as in control according to the role structure. This kind of control is delivered with a restricted code.

Other families prefer *positional appeals*, based on role-related norms. Here, control is exerted by relying on commonly understood norms associated with each role. Examples of this kind of appeal are "You are old enough to know better," or "Boys don't play with dolls." This kind of control can be expressed with restricted or elaborated codes, depending on the degree of differentiation in the system.

Finally, *personal appeals* are based on individualized characteristics and individualized rules, and these appeals often consist of giving reasons for why a person should or should not do something. Again, the code employed can be restricted or elaborated, depending on the degree of shared understanding in the family.

Because these theories focus precisely on the relationship of signs to culture, they are clearly influenced by the semiotic tradition. Linguistic relativity imagines a more direct relationship between the sign—words and grammar—and the thought processes within a culture. In other words, the semantics and syntactics of language have a direct effect on thought and culture. The theory of elaborated and restricted codes imagines more of a two-way influence. In other words, the social structures of the culture necessitate certain language forms, but those language forms support the culture as well.

As is the case with most of the theories in this chapter—because they do focus on cultural matters—there is a kinship among the traditions represented here. Although we can argue that these two theories are semiotic, we could just as easily say that they are sociocultural. In the study of culture, these two traditions support

one another—an overlap we will see again as we move through the different theories summarized here.

● THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

It should come as no surprise that systems thinking, thoroughly embedded in the cybernetic tradition, would influence how we treat communication in society and culture because society itself can easily be seen as a large system. You do not communicate the same amount with all others, but establish pathways, clusters, or nodes that define large social networks of communication. Theories of the diffusion of information and influence nicely illustrate this tradition.

The Diffusion of Information and Influence

Lazarsfeld's Two-Step-Hypothesis. The importance of interpersonal networks was brought to light by an early voting study in 1940 conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in Elmira, New York.[9] The researchers unexpectedly found that the effect of media was influenced by interpersonal communication. This effect, which came to be known as the *two-step flow hypothesis*, was startling, and it had a major impact on our understanding of the role of mass media. We mentioned this theory briefly as a media theory in Chapter 10; here we will treat its societal dimensions.

The Lazarsfeld study was the beginning of a line of research on how information and influence are distributed in society. Lazarsfeld hypothesized that information flows from the mass media to certain opinion leaders in the community, who pass information on by talking to peers. He found that voters seem to be more influenced by their friends during a campaign than by the media. Since the original Elmira study, much additional data have come in, and this hypothesis has received substantial support.[10]

The two-step flow theory is best summarized in Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld's classic work *Personal Influence*.[11] These authors confirm that certain individuals known as *opinion leaders* receive information from the media and pass it on to their peers. Every group has opinion leaders, but these individuals are difficult to distinguish from other group members because opinion leadership is not a trait but a role taken by some individuals in certain circumstances. Opinion leadership changes from time to time and from issue to issue. In addition, opinion leaders may be of two kinds: those influential on one topic, called *monomorphic*, and those influential on a variety of topics, or *polymorphic*. Monomorphism becomes more predominant as systems become more modern.

Recent research on two-step flow has shown that the dissemination of ideas is not a simple two-step process. A *multiple-step model* is generally accepted now as more accurate in terms of the actual process.[12] Research has shown that the ultimate number of relays between the media and final receivers is variable. In the adoption of an innovation, for example, certain individuals will hear about it directly from media sources, whereas others will be many steps removed.

We know that interaction in networks plays an important role in relationships, small groups, and organizations and plays an important role in the reception of the mass media as well. The diffusion of an innovation occurs when the adoption of an idea, practice, or object spreads by communication through a social system. Several prominent U.S. and foreign researchers in fields such as agriculture and rural studies, national development, and organizational communication have been responsible for this line of research, and we now turn to the theory of the diffusion of innovations.

Everett Rogers's Diffusion of Innovations. The broadest and most communication-oriented theory of diffusion is that of Everett Rogers and his colleagues.[13] Rogers relates dissemination to the process of social change, which consists of invention, diffusion (or communication), and consequences. Such change can occur internally from within a group or externally through contact with outside change agents. Contact

may occur spontaneously or accidentally, or it may result from planning on the part of outside agencies.

In the diffusion of innovations, many years may be required for an idea to spread. Rogers states, in fact, that one purpose of diffusion research is to discover the means to shorten this lag. Once established, an innovation will have consequences—be they functional or dysfunctional, direct or indirect, manifest or latent. Change agents normally expect their impact to be functional, direct, and manifest, although this positive result does not always occur.

The diffusion of innovations is well illustrated by the family-planning program instituted in South Korea in 1968. Mothers' clubs were established in about 12,000 villages throughout Korea for the purpose of disseminating information about family planning. Overall, the program was successful, and Korea saw a major decline in birthrate during this period. This program was built on the idea that interpersonal channels of communication would be crucial to the adoption of birth-control methods.

Rogers and his colleagues studied the Korean case by interviewing about 1,000 women in 24 villages to gather information about the networks the women used for family planning.[14] They found that the village leaders initially received their information about family planning from the mass media and family-planning worker visits, but interpersonal networks turned out to be most important in the dissemination-adoption process. Two network variables were especially important. The first was the degree to which the mothers' club leader was connected with others in the village network. The second variable was the amount of overlap between the family-planning network and the general village network. Birth-control adoption was greatest in the villages in which the leader talked to many people personally, and the village women talked about it among themselves.

When innovations such as the cell phone, DSL lines, a new HIV therapy, or Internet shopping are introduced, it takes a while for them to catch on. Some innovations never catch on, but others spread rapidly. One innovation that has

yet to catch on is a keyboard arranged so that the keys most often used are under the strongest fingers, an innovation which could greatly increase keyboarding speed. The traditional "qwerty" keyboard, named for the first keys of the top row, was deliberately designed to slow typists down. When the typewriter was first introduced, keys would jam if the typist went too fast, so positioning often-used keys under weak fingers was the approach devised to limit typing speed.

In contrast, the use of the Internet has been perhaps the fastest spreading innovation in the history of technology. You probably don't know very many people who have never used the Internet. Interpersonal influence is very important in this process. People raise awareness of the innovation as they talk with one another about it. They share opinions, discuss their experience with the innovation, sometimes advocate its use, and sometimes resist it.

The rate of adoption is determined by perceptions of the innovation's relative advantage and its compatibility with existing values and experiences. The complexity of the innovation matters, and potential adopters will more readily accept an innovation that they can experiment with, or try out, without making a huge commitment. They may also want to observe others' adoption before taking the plunge.

People vary in their levels of resistance and the social support needed to adopt the new idea, practice, or object. There are always individuals who will adopt an innovation early, before most others consider doing so. These early adopters will set the stage, and they usually have an influence on others. As more and more people adopt, a critical mass of adoption occurs that gives rise to a rapid increase in general adoption.[15] A few people may be very slow to adopt and must see the innovation all around them before they will consider it. These are the late adopters. Of course, some may never adopt the new practice. In general, Rogers and his colleagues have found that adoption approximates an S-curve. On a time scale, the rise of adoption is slow at first, then it hits a critical mass after which a sudden rise in adoption occurs, and then it levels out.

Both of the theories in this section are essentially network theories; they depict systems of communication, consisting of lines of communication that cluster people together in cybernetic loops. But they are more than simple connections or contacts because they build consensus and commonality through repeated communication. Although cybernetic theories do not "feel" much like the other traditions in this context, they do provide a way of understanding how cultures and social structures get established and spread.

◖ THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION

If you had a friend who had just returned from visiting China, would you prefer to learn about the trip by sending this person an e-mail questionnaire or by listening to stories about the trip? Could you learn more about the culture of a group of Iraqi war veterans by having each one fill out a series of scales or by observing several of their meetings and interviewing them? In these situations, most of us would rely on personal contact and observation as a way of learning more about cultural experiences. Many researchers feel the same way and prefer to learn about culture through personal interpretation rather than from tests, experiments, and questionnaires. This kind of knowledge is what characterizes phenomenology as a tradition. You may recall that the process of interpretation is *hermeneutics*. Cultural interpretation is commonly referred to as *ethnography*.[16]

We look at cultural interpretation in two sections of this chapter. In this section, we focus on cultural interpretation as the core of ethnography—and thus the ways in which it is a phenomenological endeavor. In the following section, we show how ethnography is equally a part of the sociocultural tradition.

Cultural Hermeneutics

Cultural interpretation involves trying to understand the actions of a group or culture such as the Zulu, residents of the Castro in San Francisco, or New York City high-school students. This kind of hermeneutics requires observing and describing the actions of a group, just as one might examine a written text, and trying to figure out what they mean.[17]

Clifford Goertz was a leading cultural interpreter, or ethnographer.[18] Geertz describes cultural interpretation as *thick description*, in which interpreters describe cultural practices "from the native's point of view." This level of interpretation is contrasted with *thin description*, in which people merely describe the behavioral pattern with little sense of what it means to the participants themselves.

Like all hermeneutics, cultural interpretation uses a hermeneutic circle. As described in Chapter 3, the hermeneutic circle is a process of moving back and forth between specific observations and general interpretations. The circle, vital to all hermeneutics, is a deliberate shifting of perspectives from something that feels familiar to something that may stretch our understanding. In cultural interpretation, this hermeneutic circle involves a movement from experience-near concepts to experience-distant ones. *Experience-near concepts* are those that have meaning to the members of the culture, and *experience-distant concepts* have meaning to outsiders. The cultural interpreter essentially translates between the two, so that observers outside can have an understanding of the insider's feelings and meanings in a situation. The interpretation process, then, is one of going back and forth in a circle between what appears to be happening from outside to what insiders define as happening. Slowly, a suitable vocabulary can be developed to explain the insiders' point of view to outsiders without forsaking participants' own experience-near concepts.[19]

For example, an ethnographer might wonder about the meaning of numerous tattoos and body piercings among a group of young people. From an experience-distant perspective, it might appear to be a form of group conformity. If you ask several young people what it means, they would answer in a more experience-near way with something like, "Oh, it's so cool." The ethnographer would need to investigate what it

means for something to be "cool" and perhaps relate this response to statements made by others. Eventually, a vocabulary acceptable to informants and understandable to those who are not members of this group would be created.

Ethnographic problems arise when interpreters lack adequate understanding of behavior. The researchers witness something that cannot be understood from their concepts, such as wearing pants so large that you can hardly walk, and seek to resolve the difficulty by creating an explanation. Ethnography attempts to understand things that are otherwise foreign. How would you make sense of a ceremony involving the fondling of rattlesnakes? Most of us have no frame for understanding such actions, but ethnographers would—through careful observation, interviews, and inference—create an explanation that would make such behavior understandable to outsiders and still feel "right" to those who actually practice snake handling.

