Introduction

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When Donald P. Cushman and I co-edited a previous book on communication theories (1995), we used a template of watershed research tradition consisting of three developed and intertwined components. First, at the philosophical level, each watershed research tradition has explicitly developed assumptions about the nature of communication, its purposes, and its significant domains of reality. Second, at the theoretical level, each watershed research tradition explicitly defines its constructs and specifies a web of relationships between them. This is part of each tradition that generates productive empirical research. Finally, at the practical level, each watershed research tradition articulates communication skills in the form of message strategies, tactics, and activities that need to be performed in order to achieve desired outcomes.

Such a template of a watershed research tradition is a useful backdrop for the present book on *Emerging Theories of Human Communication* for two reasons. First, it helps us to distinguish a received from an emerging theory of communication. Second, it suggests that an emerging theory is a symbolic product that mixes some old and some new components but in creative and significant ways.

It is the intention of this chapter to accomplish three goals. I will first briefly discuss some defining characteristics of an emerging theory. Second, I will critically summarize contributing essays. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

CLUSTERS OF EMERGING THEORIES

There are three different clusters of emerging theories of human communication in this volume. First, an emergent theory may be formulated from within a homogeneous, well-established tradition. However, conceptual developments, especially at the theoretical level start to overgrow the original framework, and the original formulations become a distant template whose cohesive, integrative force is weakening (see Alexander, 1987). The case in point is new developments in media agenda-suing theory (chapter 5). Second, an emergent theory may be created from within a family of overlapping traditions. Theorists freely borrow constructs and methodological tools in order to establish a new theoretical foothold (see Wagner, 1984). A new theory of relational communication competence (chapter 2), a new theory of conflict communication (chapter 3), and a theory of new rhetoric and new social movements (chapter 6) were minted in such a way. Finally, an emergent theory may be based on a critical importation of relevant constructs from multiple disciplines which are then woven together by a communication framework (see Aldrich, 1988). Examples of such an approach to theory development are an interactional theory of peace (chapter 4), a new theory of communication and culture (chapter 1), and a communication theory of managing government competitiveness (chapter 7).

Let me now turn to a brief, critical summary of individual essays.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

A conception of communication that is located in social scenes and sensitive to cultural variability is developed in chapter 1. Carbaugh, Gibson, and Milburn articulate the relationship between communicative practices in concrete social interaction and culture. The authors first spell out three basic assumptions and two axioms about communication. The first assumption is that communication exhibits some kind of systemic patterns. The second assumption states that systemic patterns of communication implicate social organization/structuring (of interaction, social relations, and institutions) and cultural meaning systems or beliefs and values (regarding persons, social action, and nature). Finally, the authors assume that communication is partly constitutive of sociocultural life. The axiom of particularity states that communication varies from com-

munity to community, and the axiom of actuality stresses the actual communication practices.

Carbaugh, Gibson, and Milburn then go on to define three basic concepts of their new theory of communication and culture. The first concept is the communicative scene—the specific place and specific occasion. The second concept is communication practice as a pattern of situated, message endowed actions performed in a scene(s). The third concept is cultural discourse, a system of communication practices that converge topically (discourses of religion, science, and education) and functionally (discourses of identity and action).

The authors conclude that (1) specific communicative scenes demand (2) particular communicative practices that activate (3) cultural discourses of identification/personhood and action. They offer two case studies to illustrate some of the ways social interaction and cultural performances can be integrated into explorations of communication conduct.

Communication competence, as it is manifested in interpersonal relationships, is defined by Wiemann, Takai, Ota, and Wiemann (chapter 2) as the joint creation of a mutually satisfying relationship by constructing appropriate and effective messages. Relational communication competence is a functional process based on an optimal but not necessarily equal distribution of control of messages by the partners for the duration of an encounter and across space and time of encounter.

Wiemann and his colleagues construct a relational model of communication competence that stresses unspecified links between interactional constructs such as goals, relational history, future expectations, and relational satisfaction. The authors' main interest is in the application of the model of relational communication competence to teaching competence skills.

In chapter 3, Cahn outlines and compares three traditional approaches guiding research on interpersonal conflict, then adumbrates an overarching paradigm of conflict communication, and, finally, discusses some implications of the new paradigm. Cahn examines the following three traditional approaches to research on interpersonal conflict: (1) the systems-interactionist approach to couples' conflict, (2) the cognitive-exchange approach to the role of conflict in relationship satisfaction and commitment, and (3) the rules-interventionist approach to disputes between divorcing spouses.

What is theoretically important, however, is that Cahn argues

that the three approaches are becoming increasingly intertwined in an emerging, overarching paradigm of conflict communication. The systems-interactionist approach contributes its objective observation of partners' interdependent behaviors in dyads. The cognitive-exchange approach adds subjective self-reports of interdependent cognitions. Finally, the rules-interventionist approach offers objective observation of triads and rules that regulate interaction. Such an integration of theoretical contributions of the three approaches to conflict allows Cahn to articulate three propositions concerning conflict communication theory: First, the new theory specifies escalating versus de-escalating behaviors. Second, the new theory can isolate combinations of peoples' attributions and expectations that lead to negative or positive forms of conflict. Third, the new theory takes advantage of the fact that the agreed-upon rules enforced by mediators make it possible to resolve conflict in a mutually beneficial way.

