

# INTRODUCTION

HEIDI L. MULLER AND ROBERT T. CRAIG

**T***heorizing Communication: Readings Across Traditions*, a new introduction to communication theory based on an integrative model for the field, is designed to engage readers in a very practical project of theorizing communication. Craig (1999) envisioned communication theory as a field of study that integrates seven distinct traditions of thought with a shared focus on practical communication problems (see unit II, reading 5). Leading textbooks have adopted the seven traditions model as an overview perspective of the field. Because communication theory actually encompasses hundreds of different theories that approach communication from various, seemingly unrelated points of view, the subject is notoriously confusing for beginning students. Making sense of communication theory is further complicated by the diversity of intellectual styles within the communication discipline. Because different theories are in essence written in different languages, assembling a coherent picture of communication theory often seems like an unwieldy if not overwhelming task. Brief textbook overviews of the integrative model are therefore helpful for giving the field some initial unity and structure, thus helping students to make sense of it.

Our purpose in this book is to provide a deeper background for understanding and using that integrative approach to communication theory. For that purpose we have assembled a reference collection of primary source readings along with introductory notes and suggestions

for further research. The readings include both classic texts from the traditions of communication theory and newer selections reflecting current trends. The book creates a more fully developed structure for making sense of the varied and constantly evolving ideas that compose the field of communication theory. It also highlights the possibility, practicality, and usefulness of the project of theorizing communication for everyone ranging from advanced scholars to curious general readers.

## THE PROJECT OF THEORIZING COMMUNICATION

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Communication theory is more than just an expansive litany of abstract concepts formulated by accomplished scholars for others to understand, apply, and investigate. For us, to study communication theory means to become actively engaged in the project of theorizing communication. This is not a project that is somehow removed from ordinary life. Theorizing is a formalized extension of everyday sense-making and problem solving. Theorizing begins with a heightened awareness of our own communication experiences and expands that awareness to engage with communication problems and practices in the social world. Theories are not just intellectual abstractions; they are ways of thinking and talking that arise from different interests, and they are

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useful for addressing different kinds of practical problems. Over time, specific avenues of thought have been surveyed and cleared (and sometimes paved) as scholars and others have participated in these specialized forms of discourse. These established, cultivated ways of thinking and talking are what we call traditions of communication theory. Learning communication theory means learning these traditions, learning how to use them as lenses for examining communication problems in different ways, and learning how to participate in the specialized forms of discourse by which the traditions of communication theory constantly grow, develop, and change.

To summarize in a different way, learning to engage in the project of theorizing communication as we approach it in this book has four key requirements. First, we must understand the close connection between theoretical ways of thinking and talking about communication and our ways of thinking and talking about communication in everyday life. Second, we must understand the logic of practical theory—how theories can be explicitly designed and used to address practical problems. Third, we must understand the traditions of communication theory and their usefulness as a way of integrating the field. Fourth, however, we must also understand that traditions should not be reified or taken for granted, and that the project of theorizing requires questioning and rethinking theoretical traditions as we use them. These four points are explained in more detail in the following sections.

#### UNDERSTANDING METADISOURSE: COMMUNICATION THEORY AND EVERYDAY TALK

In some sense, everyone is already a communication theorist. That is, throughout society there is an ongoing conversation about communication and communication theory in which everyone is already engaged to some extent. Cameron (reading 30) points out that *metadiscourse*—everyday talk about communication—has become a major preoccupation of people in modern

societies. Although the widespread awareness of the importance of communication that Cameron describes is a fairly new phenomenon, the readings in unit I reveal that our commonplace ideas and ways of talking about communication have evolved over many centuries. Communication theory, in essence, extends those commonplace ideas to enable a more sophisticated, insightful level of conversation about communication problems and practices.