Ethnographic interpreters, of course, do not begin their investigation empty-handed. Previous experience always provides some kind of schema for understanding an event, but ethnography is a process in which one's understandings become increasingly more refined and accurate. As a hermeneutic activity, then, ethnography is a very personal process, a process in which researchers experience a culture and interpret its various forms. Although ethnographers take different approaches to this process, many believe that the best approach is to live the culture first-hand. On this point, Lyall Crawford writes: "As an ethnographer, I am an expert about what only I verify—a state of affairs subject to emotional vulnerabilities, intellectual instabilities, and academic suspicion. Thought of in these terms, taking the ethnographic turn, living and writing the ethnographic life, is essentially a self-report of personal experiences."[20]

Donal Carbaugh and Sally Hastings describe ethnographic theorizing as a four-part process.[21] The first part is to develop a basic orientation to the subject. Here ethnographers assess their own assumptions about culture and its manifestations. Communication ethnographers, for instance, define communication as central to culture and

worthy of ethnographic study and decide to focus on various aspects of communication. They may assume further that clothing is an important expression of meaning and a form of communication.

The second phase of ethnographic theorizing defines the classes or kinds of activity that will be observed. Communication ethnographers, for example, might decide to look at the ways clothing is worn. Next, the ethnographers theorize about the specific culture under investigation. Here certain activities will be interpreted within the context of the culture itself—young men wearing baggy pants is taken as a sign of group conformity and acceptance. Finally, in the fourth phase, the ethnographers move back out to look again at the general theory of culture with which they are operating and test it against the specific case. The ethnographers in this case might conclude that baggy pants are yet another instance of how clothing is used by members of a culture to establish communal bonds.

Because it relies on the personal experiences of the ethnographers themselves, cultural interpretation is thoroughly phenomenological. We will see later in this chapter how ethnography can fit within the critical tradition as well. Ethnography also relies on assumptions common in the sociocultural tradition that capture the situational and emergent nature of meaning and action within cultural groups. It is to this line of thinking that we now turn.

◖ THE SOCIOCULTURAL TRADITION

In this chapter, the sociocultural tradition provides a continuation of the phenomenological because cultural interpretation is both hermeneutic and sociocultural in orientation. Each of the following theories concentrates on the ways in which cultural groups create meaning, values, and practices through communication.

An important assumption of theories in this tradition is that society itself is a product of social interaction, in which small and large social structures—relationships, groups, organizations,

and institutions—are constructed in everyday interaction. Symbolic interactionism, particularly the work of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, previously addressed in Chapters 4 and 6, was very important in establishing the connection between interaction and society.[22]

Sociocultural theories assume that social structure influences interaction. Various social arrangements affect and constrain the very talk that produced them, as structuration theory shows.[23] Recognizing that even the largest social institutions consist of interlinked conversations, we concentrate in this section on two theories relying on cultural interpretation—ethnography of communication and performance ethnography.

We should note that there is another branch of ethnography as well, which is critical in nature. *Critical ethnography* goes beyond ethnographic description and interpretation to address questions of fairness, justice, freedom, well-being, and compassion for suffering. In other words, going beyond "what is," critical ethnography posits "what might be."[24]

Ethnography of Communication

The ethnography of communication is simply the application of ethnographic methods to the communication patterns of a group. Here, the interpreter attempts to make sense of the forms of communication employed by the members of a community or culture. Ethnographers of communication look at (1) the forms of communication used by a group; (2) the meanings these communication practices have for the group; (3) when and where the group members use these practices; (4) how communication practices create a sense of community; and (5) the variety of codes used by a group.[25] Keep in mind that these issues require a phenomenological approach, as we summarized in the previous section, but the outcome is also highly sociocultural in orientation, so that the ethnography of communication crosses both traditions.

The originator of this research tradition is anthropologist Dell Hymes.[26] Hymes suggests that formal linguistics is not sufficient by itself to uncover a complete understanding of language

because it ignores the highly variable ways in which language is used in everyday communication. According to Hymes, cultures communicate in different ways, but all forms of communication require a shared code, communicators who know and use the code, a channel, a setting, a message form, a topic, and an event created by transmission of the message. Anything may qualify as communication as long as it is construed as such by those who use that code. Is snake handling communication? How about baggy pants? Perhaps these are shared codes for expressing something among the members of the group. We cannot know until further ethnographic study is undertaken.

Hymes referred to a group that uses a common code as a *speech community*, a concept that has become a centerpiece within the ongoing work of the ethnography of communication.[27] Speech communities are richly different from one another, and this makes generalization difficult. To meet this challenge, *comparative ethnography* creates categories with which one can compare them. Within the ethnography of communication, Hymes suggests a set of nine categories that can be used to compare different cultures:[28]

1. *ways of speaking*, or patterns of communication familiar to the members of the group
2. *ideal of the fluent speaker*, or what constitutes an exemplary communicator
3. *speech community*, or the group itself and its boundaries
4. *speech situation*, or those times when communication is considered appropriate in the community
5. *speech event*, or what episodes are considered to be communication for the members of the group
6. *speech act*, or a specific set of behaviors taken as an instance of communication within a speech event
7. *components of speech acts*, or what the group considers to be the elements of a communicative act
8. *the rules of speaking in the community*, or the guidelines or standards by which communicative behavior is judged
9. *the functions of speech in the community*, or what communication is believed to accomplish

This set of concepts is nothing more than a list of categories by which various communities can be compared. Two native groups—the Apache in the U.S. and the Ilongot in the Philippines, for example—would have many different events that count as communication, varying behaviors that would be considered appropriate within those speaking events, and perhaps some distinct rules for how to communicate. On the other hand, they might have some similar types and functions of communication as well.

Participants in a local cultural community create shared meaning by using codes that have some degree of common understanding. Gerry Philipsen, a leader in the ethnography of communication, defines a *speech code* as a distinctive set of understandings within a culture about what counts as communication, the significance of communication forms within the culture, how those forms are to be understood, and how they are to be performed.[29] The speech code is a culture's unwritten and often subconscious "guidebook" for how to communicate within the culture. How does a teenager in the United States know how to communicate at school—what to say, how to understand what others say, and how to talk? The group's speech code enables the teenager to do this.

Philipsen makes several claims about speech codes. First, such codes are distinctive; they vary from one culture to another. Second, a speech community will have multiple speech codes. Although a single code may predominate at particular times and in particular places, within the community, several codes may be deployed.

Third, speech codes constitute a speech community's own sense of how to be a person, how to connect with other people, and how to act or communicate within the social group. The code is more than a list of semantic meanings; it establishes the actual forms of communication that competent members of the culture must know.

Fourth, the code guides what communicators actually experience when they interact with one another. It tells them what certain actions should count as. It defines the meaning of speech acts. Fifth, speech codes are not separate entities but are embedded in daily speech. You can "see" the code in the patterns of communication commonly used, the terms communicators use to describe what they are doing when they speak, and how they explain, justify, or evaluate the communication being used. You can detect speech codes also in how members of the culture change their behavior and vocabulary in different forms of communication.

Sixth, speech codes are powerful. They form the basis on which the culture will evaluate and conduct its communication. The skill or quality of performance in communication is noticed and evaluated based on the requirements of the speech code. Moral judgments are made about whether individuals and groups communicate properly and make appropriate use of cultural communication forms.

Visit any American high school and you will see speech codes at work. Listen to how students talk to one another, notice when they do so, and observe the different forms of communication they use. Notice that they know what they are doing and that their communication patterns have meaning to them. Our communication is always constrained by the codes in use. We are able to switch codes as we move from one cultural setting to another, but we are never free from them.

Donal Carbaugh, suggests that ethnography addresses at least three types of problems.[30] The first is to discover the type of *shared identity* created by communication in the cultural community, be it African-Americans, La Habra High School cheerleaders, Japanese businessmen, or John's Auto Body bowlers. This identity is the members' sense of who they are as a group. It is a common set of qualities with which most members of the community would identify.

The second problem is to uncover the *shared meanings of public performances* seen in the group. What constitutes communication within the culture, and what meanings do the various displays evoke? What does "playing the dozens" mean in the black youth culture? What do cheerleaders at a high school basketball game communicate? What meaning is assigned to the "fines" at a Rotary meeting?

The third is to explore *contradictions*, or paradoxes, of the group. How are these handled

From the Source . . .

When I was living among Blackfeet people in Montana, I realized some moments when people were not verbally communicating but were deeply involved in listening to the natural world around them; when I was living among Finnish people, I discovered long periods of comfortable silence where my impulse was to get people talking! In both cases, and many others, the ethnography of communication provided not only a way of investigating these practices — of communicating with nature, and in silence — but also a way of living with others and respecting their communal ways. In this sense, the theory has offered to me not just an academic perspective but a way of living constructively with others.

—Donal Carbaugh

through communication? How, for example, might a culture treat its members as individuals while also providing a sense of community? How might autonomy be granted while maintaining authority? How might roles be taught while instilling ideals of freedom?

In addressing these ethnographic problems, three types of questions are pursued. *Questions of norms* look for the ways communication is used to establish a set of standards and the ways notions of right and wrong affect communication patterns. *Questions of forms* look at the types of communication used within the society. What behaviors count as communication, and how are they organized? *Questions of cultural codes* draw attention to the meanings of the symbols and behaviors used as communication in the cultural community.

Although ethnography highlights aspects of group life, it can also reveal how persons see themselves as persons. Our group identities give rise to our individual identities. Who you are, your identity as a person, is determined in large measure by how you communicate, with whom, and in what settings. The ethnographic study of communication, then, offers insights into various individual and group experiences. It is the study of the cultures that surround us and in which we participate. Carbaugh's own studies — of a college basketball audience, workers in a television station, married person's names, a television talk show, and a community land-use controversy — show the diversity of communities that can be explored ethnographically.

As an example of an ethnography of communication, consider Tamar Katriel's study on Israeli "griping."[31] Based on her own experience as a "native griper" and about 50 interviews with middle-class Israelis, Katriel explains the common communication form *kiturim*. This form of communication takes place throughout adult Israeli society, but it is most often seen among the middle class and commonly takes place at Friday-night social gatherings called *mesibot kiturim*, or griping parties.

This communication form is so common that it is widely recognized by Israelis as part of their national character. Griping does not deal with personal problems but national (and sometimes local) and public ones. It seems to affirm the Israeli identity as having important common national concerns. These are concerns that society at large theoretically could address but that the individual has little power to change. Thus, griping is a kind of shared venting. It is more than this, however, since Katriel's informants told her that it provides a sense of solidarity and is fun. In fact, griping and joke telling are often viewed together as the primary means of establishing cohesiveness in a social group in Israel.

Griping follows a predictable pattern. It usually begins with an initial gripe, followed by an acknowledgment and a gripe by another person. The pattern of a griping session can go from general societal problems to local ones, or the other way around. Katriel found two interesting variants on the griping theme. *Metagriping* is griping about griping, or complaining that Israelis gripe too much. The other form is the *antigripe*: "Stop griping, and start doing something."

Griping is ritualistic, and the content of the communication does not seem to be important. One must not mistake griping for serious problem solving on topics of concern. In fact, there is

a strict prohibition against griping in the presence of non-Israelis—e.g., tourists—because outsiders do not understand the nature of griping and may take it literally, which would be embarrassing to the Israelis.