Peace as a condition of the parties' relationship in interaction is the topic of chapter 4. Donohue proposes an interactionist framework for peace, and then discusses theoretical and empirical issues regarding the framework. Donohue argues that an interactionist framework for peace is based on communication behaviors such as interpersonal aggression and violence, and negotiation and mediation. He implies that peace is also a discourse, a form of talk.

Drawing on multiple theoretic and research traditions such as political science and international relations, psychological, marital communication, and criminal justice and sociology theoretical traditions, Donohue presents an interactionist framework for peace entailing four clusters of peaceful and nonpeaceful behaviors. First, unconditional peace requires high affiliation and high interdependence of actors. Parties are involved with one another in a cooperative manner, consider their relationship as unconditional, and interact in a mostly problem- or task-oriented exchanges. Second, isolationist peace is characterized by low affiliation and low interdependence between actors. Although parties are not fighting, they are not moving forward productively with their substantive agenda. They engage in less frequent and superficial information exchange, and prefer withdrawal. Third, conditional peace is like a courting relationship of high affiliation and low interdependence between actors. In such conditions actors remain friendly and polite, generally as an attempt to escalate the level of interdependence. They test one another to decide whether to expand interdependence and role obligations, and bargain constructively in good

faith. Fourth, competition/aggression occurs within a framework of low affiliation and high interdependence between actors. Asserting rights and resisting obligations, especially when key, central, and defining rights have been violated, is the dominant type of interaction. The communication then carries almost a moral imperative and authority with it.

In chapter 5, Zhu and Blood describe emergence of media agenda-setting theory, analyze its relevant extensions, and outline its new frontiers. Media agenda-setting theory is built on three underlying assumptions: First, a content-specific effect (certain issues) is believed to be superior to a content-free effect. Second, theory focuses on an aggregate level effect (creating an agenda for the community as a whole). Third, the ultimate effects of agenda-setting may be that news coverage shapes public concerns about certain issues, which, in turn, act upon the policy-making process, political force and influence of social movements, or actual voting.

The authors articulate new and significant theoretical developments within a media agenda-setting research tradition in terms of five conceptual moves:

1. Issue competition, or whether agenda-setting is a zero-sum process in which the rise of one issue in the public arena is at the expense of another issue.

2. Use of nonlinear models to detect an upper ceiling (saturation point) for any issue salience, time-varying media impacts, and a path the public's attention follows.

3. Psychological mechanisms involved in agenda-setting.

4. Integrating mass and interpersonal communication.

5. This conceptual move is the most ambitious one. It attempts to go beyond the public agenda by specifying (a) the antecedents of media agenda-setting ("media agenda-building"), (b) the consequences of media agenda-setting ("policy agenda-setting"), and (c) the broader democratic context of agenda-setting.

Hauser and Whalen outline (chapter 6) the constitutive nature of the new rhetoric deployed by new social movements. They argue that the constitutive nature of the new rhetoric is based on a radical departure from rhetoric's ancient instrumentalism. Whereas instrumentalist rhetorical theory views the audience as pregiven, its

constitutive counterpart posits that autonomous individual and collective identities do not exist free and independent of discourse. This view of rhetoric as a social practice focuses on shared problems, tolerance of interpretative differences in understanding the problems themselves, and a shared world of coordinated social action.

The authors spell out three theoretical postulates or general theory propositions of the rhetorical theory of new social movements:

1. Although anchored in material conditions, the interests of social actors do not predate their formulation and expression through rhetoric. In other words, social actors rhetorically mint new worldviews that then specify a complete set of practices.

2. Movement membership is an individual, extrainstitutional or organizational practice and social movement actors thus must negotiate between unstable individual and collective meanings.

3. Rhetorical situations are the product of choices made by the social actor.

Hauser and Whalen draw four implications for the practical realities of message design strategies. First, audience cannot be addressed in terms of shared interests. Second, the combat involving new social movements is less likely to be orchestrated or waged at the institutional level. Third, vernacular codes are used to express affiliation and personal identity. Fourth, the vernacular codes influence the length of time spent on a question, and the places in which discourse does or does not occur.

A new communication theory of competitive government is presented in chapter 7. Cullen offers a new model of competitive government based on three ingredients. First, the model incorporates trade-offs between three basic modes of management—high production, high autonomy, and high response. Second, the model states that implementation of change in the public sector requires performance management (i.e., that projects lead to operational outputs and real added value) and comfort-zone management (i.e., containing opposition of key groups to key changes). Third, the model stresses the need to manage the timing of change projects more strategically. The author specifies four different transition strategies to move toward the high-response mode:

1. Transitions based on the various Asian development (high production) models.

2. Transitions based on the deregulation of various planned (produc-tion-oriented) economies in Eastern Europe.

3. Transitions based on regulated expansion and internal develop-ment (the Western European experience).

4. Transitions based on devolution and the empowerment of sub-units (the U.S. case).

Such transitions obviously require new concepts of leadership and communication for the public sector.

CONCLUSIONS

Let me now offer three brief observations regarding the formula-tions of new theories of human communication.

First, they all redefine the constructs of (1) actors, (2) action/practice, (3) order/structure, and (4) change/transformation explic-itly in terms of communication.

Second, they borrow freely from the exiting traditions within the field of communication and related disciplines in order to start constructing new theoretical models. As a consequence, they en-gage in the initial specification of a web of relationships between constructs to the relative exclusion of the philosophical justifica-tion of their endeavor. In other words, they tend to ignore founda-tional debates.

Third, they all strive to have an impact on everyday processes. One result of such an orientation could be a new standard of practi-cal relevance of theorizing about communication.