Ideas in communication theory are often intellectually refined versions of ordinary practical concepts. For example, certain elements of what is now called the transmission or source-message-receiver model of communication were already present in the ancient culture of Homeric Greece (see reading 1). Other ideas about communication as transmission emerged with Christian speculation about the communication of angels (reading 2), bureaucratic discourse about the construction of roads and canals in early modern France (reading 3), and innovations in electronic media from the telegraph in the mid-19th century to the present (reading 4). Semiotic and cybernetic theories of communication (see units IV and VI) have modified and systematized these now commonplace ideas about communication between minds, flow and circulation through networks, and have modified and systematized ways of using information to achieve influence and control at a distance.

As the process of theorizing reflects on ordinary ideas about communication, it also criticizes those ideas and generates alternative, more carefully thought out designs for thinking and talking. Semiotics (the theory of communication through signs and symbols) is not just an elaboration of commonplace ideas about the use of words to communicate. From the 17th-century philosopher John Locke's critique of the abuses of language (reading 10) to the most recent deconstruction of popular ideas about communication with extraterrestrial aliens (reading 14), theorists in this tradition have challenged the conventional wisdom about communication in enlightening and sometimes disturbing ways.

The theorizing process is creative as well as critical. Locke's remedies for the abuse of

language still continue to echo several centuries later in teachings and popular advice about effective communication. Plato's devastating critique of the unprincipled nature of rhetoric (reading 6) was soon followed by Aristotle's effort to put the art of rhetoric on a sounder theoretical foundation (reading 7), which in turn has been both extended and challenged by later theorists (for examples, see readings 8 and 9). Phenomenological writings about genuine dialogue (unit V) have both questioned the possibility of authentic human contact and articulated the conditions for achieving it. Research in social psychology (unit VII) has corrected naive assumptions about the psychological processes involved in communication while also providing a wealth of experimentally tested hypotheses. Sociocultural theorists (unit VIII) have shown how communication makes human society possible while critical theorists (unit IX) have both unmasked the ideologies and power structures that distort communication and envisioned the possibility of more genuinely democratic forms of social life.

As we become more deeply involved in these theoretical and everyday discourses on communication, we gain a fuller understanding of communication scholarship and become more aware of our own perspectives on communication, more discerning in our observations of communication in the society around us, more articulate critics of communication theory, and more thoughtful participants in the communication process. This is the practicality of the project of theorizing communication.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE LOGIC OF PRACTICAL THEORY

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Thinking practically, when is it that we become aware of our communication? It could be argued that most of the time we do not think about our communication. We simply communicate, whether by talking with people, watching TV, or browsing the Web. However, we often think about our communication when something goes wrong, when a problem of communication becomes

apparent. Why did members of the group show up in two different meeting places? What did I say that made my friend angry with me? How do I know if this news on TV is just "spin"? Can I trust this information I found on the Web? We also think about our communication when we find ourselves faced with particularly problematic situations and need to decide what to do. How do I tell my boss about what went wrong in the meeting today without affecting my chances of promotion? As a journalist, how can I remain objective while reporting a nasty and misleading political campaign? That we think about communication at these points is in keeping with the logic of practice. As Craig and Tracy (1995) pointed out, "When ongoing action is blocked, we think: and in thinking we reinterpret the problematic situation so as to continue action" (p. 252). Such is the nature of communication practice.

A practical approach says that there is no way to devise or apply a theory that would provide the right answer that would eliminate these problems. Rather, communication is inherently problematic. What worked this time in communicating with this boss may not be what works next time with another or even the same boss. "The underlying philosophy is not realism (theory describes the world) or idealism (theory constitutes the world) but rather a reflective pragmatism (theory informs praxis)" (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 252). The way we think and talk about communication affects how we communicate, and the way we communicate affects how we think about communication; as noted above, we tend to think about communication when we encounter communication problems.

Communication theory and theorizing, as well as the communication discipline as a whole, can be undertaken from such a practical perspective (Craig, 1989). In a practical theory, theory is informative to communication practitioners. Additionally, the actual practices of communication (the way people in fact do communicate) and the communities of practice (those who engage in a specific way of communicating) inform communication theory. Finally, the process of communication theorizing is a

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practical response to experienced communication problems. Rather than seeking to develop a theory that enables communicators to eradicate communication problems, practical theorizing allows us to engage in discourses through which we can examine and name problems and can provide us with new ways of thinking and talking about communication as well as tools to strategically manage problems in our communication.