This study illustrates Hymes's categories of comparative ethnography very well. The griping session is a communication event, which consists of particular types of speech acts; it also has rules and serves particular functions. The example also illustrates the ethnographic problems of identity, meaning, and tension. Griping reflects a certain national identity in Israel. It is understood among Israelis according to particular meanings, and manages tensions around problems and what can be done about them. Griping is also a way that Israelis perform their culture, a topic considered in the following section.

In this section we have explored one line of work within the broader tradition of ethnography. In the following section, we look at another one, which normally goes by the name *performance ethnography*.

Performance Ethnography

If you were to do fieldwork in a foreign culture, you would be observing what the people of the culture actually do—how they perform culture. The anthropologist Victor Turner is best known for bringing our attention to the fact that culture is performed.[32] Turner sees much in common between theater and everyday cultural life. Like actors, we say our lines as we perform with our bodies.

The public performances in a culture are like *social dramas*, in which group members work out their relationships and ideas. Such dramas are *liminal*, meaning that they mark a transition from one state to another or a border between one thing and another. A *limin* is like a threshold or door between two places. Rites of passage are a good example, as they depict movement from one stage of life to another. Often rituals are liminal in the sense that they connect the sacred with the secular or symbolize the change of seasons.

Turner notes that social dramas tend to follow a certain process. The first stage is a *breach*, or

some kind of violation or threat to community order. This is followed by a *crisis*, as members of the community become agitated and take various sides on the issues raised by the breach. In the third phase, consisting of *redressive or remedial procedures*, members of the culture make performances that mend the breach or in some way return to a state of acceptance. This stage of the social drama often involves the most self-examination and is the place where new meanings are created or old ones reproduced. There is, then, a fourth stage—*reintegration*—or restoration of peace.

The way a community responds to a threat such as an attack or a natural disaster constitutes a kind of social drama. The United States responded or performed in one way in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11—with a war designed to track down terrorists; Great Britain responded quite differently when terrorists planted bombs on their underground—going about their business as a way of showing they would not become afraid as the terrorists wanted them to be. A very different response altogether occurs in some African communities when a member of the community violates norms of that community. In this instance, the entire community gathers in the village center with the individual who disrupted the community. All remain there until everyone has had a chance to say everything good they can think of about the individual, a very different kind of performance with a very different outcome—the individual is welcomed back into the community.[33]

Cultural performance involves not only the manipulation of the body itself but also the manipulation of various media that may be experienced by eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and touch. How these media are used both makes and reflects the meanings of the culture. Not all members of a group or culture participate in these social dramas and performances. Often certain members take the lead, and others may be selected to participate. Cultural performances, like presidential elections, are ways that "stars" show an audience its own culture. By seeing how the performers work things out through

breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration, the culture is both formed and learned.

Sporting events are a good example of social dramas. The teams come together in competition, which creates a breach, or threat to order. As the teams play and make gains against one another, a spirit of crisis arises, and fans take sides, cheer, boo, and may feel elated and/or disappointed. Rules, officials, time-outs, halftime, huddles, and time with the coach offer moments for redressive action, as the teams and fans deal with the crisis in a variety of ways. As we are writing this, Italy just won the world cup in soccer, principally because Zinedine Zidane, the French soccer star, was booted from the game for head-butting an Italian player. This violation of etiquette was a breach of performance—and especially agonizing to the French because it was so unexpected. Usually, however, a game ends without the uproar of this soccer match, reintegration occurs as teams shake hands, fans join their friends to rehash the game or perhaps tune in to another game. These performances, then, are more than just games. They teach us about competition, collaboration, loyalty, and a host of other values important to a culture.

Performance ethnography is significant because it broadens the field beyond its traditional fixation on language and text to include *embodied practice*. Dwight Conquergood's work has been critical to the development of performance ethnography in communication. This move— from text to performance—raises a number of interesting questions:[34]

1. Is *culture* better understood as a verb rather than a noun?
2. Is ethnographic fieldwork a joint performance between the researcher and the subject?
3. How does performance impact interpretation, and can performance be considered a kind of hermeneutics?
4. How should the results of performance ethnography be published, and how should scholarly representation itself make use of performance?
5. What is the relationship between performance and power?

In working with these questions, Conquergood came to replace the traditional ethnographic approach of *observation* or seeing with listening. When we see, we look at the other as a spectator; when we listen, we take in the experience of the other and become engaged coperformers.[35]

Ethnographic theories clearly prioritize cultural conditions and tendencies over individual ones. Within this tradition, communication is never a simple tool for transmitting information and influence from one person to another, but a way in which culture itself is produced and reproduced. As a tradition, then, these theories place cultural forms at the center, showing how culture both influences and is influenced by our forms of communication.

Cultural productions are interesting in their own right, but they have serious personal and societal consequences, as we learn from the critical tradition.

■ THE CRITICAL TRADITION

Many theories of communication have a tendency to "normalize" the institutions and structures constructed in social interaction. By this, we mean that theories often describe the outcomes of social interaction without questioning these outcomes. This tradition arose to counteract this tendency, which explains the term *critical*. Although diffuse and hard to organize, this tradition brings one thing in common to the table—the idea that social and cultural arrangements are loaded to enforce the power of certain stakeholders in ways that dominate and even oppress others. The work in this tradition, then, looks for the ways in which power imbalance, hegemony, and domination are constructed in social interaction, and this work imagines other possibilities that are humanizing and deeply democratic in orientation.[36]

Most critical theorists today view social processes as *overdetermined*, which means that they are caused by multiple sources. Critical scholars uncover oppressive forces through *dialectical analysis*, which exposes the underlying struggles between opposing forces.[37] Although

the population generally perceives a kind of surface order to things, the critical scholar points out the contradictions that exist. Only by becoming aware of the dialectic of opposing forces in a struggle for power can individuals be liberated and free to change the existing order. Otherwise, they will remain alienated from one another and co-opted into their own oppression.

If you have lived your life as a member of a privileged group, it may be hard for you to see this point, because, as critical theories point out, power is invisible to groups well served by current social institutions. Everything looks normal and good to people of privilege. However, if you are a member of a marginalized group, you may see immediately the value that the critical tradition brings to bear. In many ways, the critical tradition is a consciousness-raising endeavor. It is very much mission driven in that critical theorists work to expose oppressive forces in society in ways that enable everyone to question the constructions of everyday communication.

Many critical theorists believe that contradiction, tension, and conflict are inevitable aspects of the social order and can never be eliminated. The ideal state is a social environment in which all voices can be heard so that no force dominates any other. Language is an important constraint on individual expression, for the language of the dominant class makes it difficult for working-class groups to understand their situation and to get out of it. In other words, the dominant language defines and perpetuates the oppression of marginalized groups. It is the job of the critical theorist to create new forms of language that will enable the predominant ideology to be exposed and competing ideologies to be heard.

Frankly, this section is difficult to organize, because the critical tradition itself is diffuse and wide-ranging. No scheme is perfect, but the use of four general categories of theory has been helpful to us in sorting out this body of work. These categories are (1) modernist theories; (2) postmodern theories; (3) poststructuralism; and (4) postcolonialism. Briefly, modernist theories rely on the assumption that society consists of certain pre-established structures that determine the power arrangement among groups. Post-

modern theories rely on the idea that structures are always in formation, being shaped and reshaped by the communication practices used at any given moment in history. Poststructuralism is actually a variation of postmodernism, a variation focusing on language and power. Finally, postcolonialism is a movement that focuses on oppressive forces, primarily those of European/American imperialism and colonialism.

Modernism

The distinction between modern and postmodern movements marks a significant fault line within the critical tradition.[38] The modern version—often referred to as "structural"—centers on ongoing oppressive social structures, which are considered real and enduring, though they may be hidden from the consciousness of most people. Critical scholars in this group attempt to name and expose these oppressive arrangements. In contrast, the postmodern version teaches that there is no objectively real structure or central meaning and that oppressive "structures" are ephemeral. There is a struggle, but it is not a struggle between monolithic ideologies. It is a struggle between fluid interests and ideas created in communication practices.[39]

The structural tradition in critical social science is highly "theoretical" in the sense that it presents a standing version of social life to explain how oppressive structures work. The postmodern tradition is rather "antitheoretical" because it denies the existence of any particular structure over time.

In this section, we look at Marxism as the forebear of the modern branch of the critical tradition. We also look at the Frankfurt School and modernist approaches to feminist scholarship.

Marxism.   One of the most important intellectual strands of study of the 20th century was Marxist-based social theory. Originating with the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who wrote in the 19th century, this movement consists of a number of loosely related theories challenging the dominant order of society. This line of thought has influenced virtually all branches of social science, including communication.[40]

Marx believed that a society's means of production determine the structure of that society. Called the *base-superstructure* relationship, this notion is the idea that the economy is the base of all social structure. Marx was most concerned with the consequences of capitalism as an economic system, believing that profit drives production. Labor, then, becomes a mere tool to generate profit, to the ultimate harm of workers.

All institutions that perpetuate this form of domination are made possible by this economic system.[41] Economics drives politics, which is why classical Marxism is often called *the critique of political economy.* Marx's ultimate goal was revolution, in which workers—now aware of their plight—would rise up against the interests of capital to change the order of society. He believed that liberation would further the natural progress of history, in which opposing forces come to clash. Few critical theorists today are Marxist, in the classical sense of this term, but there is no question that Marx had an immense influence on this school of thought, including concerns over dialectical conflict, domination, and oppression. For this reason much of this work is now labeled "neomarxist."

As a movement, Marxism places great emphasis on the means of communication in society. Communication practices are an outcome of the tension between individual creativity and the social constraints on that creativity. Only when individuals are truly free to express themselves with clarity and reason will liberation occur, and that condition cannot come about in a class-based society.

The term *ideology* is important in most critical theories. An ideology is a set of ideas that structure a group's reality, a system of representations or a code of meanings governing how individuals and groups see the world.[42] In classical Marxism, an ideology is a false set of ideas perpetuated by the dominant political force. For the classical Marxist, science must be used to discover truth and to overcome the *false consciousness* of ideology.

More recent critical theorists tend to assert that there is no single dominant ideology but that the dominant classes in society are themselves constituted by a struggle among several ideologies. Many current thinkers reject the idea that an ideology is an isolated element in the social system; rather, ideology is deeply embedded in language and all other social and cultural processes. The French Marxist Louis Althusser represents this perspective.[43] For Althusser, ideology is present in the structure of society itself and arises from the actual practices undertaken by institutions within society. As such, ideology actually forms the individual's consciousness and creates the person's subjective understanding of experience.

In this model the superstructure (social organization) creates ideology, which in turn affects individuals' notions of reality. According to Althusser, this superstructure consists of *repressive state apparatuses*, such as the police and the military, and *ideological state apparatuses*, such as education, religion, and mass media. The repressive mechanisms enforce an ideology when it is threatened by deviant action, and the ideological apparatuses reproduce it more subtly in everyday activities of communication by making an ideology seem normal.

We live within a real set of material conditions, but we normally do not understand our relationship to actual conditions except through an ideology. The real conditions of existence can only be discovered through science, which Althusser poses in opposition to ideology. This idea has been highly controversial because it is based on a realist notion of truth, which most critical theorists now oppose.

Marxist theories tend to see society as the grounds for a struggle among interests through the domination of one ideology over another. *Hegemony* is the process of domination, in which one set of ideas subverts or co-opts another—a process by which one group in society exerts leadership over all others. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci originally elaborated the concept of hegemony.[44] Hegemony can occur in many ways and in many settings; in essence, it happens when events or texts are interpreted in a way that promotes the interests of one group over those of another. This can be a subtle process of co-opting the interests of a subordinate group into supporting those of a dominant

From the Source . . .

Historical materialism, the theory pioneered by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, understands all rhetorical and cultural expressions as located in and conditioned (not entirely determined) by material (economic) conditions. Examination of the historical context and political-economic motives (like oil) helps explain rhetorical acts (like war propaganda). The division of society between a minority ruling class and the rest of us results in struggle (for cultural, political, and economic hegemony) between "ruling ideas" (including sexism, racism, and homophobia) and the rhetoric of ordinary people in social movements.

—Dana Cloud

one. For example, advertisers often play into the "women's liberation" theme, making it look as though the corporation supports women's rights. What is happening here is that women's interests are being reinterpreted or appropriated to promote the interests of the capital economy. Ideology plays a central role in this process because it structures the way people understand their experience, and it is therefore powerful in shaping how they interpret events.

Today, Marxist theory, in contrast with other branches of the critical tradition, is characterized by its identification of actual social structures that determine, or cause, domination and oppression to occur. This line of work, then, is highly *structuralist* in orientation. In communication, much of the recent work has focused less on the economic or materialist conditions that create oppression and more on the discursive formations that contribute to the creation of structures of oppression and alienation. Both of these aspects are evident in Marx's work. As Cloud summarizes: "In classical Marxist texts on language and culture, one can discover two meanings of the word *materialist.* The first suggests . . . that the human being is a historically situated product of discourses and relations. The second tenet of materialist discourse theories

posits that the mode of production, or the ways in which goods are made and distributed in society, determines the social relations and prevailing consciousness of a given epoch."[45] Both meanings contribute to hegemonic ideologies that function to impede emancipation. Neither structural conditions nor discursive constructions are sufficient to understand and provide possibilities for countering oppression.

Dana Cloud's work on "the materiality of discourse" is an example of contemporary Marxist work within the discipline of communication.[46] Cloud argues that with the popularity of social constructionism—the line of thought that symbols construct our social worlds—critics are reluctant to argue that political and material conditions are implicated in texts. Instead, social constructionists are content to describe patterns in discourse and to see reality as a discursive formation, "rhetorically created and rhetorically altered."[47] The "material" has for many become not physical conditions in the world but discourse or texts. According to Cloud, emancipation cannot be achieved through talk alone, and such an extreme constructionist position offers no guidance in evaluating different ideologies or for acting in the world.

Disagreeing with this extreme social constructionist stance, Cloud asks: "If the discourse is the reality, would a critic of the 'freedom' inherent in the discourse around the war be forced to grant the nationalistic 1991 Super Bowl half-time an ontological status equal to the suffering of thousands of Iraqis as they were buried in the sand?"[48] While this example is extreme, she uses it to illustrate that liberation is more than just a matter of emancipation from words. Cloud's focus on materiality offers a return to a Marxist grounding in physical and economic conditions without ignoring the role of discourse in influencing those conditions. She argues for viewing rhetorical texts as symbolic resources contained and constrained by ideology so that lived experiences and economic interests are considered as they intersect with texts. Only when this intersection is considered, according to Cloud, does social change become a possibility. Otherwise, all the critic can do is simply describe the

discourses at work in any particular historical moment, but the critic cannot act on them to facilitate change in consciousness, action, or ideology.

Jürgen Habermas and the Frankfurt School.
One of the longest and best-known Marxist traditions is the Frankfurt School. The *Frankfurt School* is such an important tradition in critical studies that it is often known simply as *Critical Theory*. Theorists following this tradition originally based their ideas on Marxist thought, although in the past 80 years the tradition has gone far afield from that origin. Communication takes a central place in this movement, and the study of mass communication has been especially important.[49]

This brand of critical theory began with the work of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and their colleagues at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in 1923. The early Frankfurt scholars responded strongly to the classical ideals of Marxism and the success of the Russian Revolution. They saw capitalism as an evolutionary stage in the development, first, of socialism and then of communism. Their ideas at that time formed a harsh critique of capitalism and liberal democracy. With the rise of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s, the Frankfurt scholars immigrated to the United States and there became intensely interested in mass communication and the media as structures of oppression in capitalistic societies.

The best-known contemporary Frankfurt scholar is Jürgen Habermas, whose theory of universal pragmatics and the transformation of society has had considerable influence in Europe and an increasing influence in the United States. Habermas is clearly the most important spokesperson for the Frankfurt School today and has particular influence on the communication field.[50] His theory draws from a wide range of thought and presents a coherent critical view of communication and society.

Habermas teaches that society must be understood as a mix of three major interests—work, interaction, and power—all of which are necessary in a society. *Work*, the first interest, consists of the efforts to create material resources. Because of its highly instrumental nature—achieving tangible tasks and accomplishing concrete objectives—work is basically a "technical interest." It involves an instrumental rationality and is represented by the empirical-analytical sciences. In other words, technology is used as an instrument to accomplish practical results and is based on scientific research. This technical interest designs computers, builds bridges, puts satellites in orbit, administers organizations, and enables wondrous medical treatments.

The second major interest is *interaction*, or the use of language and other symbol systems of communication. Because social cooperation is necessary for survival, Habermas names this second item the "practical interest." It involves practical reasoning and is represented in historical scholarship and hermeneutics. The interaction interest can be seen in speeches, conferences, psychotherapy, family relations, and a host of other cooperative endeavors.

The third major interest is *power*. Social order naturally leads to the distribution of power, yet we are also interested in being freed from domination. Power leads to distorted communication, but by becoming aware of the ideologies that dominate in society, groups can themselves be empowered to transform society. Consequently, power is an "emancipatory interest." The rationality of power is self-reflection, and the branch of scholarship that deals with it is critical theory. For Habermas, the kind of work done by the critical theorists discussed thus far in this chapter is emancipatory because it can empower otherwise powerless groups. Table 11.1 summarizes the basic interests of work, interaction, and power.

As an example of these interests at work, consider Steven Ealy's study of a Georgia State job-classification survey in the 1970s.[51] At that time Georgia was strapped with the responsibility of reclassifying 45,000 state job positions, a monumental task; according to Ealy, the result was a serious communication breakdown. The state employed a consulting firm to conduct the necessary survey, and a plan was drafted to collect information about each position, develop job specifications, classify the positions, and then

Three Interests of Society

Type	Nature of Interest	Rationality	Associated Scholarship
Work	Technical	Instrumental	Empirical sciences
Interaction	Practical	Practical	History/hermeneutics
Power	Emancipatory	Self-reflection	Critical theory

determine pay. A strong technical interest guided the reclassification study. There was a job to be done, and the consultants developed a method to achieve this goal. They proceeded as if the task could be solved by the use of "objective" or scientific procedures—gathering data, classifying jobs, and the like.

The employees and the departments, however, did not think of the study this way. They saw the study as a practical problem, one that affected their daily work and pay. For the departments, collecting data and implementing the results should have involved a good deal of interaction and consensus building, but it did not.

Because the organizational decision makers held the power, their technical interests prevailed, the consultants' methods were imposed, and all practical interests were eliminated. In other words, the employees were expected simply to comply with the survey without much discussion about their needs and the practical problems like operational difficulties, management problems, and moral questions that reclassification might create.

In short, the participants were unequal in power and knowledge, and the interests of workers were subverted by those of management. The study lacked the kind of open communication that Habermas says is necessary in a free society. As a result the new classification system was not accepted by employees and was implemented only partially after many delays, new studies, lawsuits, and appeals.

As this case illustrates, human life cannot be properly conducted from the perspective of only one interest—work, interaction, or power. Any activity is likely to span all three categories. For

example, the development of a new drug is a clear reflection of a technical interest, but it cannot be done without cooperation and communication, requiring an interaction interest as well. In a market economy, the drug is developed by a corporation to gain a competitive advantage, which is clearly a power interest too.

No aspect of life, not even science, is interest free. An emancipated society is free from unnecessary domination of any one interest, and everybody has equal opportunity to participate in decision making. Habermas believes that a strong public sphere, apart from private interests, is necessary to ensure this state of affairs.

Habermas is especially concerned with the domination of the technical interest in contemporary capitalistic societies. In such societies, the public and private are intertwined to the point that the public sector cannot guard against the oppression of private, technical interests. Ideally, the public and private should be balanced, and the public sector should be strong enough to provide a climate for free expression of ideas and debate. In modern society, however, that climate is stifled.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that Habermas values communication as essential to emancipation because language is the means by which the emancipatory interest is fulfilled. Communicative competence is therefore necessary for effective participation in decision making. Competence involves knowing how to use speech appropriately to accomplish goals, which requires compelling argumentation.[52]

Habermas's theory, sometimes called *universal pragmatics*, establishes universal principles for the use of language. As an example, let's say that

you give a speech to a labor group, claiming that labor unions today do not fight for their members' rights. Clearly, you want the audience to take some action on this problem. In this speech, you are making a claim, asserting your feelings about it, and trying to influence the audience. Three validity criteria must be met in order for your audience to take your speech seriously: you must be (1) truthful; (2) sincere; and (3) appropriate. These validity claims are not always easy to secure, since people do not always believe that one's statements are valid. In the labor-management case, you might have some difficulty proving your case, as happened in the Georgia reclassification situation. Here, the management's validity claims about the new system were severely challenged in the form of objections, lawsuits, and individual appeals.

Habermas uses the term *discourse* to describe the special kind of communication required when a speaker's statements are challenged. Unlike normal communication, "discourse" is a systematic argument that makes special appeals to demonstrate the validity of a claim. So, for example, if your audience does not accept your speech at face value, you will need to engage in special argumentation, or *discourse*.

Again, there are different kinds of discourse, depending on the type of speech act being defended. Truth claims are argued with *theoretic discourse*, which emphasizes evidence. If the union denied your allegations about its role, you would be pressed to make a case by expanding your argument to include evidence showing that the union in fact did not participate in certain activities designed to benefit workers.

When appropriateness is being argued, *practical discourse* is used. This emphasizes norms. If the union resisted your attempts to begin bargaining, you would have to create practical discourse to demonstrate the appropriateness of negotiations. Challenges to one's sincerity also require special action to demonstrate genuine concern, but this is usually direct action rather than discourse.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the audience would agree with your evidence or the norms used to appeal for more union involve-ment. Where communicators do not share the same standards or concepts for evaluating the strength of an argument, they must move to a higher level of discourse, which Habermas calls *metatheoretical discourse*. Here, communicators argue about what constitutes good evidence for a claim or what norms are indeed appropriate in the given situation. This is the kind of thing the Supreme Court does, as one example.