This is not, of course, the only possible approach to communication theory. One interesting contrast to a practical approach is an empirical social scientific approach. In an empirical approach, the goal of theory is to explain communication phenomena. Theory construction is done within the parameters of scientific methods. Theories are constructed to be testable and to provide illumination into the underlying workings of communication in a way that allows for prediction of communicative actions. In this book there are examples of theories constructed within this empirical paradigm. Some of these include readings by Berger and Calabrese and Bandura (unit VII) and Lang (unit VI).

Another interesting contrast is philosophically based normative theories. In this kind of theorizing, abstract principles are constructed to provide ideal models for how things could or should occur. This theorizing is done in adherence to rational principles, and the results of this theorizing provide a basis for evaluating communication as it actually occurs. Again, in this book there are examples of theories constructed from a normative philosophical approach. Some of these include readings by Plato (unit III), Buber and Gadamer (unit V), and Habermas (unit IX).

When taking a practical perspective, there are at least two ways in which practical theory can be developed. One is inductively: empirically studying and analyzing communication problems and the ways people think about and address them. Craig and Tracy (1995) provide an example of this kind of theorizing in which ethnographically informed discourse analysis was used to reconstruct the dilemmas, ideals, and techniques used by participants in academic discussions. Through participation in discussions, analysis of taped interaction, and interviews, the researchers were

able to identify (1) the problems participants faced as well as (2) the principles they used to guide their decision making about how to deal with these problems, and finally (3) the communication techniques they used to manage these problems in their actual interaction. Critical reflection on these findings allowed the researchers to construct a practical theory of intellectual discussion that was grounded in the actual practices of such discussions. Other examples of this kind of theoretical work can be seen in Ashcraft's (2001) examination of a women's safe-house and in Muller's (2002) exploration of collegiate classroom discussion.

The other way of constructing practical theory is deductively: conceptualizing already existing theories—including scientific and philosophical theories—in terms of their practical applications and applying them to particular communication problems. This second approach is the one for which this book is particularly useful. It allows multiple theories to be applied, increasing the richness and flexibility of our thinking as we consider a practical problem from various points of view.

This approach is what Tracy and Muller (2001) used with school board meetings that participants experienced as difficult. The study called into question the naming of the problem by many local participants and media outlets as due to the nasty personalities of the board members and sought to address the nature of problem formulation. By looking through multiple theoretical lenses, different aspects of the interaction were found to be problematic, leading to different diagnoses of the school board's interactional trouble. Was the problem due to the structure and organization of the meetings, the "thin skin" of participants, or their lack of skill in making arguments? As is seen in this study, different theoretical lenses can lead to different diagnoses, which can each lead to a different potential solution of the problem. Additionally, these diagnoses can be used to reflexively critique the practicality of the established theories.

This second approach to constructing practical theory begins to answer the question, Why are theories included in this volume that were

not constructed from a practical perspective? These theories can be applied practically, and through following the logic of practice, they can be applied to particular problems and critiqued with regard to their usefulness. Craig (reading 5) argues that all communication theories have practical implications. Every theory implies a practical orientation to communication that can be useful for addressing some range of problems and undoubtedly is biased toward some interests and segments of society over others. Issues of gender, for example, are highlighted by some theories while being ignored by most other theories. Some theories conceptualize problems from a more social or cultural point of view; others from a more individualistic point of view. The diversity of theories allows us to consider the advantages and disadvantages of approaching problems in different ways. Debate in the field should focus on the practical interests served by theories and the biases, gaps, and areas of agreement and disagreement among those different practical approaches. This form of dialogue among diverse theories is what Craig calls “dialogical-dialectical coherence” (reading 5). Within the project of theorizing, the logic of practical theory highlights that the more familiar we become with communication theorizing, the more aware we will become of a wider range of communication problems, the more facile we will become with ways to think and talk about these problems, and the more options we will perceive for managing problematic situations. The more thoroughly we understand established ways of thinking and talking about communication (communication theories), the more lenses we will have available through which to identify and diagnose communication problems.