An even higher level of discourse is sometimes necessary—*metaethical discourse*. Here, the very nature of knowledge itself is under contention and must be argued. Such discourse is a philosophical argument about what constitutes proper knowledge, which is precisely what critical theory addresses, for it challenges the assumed procedures for generating knowledge in society.

Habermas believes that free speech is necessary for productive normal communication and higher levels of discourse to take place. Although impossible to achieve, Habermas describes an *ideal speech situation* on which society should be modeled. First, the ideal speech situation requires freedom of speech; there must be no constraints on what can be expressed. Second, all individuals must have equal access to speaking. In other words, all speakers and positions must be recognized as legitimate. Finally, the norms and obligations of society are not one-sided but distribute power equally to all strata in society. Only when these requirements are met can completely emancipatory communication take place.

Emancipatory communication in the form of higher levels of discourse is essential to transform society so that the needs of the individual can be met. Habermas believes that people normally live in an unquestioned *life-world*—the ordinary, daily activities of life. This life-world, however, is constrained by certain aspects of the social system such as money, bureaucracy, and corporate power. We see here shades of Althusserian ideology in Habermas's theory: the idea that the superstructure creates an ideology that affects the ordinary understanding of citizens in their everyday lives. Habermas frames this problem as *colonization*, or the power of the system over individuals. When the life-world is colonized by the

system, there is less opportunity to use language to achieve positive goals for individuals.

For Habermas, critical theory raises questions and calls attention to problems about the life-world that make critical reflection and resolution necessary. Only when we are aware of the problems of our life-world and the ways the system influences our view of life can we become emancipated from the entanglements of the system.

There is more opportunity to accomplish emancipation in modern society than in traditional society because of the relatively greater amount of conflict in modernity. In modern society we have the opportunity to hear a variety of viewpoints, but only if the system will allow free expression. Modern capitalistic societies have not yet achieved emancipation, and critical theorists have a responsibility to work toward making this possible.

Feminist Scholarship in the Modern Tradition. Feminist scholarship within the modernist tradition centers around two lines of inquiry: (1) feminist scholarship that works primarily for the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes—that seeks for women to gain equal status with men within existing power structures; and (2) that scholarship seeking to dismantle and restructure the social system to make it more emancipatory for women and men. In the most general terms, these can be viewed as *liberal* and *radical* feminism, respectively.

Liberal feminism, the foundation of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, is based in liberal democracy, the idea that justice involves the assurance of equal rights for all individuals. Liberal feminists say that women have been oppressed as a group and that they have not had equal rights with men, as evidenced by women's lower average income, women's exclusion from centers of power and decision making, and women's lack of opportunity to advance in careers of their choice.

In contrast to the liberal school of thought, *radical feminism* believes that the oppression of women runs far deeper than political rights. For radical feminists, the problem goes to the heart of our social structure, which is patriarchal. The patriarchy perpetuates a set of gender-laden meanings that promote masculine interests and subordinate feminine ones. Women are oppressed because the very fabric of society is based on a constructed reality that devalues and marginalizes women's experience. If gender is a social construction, then in our present order of things it is a man-made construction. The term *radical* is appropriate for this movement because it goes to the root of social structure and demands *basic redefinitions* of all facets of society.

For example, instead of merely thinking that there should be more women physicians, society itself must redefine the whole nature of medicine, especially in regard to how it treats the experiences of women, how women as traditional healers have been displaced, and the like. Instead of limiting the struggle to overcoming the glass ceiling, women must strive to change the very definition of commerce and economy in society at large so that it better accommodates the interests and needs of women, children, and men. Feminist inquiry in this category seeks to transform society rather than simply just incorporate women's voices within it.[53]

The early work in terms of academic disciplines generally, and communication in particular, tended to focus on the first category of feminism—understanding sex and gender differences in order to move toward a valuing of the feminine on equal terms with the masculine. Women's discourse was seen, from this vantage point, as "different" from the position of white males and differently valued as a result. Feminist scholars sought to describe the perspectives and worldviews that women's different discourse created; the different expectations of and patterns for women's communication; and the ways women accommodated, challenged, and subverted such expectations.[54] Feminist scholars sought, by means of these studies, to add women's communication practices to those of the discipline and to value the often-more-private and vernacular discourses that characterized much of women's experience.[55] They also argued that the inclusion of women and women's discourse—an elaborated range of

communication behaviors—could be to everyone's benefit.

While such studies uncovered many important gendered patterns in society and created greater awareness of how gender functions, women and femininity often ended up constructed as unitary constructs—constructs that applied across the board to all women.[56] These essentializing tendencies have been forcefully and productively challenged by scholarship that seeks to emphasize individual standpoints, as well as the necessary intersections of gender, with other societal classifications.[57] With these developments, feminist scholarship moves from modernist to postmodern concerns, as we see in the next section.

Postmodernism

While the modern branch of the critical tradition identifies a variety of *a priori* oppressive social structures, the postmodern branch resists the idea that any one, enduring arrangement is responsible for power inequities. Postmodernism is based on the idea that social realities are constantly produced, reproduced, and changed through the use of language and other symbolic forms. We begin this section by describing cultural studies, the movement most frequently identified with postmodernism. We then turn to two important areas of application and extension—feminist cultural studies and critical race theory.

Cultural Studies. Cultural studies involve investigations of the ways culture is produced through a struggle among ideologies.[58] The most notable group of cultural scholars, British Cultural Studies, is associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. The origins of this tradition are usually traced to the writings of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams in the 1950s, which examined the British working class after World War II.[59] Today, the name most associated with the movement is Stuart Hall.[60] Although influenced by Marxist thought, these scholars take a rather different direction in their thinking about oppressive communication.

The cultural studies tradition is distinctly reformist in orientation. These scholars want to see changes in Western society, and they view their scholarship as an instrument of socialist cultural struggle.[61] They believe that such change will occur in two ways: (1) by identifying contradictions in society, the resolution of which will lead to positive, as opposed to oppressive, change; and (2) by providing interpretations that will help people understand domination and the kinds of change that would be desirable.

The study of mass communication is central to this work, for the media are perceived as powerful tools of dominant ideologies. In addition, media have the potential of raising the consciousness of the population about issues of class, power, and domination. We must be cautious in interpreting cultural studies in this light, however, because media are part of a much larger set of institutional forces. Media are important, but they are not the sole concern of these scholars, which is why they refer to their field as "cultural studies" rather than "media studies."

Cultural studies scholars speak of culture in two ways. The first definition is the common ideas on which a society or group rests, its ideology, or the collective ways by which a group understands its experience. The second definition is the practices or the entire way of life of a group—what individuals do materially from day to day. These two senses of culture cannot really be separated, for the ideology of a group is produced and reproduced in its practices. In fact, the general concern of cultural theorists is the link between the actions of society's institutions, such as the media and the culture. Practices and ideas always occur together within a historical context.

For example, people watch television every day, making them part of a television culture. The entire television industry is a cultural production as well because it is a means for creating, disputing, reproducing, and changing culture. The concrete or material practices involved in producing and consuming television are a crucial mechanism in the establishment of ideology.

This shared understanding is an ideology determined by numerous, often subtle, influences

that come together and make common experience seem real to us. In cultural studies, this process of having our realities reinforced from many sources is called *articulation*. Our shared understandings seem real because of the connection, or articulation, among several sources of verification.[62]

For example, it may seem absolutely essential to you to get a college degree. You think that a college education is good and leads to success in life. You think that you will get a good career by attending college and that you will be able to have a more meaningful life because of what you learn in college. You think that a college education will make you more literate and able to participate more critically in our democratic society. These beliefs are commonly accepted by many people in our culture, but they are socially constructed ideas reinforced seemingly from every direction—from family, media, and school itself. Our acceptance of the superiority of higher education is a product of a very strong articulation.

Because some ideologies are more articulated than others, ideologies exist on an unequal footing in society. Cultural theory posits that capitalistic societies are dominated by a particular ideology of the elite. Hegemony, however, is always a fluid process, what Hall calls a temporary state characterized by a "theatre of struggle." In other words, the struggle between contradictory ideologies is constantly present and constantly shifting.

As we saw earlier in the chapter, early Marxist theory taught that the infrastructure (economic system) is a foundational factor in what gets produced, materially and socially, in a culture.[63] In cultural studies, however, the forces at play in society are considered to be *overdetermined*, or caused by multiple sources. Cultural studies theorists, then, are interested in the relations among different components of the cultural field as they interact with one another against various historical and social processes. A cultural critic might examine how a particular artifact or cultural practice—a television program, song, sports event—is positioned against an intersecting set of historical discourses in order to better understand a set of cultural practices.[64]

Communication, especially through the media, has a special role in affecting popular culture

through the dissemination of information. The media are extremely important because they directly present a way of viewing reality. Even though the media portray ideology explicitly and directly, opposing voices will always be present as part of the dialectical struggle between groups in a society. Still the media are dominated by the prevailing ideology, and they therefore treat opposing views from within the frame of the dominant ideology, which has the effect of defining opposing groups as "fringe." The irony of media is that they present the illusion of diversity and objectivity, when in fact they are clear instruments of the dominant order.[65]

At the same time, however, audiences may use their own categories to decode the message, and they often reinterpret media messages in ways never intended by the source.[66] As a result of alternative meanings, oppositional ideologies can and do arise in society. The intended meaning of a commercial may be completely lost on certain parts of the audience that interpret it in different ways. For example, an advertiser may use sex to make a product appealing to men, but feminist viewers see the image as demeaning to women. Or an image of wilderness may be used to sell SUVs, an approach that only irritates, rather than persuades, environmentalists.

For Hall and his colleagues, the interpretation of media texts always occurs within a struggle of ideological control. Ronald Lembo and Kenneth Tucker describe the process as "a competitive arena where individuals or groups express opposing interests and battle for cultural power."[67] Rap is a good example of this struggle. Does it reflect the genuine values and interests of the black youth culture, or is it a sign of the degeneration of society? The answer depends on which interpretive community is asked. The chief aim of cultural studies, then, is to expose the ways ideologies of powerful groups are unwittingly perpetuated and the ways they can be resisted to disrupt the system of power that disfranchises certain groups.

In the next two sections, we look at two applications of cultural studies—feminist cultural scholarship and critical race theory. And although each of these focuses on different aspects of

culture, both exist within the postmodern tradition because they look at how categories such as gender and race are created in discourse and how these discourses create domination as well as opportunities for resistance and empowerment.

Feminist Cultural Studies. We saw in the previous section that modernist feminist studies identified a patriarchal system as the source of women's oppression. In contrast to this approach, feminist cultural studies suggests that power relations are constructed in social interaction of various types and that the language and symbolic forms are constantly creating categories of thought as well as social relationships. Specifically, feminist communication scholars examine the ways the male language bias affects the relations between the sexes, the ways male domination has constrained communication for females, and the ways women have both accommodated and resisted male patterns of speech and language. Although feminist scholarship has both modern and postmodern aspects, within the communication field, most current feminist work clearly aligns with cultural studies—and thus postmodernism—reflecting its interest in oppressive and emancipatory possibilities of discourse and other symbolic forms.[68]

As an example of this kind of work, Fern L. Johnson and Karren Young looked at television commercials for children's toys aired in the 1990s; the researchers viewed the commercials to see how they embodied discourse codes linking products to gender stereotypes.[69] Johnson and Young found that in addition to outnumbering girl-oriented ads, boy-oriented commercials emphasized action, competition, destruction, and agency and control, while girl-oriented ads emphasized limited activity, feelings, and nurturing. In speaking roles, characters tended to polarize genders, and boy ads included many power words, which were essentially absent in girl ads. Based on this study, then, children's television advertisements seem to reproduce cultural stereotypes by using them for marketing purposes, and the advertisements continue to socialize children into traditional patterns of gender relations

Feminist scholars do not just examine cultural texts out in the world; they have also become self-reflexive in treating scholarship and the scholarly enterprise itself as a cultural text. Feminist scholars have pointed out how research and theory building, like all aspects of life, are dominated not only by gender biases but by biases of Western science, including privileging objectivity, Eurocentricism, and imperialism. Contemporary feminist scholars, then, seek to articulate the interrelated forms of oppression, realizing that working to end one kind of oppression is useless—and in fact impossible—if other oppressions remain entrenched and unaddressed.[70]

Accordingly, feminist scholars seek to devise methods of scholarship that take into account the shifting female subject and its related discourses while also situating it in lived experience. They explore how the so-called gender-neutral discourses of the academy have denied women voice, strategies by which women can interrupt the academic conversation, and what the academy stands to lose and gain from such exclusions. Power relations are examined as they are manifest throughout society as well as in the very academic practices by which such investigations occur. In this sense, feminist scholarship undertakes the emancipatory aim of cultural studies, not only for culture generally but for its own scholarship.

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory (CRT), another example of the cultural studies approach, has a foot in both the modernist and postmodern traditions. CRT dates its origins to the 1970s, when a group of lawyers and legal scholars realized that the progress made by the civil rights movement had not continued and, in fact, that much racism had gone underground. Foundational to the movement was the idea of legal indeterminacy—the idea that not every legal decision has a single correct outcome. The movement had activist origins as well: from the civil rights movement, CRT took the notion of social justice—that historic wrongs need to be addressed—and from radical feminism, it drew upon the idea that largely unrecognized patterns

of social behavior constitute patriarchy and other forms of domination.[71] These origins point to a grounding in modernist approaches.

Proponents of critical race theory share several beliefs. First, CRT scholars see racism as ordinary, common, or normal—it is "the usual way society does business" and thus it is difficult to address because it appears ordinary. If discriminatory practices are unmarked in everyday discourse, this means they usually go unaddressed in the law as well. Second, CRT scholars agree that white domination in the United States functions to serve the psychological and material advantage of dominant groups, which means there are relatively few people genuinely interested in eradicating racism. Critical race theorists want to show, then, how what is seen as "normal" in fact contains a deep bias toward white culture.

CRT further posits, however, that race is a social construction—race and racism are products of social interaction that society constructs, manipulates, and abandons as convenient. This is where CRT makes a turn toward postmodernism. Critical race theorists understand that race is not only a structural category but a fluid and shifting one. These scholars, then, are particularly interested in the stories that get told in a culture in regard to race. It depends, of course, on who is doing the telling. Did O.J. Simpson kill Nicole Simpson? The story told by a white person might concentrate on issues of guilt or innocence; for many African-Americans, however, the story looks different it is a triumph of a person of color over a system that routinely discriminates against blacks.

Another set of stories that have interested CRT scholars is the different stories told about different racial groups at different times—depending on the interests of the dominant culture. A society may have, for example, little use for Chinese laborers at one time and instead needs and welcomes Japanese workers. During another period, the Japanese fall into disfavor—as was the case during World War II—while African-Americans are "cultivated" for jobs in the Army and in factories.

CRT advocates share a belief in the importance of nonwhites telling their stories about

race and racism as a way to bring their "unique perspectives" to the law's "master narratives," or widely accepted stories of what is normal and right.[72] Such stories help "race" the law by showing that it is not the neutral and just arbiter it is often assumed to be from the side of white privilege. CRT scholars want to make the discourses of racism transparent in order to allow for many voices to enter the dialogue and for a wider range of stories to be told.

Within the communication discipline, critical race theory is still a relative newcomer. Mark McPhail suggests that "there has been scant discussion of race and rhetoric which incorporates contemporary perspectives."[73] Many intersections can be made, however, between race, language, and power. The tension between race as a social construction and race as a material condition is one that is, at the core, a matter of communication, each with different pragmatic implications. If race is seen as primarily material, then energies must

be directed at physical conditions if racism is ever to be eradicated. If issues of race are considered as much social constructions as physical ones, as would be the case in a cultural-studies approach, then remedies can be found in language and social relations, ranging from curtailing racist speech, to hosting diversity seminars, to increasing the representations of underrepresented groups in media.

Another issue that also involves communication is the tension between the perspectives identified as color-blind and color-conscious. One position says that legal decisions should no longer take note of race—that decisions should be color-blind, a stance many CRT scholars dispute. They argue that if racism is indeed embedded in our thought processes, social structures, and discourse, then aggressive measures to address race are necessary in order to bring about change. So a paradox is constructed about race: in order to ameliorate race relations, we need to talk about race, but that conversation itself may reproduce existing patterns of racism. The insistence on attention to legal and civil rights— often the foundation upon which societal changes are predicated—is questioned by critical race theorists because such rights often are procedural rather than substantive. "Rights" favor the interests of the powerful and can and are often changed to fit the interests of the dominant and elite. How rights are defined is a matter of interpretation, legally and socially, and language and communication are important factors in such definitions.[74]

Also of interest to communication scholars is the importance of telling one's story so that these personal stories can serve as counterhistories to many stock U.S. narratives about immigrants.[75] Introducing these narratives into legal discourse is a matter of communication. Thus, while CRT was modernist in its origins, contemporary concerns take a decidedly postmodernist stance as well as bringing communication issues to the fore.

A recent extension of critical race theory—and another line of work clearly within the postmodern tradition—is the study of whiteness. After many decades of studying race, "a generation of

scholars is putting whiteness under the lens and examining the construction of the white race."[76] In general, these scholars examine what it means to be white, how whiteness became established legally, how certain groups moved into whiteness (Irish and Italians, for example, were originally seen as nonwhite, on par with blacks), and the privileges that come with being white. Communication scholars have recognized the difficulty of studying whiteness, because whiteness is at once invisible and yet extremely important. Thomas Nakayama and Lisa Peñaloza note: "If whiteness is everything and nothing, if whiteness as a racial category does not exist except in conflict with others, how can we understand racial politics in a social structure that centers whites, yet has no center?"[77]

Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek attempt to make the cultural construction of whiteness visible by describing six strategies inherent to the discourse of whiteness.[78] They arrived at these strategies after interviewing people about what it means to be white. They found six different constructions of whiteness embedded in the answers they received: (1) white is equated with power—white means status, majority, and dominance; (2) white is a default position—if you are not another color, you are white; (3) white is a scientific classification—fairly meaningless and without social status; (4) white means national origin—I'm an American; (5) white means the refusal to label self as any racialized category, whether white, black, or any other ethnic group; and (6) white means European ancestry. These varied and at times contradictory mappings of white discursive space suggest how expansive, central, and powerful the concept of whiteness is, even when it is being downplayed.

In sum, critical race theory and research on whiteness provide postmodern examples of how the careful examination of discourse can reveal ways in which society constructs categories that constrain and liberate various groups of people. We move now from the postmodern to the poststructural. As we make this transition, keep in mind that these two strands of the critical tradition support rather than oppose one another.

Poststructuralism and the Work of Michel Foucault

Originally, poststructuralism was a movement originating in France in reaction to traditional semiotic ideas about language.[79] Specifically, poststructuralists objected to the idea that language structures are just natural forms to be used by individuals as a tool of communication. Their goal was to "deconstruct" language in order to show that language can be understood, used, and constructed in a limitless number of ways. When we normalize meanings and grammars, we are in fact privileging one form of discourse over another, which is ultimately and always oppressive. You can see that poststructuralism is also postmodern, because it resists any idea that posits a universal, normal structure or way of being in the world.

Within the communication field today, the most influential poststructuralist is Michel Foucault. Foucault is normally thought of as a poststructuralist but is, in fact, impossible to classify neatly.[80] Although he denied a structuralist bias in his work, his writings bridge poststructural and structural traditions within the critical tradition.

Foucault says that each period has a distinct worldview, or conceptual structure, that determines the nature of knowledge in that period. The character of knowledge in a given epoch Foucault calls the *episteme*, or *discursive formation*. The vision of each age is exclusive and incompatible with visions from other ages, making it impossible for people in one period to think like those of another. The episteme, or way of thinking, is determined not by people but by the predominant discursive structures of the day. These discursive structures are deeply embedded ways of practicing or expressing ideas, and what people know cannot be separated from the structures of discourse used to express that knowledge. For Foucault, discourse includes written texts, but it also includes spoken language and nonverbal forms such as architecture, institutional practices, and even charts and graphs.

An example of how discourse shapes knowledge is Richard Nixon's famous Checkers speech. Martha Cooper applied Foucault's ideas to this speech to show how the discourse made use of—indeed created—standards for responding to an accusation.[81] In the presidential campaign of 1952, vice-presidential candidate Richard Nixon was accused of harboring a secret campaign fund. He responded to this accusation by denying the charge, opening his private finances to public scrutiny, and claiming that the only possible illegitimate contribution he had received was a dog named Checkers.

This speech has been analyzed by several scholars of rhetoric, each looking at the ways this particular speaker used strategies to appeal to the national audience at that time. For Foucault, this kind of analysis is irrelevant. Cooper shows how this speech was an event that served to create and reinforce knowledge structures in our culture. In particular, the speech defined what it meant to respond to an accusation, reinforcing the rule that when accused, people should respond.

The structure of discourse is a set of inherent rules that determines the form and substance of discursive practice. Foucault's use of rules is not entirely like that of the other theorists in this book, because for him, rules apply across the culture in a variety of types of discourse and function on a deep and powerful level. These are not merely rules for how to talk but rules that determine the very nature of our knowledge, power, and ethics. These rules control what can be talked or written about, who may talk or write, and whose talk is to be taken seriously. Such rules also prescribe the form that discourse must take. In our day, for example, "scientific authorities" are given great credibility, and in matters of "fact," most people prefer the form of "objective studies" over the form of conjecture or myth.

So in the Checkers speech, for instance, we see what counts as good evidence for a claim that a politician is corrupt (or not corrupt). We learn from this discourse that politicians must speak out when accused of wrongdoing, and the model of the honest, average American is created here as well.