#### THEORIZING TRADITIONS: THE USEFULNESS OF HISTORY

A third aspect of the project of theorizing is that of understanding and using *traditions* of theory. To make sense of the differences among theories,

it helps to understand that every theory follows certain traditions and not others. A tradition is something handed down from the past, but no living tradition is static. Traditions are constantly changing. Outside of some tradition, in fact, change and innovation would have little meaning. Even just applying traditional ideas to a new situation typically requires some creativity and involves changing the ideas in some way. Theorists invent new ideas to solve problems they perceive in existing ideas in a particular tradition. Gadamer (see reading 17), one of the greatest philosophers of tradition, pointed out that every new work in a tradition stands as an answer to some question it poses about the tradition, and that every work will, in turn, be questioned by later works that continue the tradition (Gadamer, 1984, pp. 333–341). Later works in a tradition build upon earlier works, which is why in this book we have organized the readings in each tradition chronologically.

It would be impossible to live a meaningful human life outside of all traditions. Traditions have shaped our identities and thereby have a certain unavoidable authority over us. As Gadamer explained, “The validity of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over, but by no means created by a free insight or justified by themselves. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity” (1984, p. 249). Gadamer also used the example of legal interpretation. When the courts interpret a law they consider legal precedent and case law—a tradition of legal interpretation—along with the wording of the statutes themselves. The meaning of a law changes over time as new cases bring up new issues and circumstances change, revealing biases and gaps in older interpretations of the law. Judges of course frequently disagree about the meaning of the law, and this state of disagreement is also characteristic of traditions. Traditions are not homogeneous. Every tradition is characterized by a history of argument about beliefs and values that are important to the tradition. “Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict,” wrote MacIntyre (1981, p. 206), another important theorist of tradition and social practices. “A living

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tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 207). Critical theorists (see unit IX) rightly question the authority of traditions, but as Gadamer would point out, in doing so they are following the traditions of critical theory.

Placing theories within traditions thus highlights the innovativeness of theories by showing how each one carries forward certain ideas and assumptions from a particular history of arguments while also departing from that tradition to contribute something new and different. Even a theory that rebels against its tradition and rejects major parts of it can still belong to the tradition in significant ways. The feminist rhetorical theory of Foss and Griffin (reading 9) is a good example. While rejecting the idea that persuasion is the purpose of rhetoric—an idea deeply embedded in the tradition of rhetorical theory—Foss and Griffin continue to assume that the basic format of communication is that of a speaker and of an audience. As a feminist critical theorist, Jansen (reading 35) shares parts of the feminist tradition with Foss and Griffin, yet she writes about communication from a very different point of view, reflecting essential differences between the tradition of critical communication theory in which she primarily writes and the rhetorical tradition of Foss and Griffin.

The field of communication theory, considered as a tradition in its own right, is both quite new and very old. The term *communication theory* was not widely used until the 1940s, when it primarily referred to certain fields of electrical engineering that included information theory and cybernetics (and it still has that meaning for engineers). Social science courses in communication theory, which began to be taught around 1950, brought together an eclectic set of ideas from existing traditions such as semiotics, social psychology, and cybernetics. The field of communication theory, in a very real sense, grew backward in time as it grew forward in time. Over time, several traditions of thought, such as rhetoric, which existed long before there was ever a field called

communication theory, were incorporated into the field. Retrospectively, they came to be seen as traditions of communication theory, which is how the field came to include the multiple traditions that it now does. The problem we now face in the project of theorizing is how to use these multiple traditions most productively for the betterment of human communication.