Contrary to popular belief, according to Foucault, people are not responsible for establishing the

conditions of discourse. Inversely, it is discourse that determines the place of the person in the scheme of the world. Our present discursive structure defines humans as the foundation and origin of knowledge, but Foucault believes that the episteme will again shift and humans will once again disappear from their central place in the world: "It is comforting . . . and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form."[82]

This radical idea does not mean that humans do not produce discourse. Indeed, they do; but any number of individuals could have produced a given statement, and any speaker or writer is merely fulfilling a role in making a statement. That Nixon was the source of the Checkers address is unimportant. Nixon took the role of agent in this case, and since then any number of other politicians have done essentially the same thing. Language itself prefigures personhood; what the self is at any given is a construction. In other words, a Nixon-type person was created by the language in the Checkers speech. In other times, entirely different ideas about knowledge, power, and the self emerge from the discourse in use.

Foucault's research on the penal system is a good example of the relationship among language, discourse, and the system they create.[83] He found a dramatic shift in the 18th and 19th centuries away from torture and public punishment to incarceration and protection of the criminal from bodily harm. Prior to this period, convicts were publicly tortured or executed in a kind of spectacle. In the discursive formation of that day, the body was seen as the central object of political relations. It was very natural that power should be exerted against the body and that punishment should involve bodily pain. In the latter discursive formation, however, the body lost this status, as power became more a matter of the individual human psyche or soul. Thus locking people up came to be viewed as a more appropriate punishment than flogging them in public.

Foucault's work centers on analyzing discourse in a way that reveals its rules and structure.

What he first called *archaeology* and later *genealogy*, this method seeks to uncover, through careful description, the regularities of discourse. It displays disparities or contradictions, rather than coherence, and reveals a succession of one form of discourse after another. For this reason, Foucault places emphasis on comparative descriptions of more than one piece of discourse. Interpretation, or establishing the meaning of a text, cannot be avoided in text analysis, but it should be minimized because interpretation does not reveal discursive structure and, in fact, may obscure it.

Foucault's writings center on the subject of power. He believes that power is an inherent part of all discursive formation. As such, it is a function of discourse or knowledge and not a human or institutional property. The episteme, as expressed in language, grants power. Power is held by all parties in an interaction; it is not something one person has and another does not. It is a creative force that pervades all human activity. Foucault's approach to systems of discourse foreshadows the next area of inquiry—post-colonialism.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonial theory involves a critique of colonialism, which has been an important cultural structure of the modern period. Scholars working in the postcolonial movement are devoted to examining Eurocentrism, imperialism, and the processes of colonization and decolonization—all of the ways in which the colonial experience can be understood as an ideology of domination. Postcolonial scholars seek to examine, understand, and ultimately undo the historical structures that created, maintain, and continue to reproduce the oppression of the colonial experience.

While many postcolonial scholars are themselves from nations that were subject to European colonization, their focus is not restricted to the literal colonization practices of these countries as empires. They also focus on what is called "neocolonialism" as it occurs in contemporary discourse about "others." *Neocolonialism* is present, for example, in the use of the terms

First World and *Third World* for "developed" and "developing" nations, in the massive transference and "invasion" of U.S. culture into all parts of the world, and in treatments of nonwhite races as "other" in U.S. media.[84]

Edward Said's work on "otherness" is often considered the origin of postcolonial theory. In his book *Orientalism,* Said discusses the systems of discourse by which the "'world' is divided, administered, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeonholes, by which 'we' are 'human' and 'they' are not."[85] These systems of discourses extend beyond the political realm to the academic world as well. Said points out how members of non-Western cultures are positioned as the "subjects" of study; that ultimately becomes the subject of a "learned" field in the academy. Then "others" become something to learn about, and thus they are turned into objects, making them dominated once again by the process of knowledge production. The postcolonial project, then, is concerned generally with how the discourses of the Western world legitimize certain power structures and reinforce the colonizing practices of those nations whose dominance continues to be reproduced.

The stance of postcolonialism is inherently political, seeing emancipation from oppressive structures as they continue to play out in Western discourses and in the material world. Postcolonial critics recognize, however, that the answer to Western domination is not simply retreating into a pre-Western past or indigenous tradition in order to preserve some kind of "native" identity. This is not only impractical but simply reproduces the "us" versus "them" ideology that is at work in the larger world. Rather the postcolonial critic seeks to understand the world from a place between two cultures, to resist any singular form of cultural understanding, and to see cultural identities in more complicated ways.

An important theme in postcolonial work, then, is *hybridity*—the spaces between cultures. Living between two cultures and not being truly part of either creates what Gloria Anzaldúa calls the borderlands,[86] a displaced position that carries with it a special consciousness and way of seeing that is valuable to understanding both cultures. Postcolonial theorists ask the discipline of communication to examine ways of communicating that take into account how all of us live, to some degree, in the borderlands.

Postcolonial theory is thus very much concerned with power—another basic component of the critical tradition. While offering a critical understanding of the power dynamics of imperialism in all of its forms, it also understands the difficulty of moving out of the ideological structures that dominate the academy and the world. Postcolonial scholars suggest several ways to begin to grapple with the forms of domination in which we find ourselves. First is to unlearn privilege—to recognize and acknowledge the ways in which our daily practices connect to larger political, national, and international interests in the world. Even simple things like being able to buy band-aids that match one's skin tone are signs of "privilege" that members of the dominant culture often do not even think about.

A second suggestion is to avoid essentializing others in the same way that others have been essentialized by Western discourses. The postcolonial critic who attempts to discuss the situation of a woman in Senegal, for instance, faces the problem of colonizing that woman by speaking with authority about and essentially defining the nature of her experience. Gayatri Spivak offers the idea of "strategic essentializing" as a way out of this bind. The critic recognizes that he will end up essentializing to some degree and thus constantly examines that stance, considering essentialism not as "the way things are" but as "something one must adopt to produce a critique of anything."[87] The postcolonial critic, then, is constantly self-reflexive and considers how the processes of scholarship may be inscribing the very power relations and hegemonic structures he is seeking to resist.

Trinh T. Minh-ha's work demonstrates several aspects of the intersection of the postcolonial with communication theory. A Vietnamese filmmaker, musician, composer, poet, and author, Trinh examines and seeks to disrupt "rooted ideologies" or established order in any form. What is troublesome for Trinh about hegemonic

systems is that they usually are unmarked, unnoticed, and thus considered normal: it becomes "the only way people can think about something."[88] Even those who might be expected to resist the system—those who have been colonized—participate in and are co-opted by the dominant worldview, maintained by prevailing social codes and techniques of categorization and standardization. As a result, the colonizer and colonized speak the same language. Trinh's aim is to disrupt any singular ideology, replacing it instead with a world of many possible meanings.

Trinh distinguishes between *otherness* and *difference* to explore how individuals are positioned in systems of domination. Individuals in privileged positions in regard to an ideology tend to respond to others who are different from them through a lens of otherness, assigning a fixed, stable, essential identity to the other. Marginalized or colonized individuals, on the other hand, typically respond to others through a lens of difference. They move between outsider and insider positions, exploring the meaning of the self through the image one has of the other and vice versa. Identity, then, becomes an open, fluctuating, ongoing process of construction, "a multiplicity of I's, none of which truly dominates."[89]

Trinh adopts two primary communication tools—violation of expectations and honoring multiplicity—to seek disruption of ideologies of domination. Violation of expectations means simply breaking the rules with regard to a particular situation, experience, or text. Trinh's documentaries are a prime example of this in operation. In her film *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, for instance, she had Vietnamese women in the United States act out transcripts of interviews others had done with women in Vietnam. The re-enactment is deliberately ambiguous, until the women, in "real" interviews, discuss why they agreed to play the roles on screen. In *Reassemblage*, she uses silence over the titles, introducing music much later in the film: music tells an audience what to expect, and Trinh wants audiences to suspend their expectations.

The disruption of expectations is tied closely to Trinh's second communication strategy—the honoring of multiplicity or the construction of messages that are deliberately ambiguous. She prefers and creates messages that do not settle "down with any single answer,"[90] with audience members invited to participate in the making of meaning. Trinh not only challenges systems of domination, then, but uses communication techniques to challenge and destabilize ideologies in order to unearth new possibilities.

The postcolonial project, in sum, brings the concerns of the critical tradition—domination, ideology, and power—to the global scene. It seeks to offer ways that we can listen to those who have been colonized in all kinds of ways by Western discourses, and it seeks to offer ways that we can begin to bring them into the conversations about identities, politics, globalization, and power.

This tradition is oppositional, it is conscious and proud of its values, and it holds a clear goal of consciousness-raising. This tradition, too, includes assumptions and insights from all the other traditions, except the sociopsychological. The keen interest in signs and the effect of signs and symbols in establishing social domination shows a strong crossover with semiotics. The idea in postmodernism that patterns of influence and domination are overdetermined, or a product of the interaction of many forces, shows a certain kinship with cybernetics. Most critical studies are obviously influenced by the sociocultural and, because of their reliance on hermeneutic methods, the phenomenological as well.

Still, critical theories resist many tendencies of the other traditions. Critical scholars worry that other forms of scholarship are merely descriptive and participate in the normalizing of otherwise hegemonic forces. Poststructural theories especially resist the semiotic notions of language structure, and postmodern theorists would reject objective system descriptions often found in the cybernetic tradition. Finally, modernist critical theories would almost certainly reject phenomenology and especially its individualistic bias. Thus, while critical theory has embedded in it many bits and pieces of the other traditions, its goal is usually to oppose and resist those traditions.

A P P L I C A T I O N S & I M P L I C A T I O N S

The implications of communication theory in the broadest context are both grand and small, as they impact society, culture, and individuals. We capture these implications here in five propositions:

1. *Difference* is the soul of society.
Most psychologically oriented communication theory focuses not on difference but on similarity, unity, or conformity. When we look at the individual communicator from a psychological point of view, we seem most interested in the predictability and repeatability of an individual's thinking and behavior. Once we move beyond the individual to look at larger social and cultural patterns, however, *difference* emerges as the defining characteristic of human life. Not only are cultures and social institutions diverse but individual human beings, because of their involvement in these larger social structures, are themselves diverse.

The theories in this chapter say a great deal about difference — differences in language, cultural forms, class, gender, and power. Because people communicate within different circles of influence, because their cultures provide different linguistic forms, and because certain groups dominate others, society is like a tapestry of numerous threads, colors, and patterns, and the whole, composed of diversity, constitutes the largest context in which communication takes place.

Who you are as a person, then, is largely determined by the combination of social formations impacting your life. For some of us, the forces that define our identities are clear, especially in the case of race, class, gender, and other cultural forms. As any person who is lesbian, an immigrant, or has a disability will tell you, group identity matters. For others, though equally important, the social categories affecting their lives are translucent. Though many of us fail to see the relevance of cultural factors, it would take only a few weeks in an intercultural communication course to realize the sociocultural nature of our lives.

The fact of difference is one of the most important things you can learn in life. Human beings are distinguished by difference, yet sometimes we have difficulty coping with it. Some resist it, some tolerate it, and others celebrate it. Each of these responses, however, is a matter of communication.

2. Social diversity is created and managed through communication.
Ordinary human beings weave the fabric of society in everyday communication. The people with whom we communicate, what we talk about, and how we communicate creates groups, organizations, cultures, and institutions. Dynamic social impact theory shows that mere clustering of people together into networks creates a kind of influence structure, ethnography provides rich descriptions of cultural forms, and cultural studies identifies the ways in which communication produces power and domination.

As we have seen in virtually all of the chapters of this book, communication is more than an odorless, tasteless, neutral tool for transmitting information. It is more than an instrument of influence. Communication is the environment in which social worlds are made, and we do have a say in the worlds that get made. The good news is that we have some power to determine what we want to achieve through communication; the bad news is we cannot do it alone. In

other words, we are in this together, and we will together build a social world based on the communication forms we employ in interaction with others. Although we use a variety of visual, spatial, and tactile symbols in communication, language is especially important in the process of social construction.

3. Language and culture are inextricable.

The early work of Sapir and Whorf showed the power of language in influencing thought. Cultural difference, according to linguistic relativity, is determined in large measure by linguistic differences. Bernstein showed how language affects and reflects social class and family relationships, and the ethnography of communication broadens this analysis to show how cultural difference includes variation in expressive forms of all types. The conclusion is inescapable: language and culture go hand in hand.

How you talk shows others who you are. Language use is a form of social bonding and identification. When you are "with" or "in" a group, your language says, "I am part of you, but not part of them," or, "I am with them, and not you." In other words, you perform culture every day.

It is true that "sticks and stones can break bones," but words matter too. A common belief is that words and deeds are different, that talking and doing are separate, and — more to the point — we should stop talking so much and start doing. But very little communication theory supports this idea. Indeed, communication scholars will almost universally tell you that doing and talking can never be separated, as each affects the other.

4. Social arrangements are consequential.

Your personal identity, what you think and do, your resources, and your privilege are all consequences of where you are positioned within the structure of society. For example, the theory of the diffusion of innovations says that the technologies you employ will depend in large measure on who you know and what technologies they use. The theory of elaborated and restricted codes suggests that how you think about yourself and other members of your family depends upon how you address one another.

Privilege is an especially important consequence of the organization of society. The privilege you enjoy or do not possess is determined, in part, by the opportunities you have had, and opportunity is very much a product of your own social status. For example, feminist theory shows that masculine values that permeate society can marginalize the experiences of women. Cultural studies takes a more complex view. Scholars in this branch of study do not see any single set of ideas as perpetually dominant. Although various interests may dominate at any particular time and certain classes of people are oppressed in this process, the field of ideological struggle is constantly in flux.

5. Contexts of communication are interlinked.

Because contexts are built up from interaction, no single context is ever sufficient to explain the communication process. Your communication may be affected largely by your sense of self (Chapter 4), the messages of others (Chapter 5), the conversations you are having at the moment (Chapter 6), your relationships (Chapter 7), the group (Chapter 8), the organization (Chapter 9), or the media (Chapter 10); but in the end all are part of a large social and cultural milieu that affects and is affected by all the others.

NOTES

1. Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1921); Benjamin L. Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. John B. Carroll (New York: Wiley, 1956). In the Whorf book, the following articles are most helpful: John B. Carroll, "Introduction," 1–34; "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," 134–59; and "Language, Mind, and Reality," 246–70.

2. Edward Sapir, quoted in Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, 134.

3. Adapted from Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, 213.

4. Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes, and Control: Theoretical Studies Toward a Sociology of Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

5. Bernstein, *Class, Codes, and Control*, 177.

6. Bernstein, *Class, Codes, and Control*, 175.

7. This study is summarized in Bernstein, *Class, Codes, and Control*; see especially 76–117.

8. Bernstein, *Class, Codes, and Control*, 186.

9. Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948). See also Everett M. Rogers, *A History of Communication Study: A Biographical Approach* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 244–315.

10. An excellent summary of this hypothesis is provided by Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 21 (1957): 61–78.

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CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION
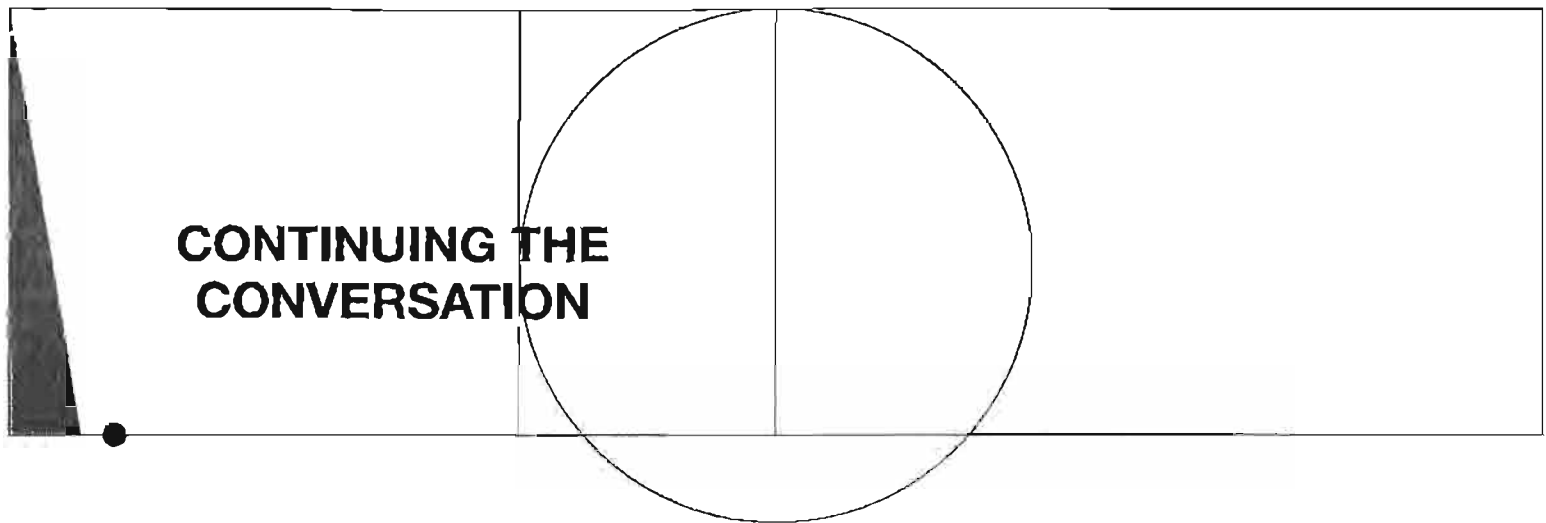
THEORIZING YOUR WORLD

We began this book by talking about what communication theories are and how they are constructed. As a student, reading this book for a class, you probably did not put yourself anywhere near that group of "scholars who theorize about communication." But in this last chapter, we are going to suggest that you always have been such a theorist and that you can be deliberately so.

You are always constructing theories—explanations—to make sense of the world. You just don't realize that you are doing so. You have a theory that helps you explain why your friend doesn't help out in the tutoring program anymore or why your boss isn't more appreciative of your efforts at a new job. Sometimes you theorize about actual communication processes—when you try to figure out how to handle a difficult encounter with your mother, for instance. At other times, you theorize about outcomes—what will happen if you confront your friend about his dropping the ball on the tutoring program. And no matter the content of your theory, communication is involved as you frame that explanation—putting it in certain language, labeling it as something, sharing it with others. In other words, your ideas about what is happening and what you might do about it are always based on generalizations you carry about how things work.

Any communication theory you generate is in response to an exigence—a situation, problem, unmet need, something that is not as you would like it to be. So much of our communication and most of our theorizing occurs because we want to accomplish something, get something figured out, have our needs met in some way.

When faced with an exigence, need, or goal, our next step is typically to figure out how to

address it. Many people don't give this step any thought—they simply respond the way their friends, their family, and/or their culture tells them to respond—the prevailing tacit theory that you learn from experience. In some families, for example, if a boy is insulted by another boy, there is only one appropriate response: punch his lights out. But regardless of your upbringing, we hope this book gives you an awareness of the almost infinite number of ways to frame a situation and to respond. Because you have read this book, you probably now realize that you have many more communication options than you realized you had before.

We hope you will not simply appreciate that you theorize and that you have lots of options with your communication. We hope you will take the next step and become a much more deliberate theorizer in all areas of your life. We hope you will deliberately consider your responses, understand why you have selected them, and decide whether a particular theory is the one you want to continue to have in place in your life.

In other words, we want to encourage you to not only think about how you theorize to explain the world around you but through theory to create the kind of world in which you want to live. This may seem like a pretty big jump—from making sense of your world with theories to actually creating that world. But this is the natural outcome of any kind of theorizing. The kind of theory you choose to explain something determines how you view that phenomenon and how you act on it. If you prefer theories of attribution, it means you are focused on a more cause-effect approach to the world than if you choose to focus on theories about marginalized cultural groups and the larger social forces that contextualize communication. In either case, you are focusing on some things and not others, you are seeing some things and not others, and you are, in essence, making some things and not others a part of your world.

What we are saying, then, is that as the theorist of your own life, you have choices about the kind of world you will construct with your theories. You can just as well construct your world

deliberately as let it come to you willy-nilly. You can be in charge of the choices. Though the realities we shape with our perception, our language, and our theorizing are symbolic ones, they often are more important than the objective reality that they represent.

Choosing to label something as a misunderstanding, an argument, or an affront makes all the difference to how you act on that incident, what kind of relationship gets made with the others involved, and how you feel about yourself in the process. You can choose to dwell on your family life and blame it for your current problems, or you can decide it created some contrasting experiences that helped make you into the resourceful person you are today. You can claim to be just "lucky" to have made it out of a negative upbringing, or you can take responsibility for the choices you made to get yourself out. Each of these framings indeed creates a different world—the world in which you end up living. That world will be one filled with blame or luck or responsibility, given your choice of communication. And you will open up or limit your choices, given the framing you choose.

The communication theories offered here give you many ideas about the options available for framing or making your world. You have been exposed to many possibilities and have probably found some that make more sense to you than others—that resonate with your assumptions about and approach to the world. You can pick and choose from among them, adopting entire theories that you really like or combining just pieces of theories to make explanations that work for your world. But most important, you can do this deliberately, thoughtfully, consciously, and systematically. You can choose, because of a communication theory, to change your perspective or approach, to communicate differently, to construct a different world.

We have all known people who made dramatic changes in their lives—sometimes by taking things slowly and going step-by-step and sometimes by doing something different overnight. Perhaps you embarked on an exercise program that resulted in your losing 50 pounds, or

perhaps you decided to quit smoking or to return to school at the age of 45. In each case, a different way of theorizing the issue and communicating about it made the difference.

As you leave this class, then, think about the world you have created with your personal communication theories. What do you like about your world? What would you like to be different? How can you deliberately use communication theories to help you make changes? World making is one of the perks of studying communication: we hope you do it with a sense of the responsibility you have as a cocreator of the world in which we all get to live.

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