Each of the seven traditions has different things to say about society as well as about the nature of communication. The rhetorical tradition is the oldest of the seven traditions, in this volume traced back to Plato and Aristotle, and within it communication is conceptualized as the art of discourse. The semiotic tradition conceptualizes communication as intersubjectivity mediated by signs and also has a lengthy history beginning here with Locke’s notion of the imperfection of words. The other five traditions have more modern origins of theorization, as will be discussed in the introductions to each unit; they arise as scholars theorize around problems in their socio-historical contexts. Husserl laid the initial theorizing foundation for the phenomenological tradition in which communication is conceptualized as the experience of the other. Hermeneutics and dialogue are key ideas within this tradition. Cybernetics, traced back to Wiener and including a variety of intersecting approaches and ideas, conceptualizes communication as information processing. The sociopsychological approach conceptualizes communication as social interaction. Chosen as a first reading here is a piece by Hovland in which he sets out a framework for the empirical study of communication by social scientists. The sociocultural tradition conceptualizes communication as a symbolic process that produces and reproduces shared sociocultural patterns. Mead was one of the first scholars to theorize how communication forms, reflects, and maintains the structure of society. The critical tradition conceptualizes communication as discursive reflection overcoming the distortion of truth by power. Within this volume, this tradition is traced back to Marx and Engels.

When looking at each of these traditions within a historical progression of theorizing, interesting

differences are seen in the development of thought. Differences in trajectory, pace, variation in voices, and coherence speak to the idea that these traditions are alive, that in the ongoing project of theorizing there have been different paths, and that these pathways have distinct shapes and routes that differently map out the changing ideas about the nature of communication.

Although each tradition provides communication theorists with a particular discourse within which to think, talk, and write about communication phenomena, it is important to note that these traditions are not like distinct canal channels levied off from each other. Rather, they are more like free-flowing rivers on relatively level bottomlands where the main course is usually distinguishable, but the braided channels often intersect and it takes relatively little environmental change to bring about a mixture of the waters and even reconfiguration of the channels. This intermingling of ideas is ever present and is especially palpable in some of the contemporary readings in which, as one reads, it becomes clear that, although the piece adds something to its primary tradition, it also seems to connect to ideas from one or more other traditions as well. For instance, the reading by Poster in unit VIII has been included in the sociocultural unit, but as a post-structuralist piece might it not also have a home in the semiotic or critical tradition? Some of the interwoven nature of readings will be addressed in the introductory sections to several units and in some of the suggested projects for additional theorizing.

A straightforward benefit of the traditions approach is that by being able to follow the development of a line of thinking, one can more deeply understand that perspective by placing it within its sociohistorical and intellectual context. Additionally, through reading conceptualizations from different eras, one can get a glimpse into the aspects of interaction that were experienced as problematic at that time. There are also nonhistorical benefits of a traditions approach. One is that each tradition provides a different lens through which to examine a communication practice. In essence, the traditions

approach allows one to take a multi-perspective exploration into understanding a communication practice.

## QUESTIONING AND RETHINKING THE TRADITIONS

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How well do the seven traditions work as a framework for organizing the various conceptions of communication theory? Why did we select these particular readings? What has been left out? Are there some readings that *must* be included if one is to understand a specific tradition? Are there just seven main traditions, or there are others? Should there be a separate feminist tradition? Should Asian or other non-Western writings on communication be included as one or more separate traditions? If the goal of communication theorizing is to lead to better communication practices, is it likely that what are considered to be good communication practices today will be considered good communication in a decade or a century? Similarly, does the nature of what are experienced as communication problems change across time? Does communication itself change over time? These are all great questions that may come into varying degrees of focus as one reads this book and that hopefully will enliven the ongoing communication theory conversation. Within this volume, questions such as these that seem especially relevant to a particular tradition are posed at the end of the introduction to that unit. Questions for further exploration are also raised in the suggested projects at the end of each unit. The conclusion of the volume returns to address some areas of concern and inquiry surrounding the idea of traditions.

While it is important to understand and use the traditions of communication theory in the project of theorizing, it is equally important to understand that the seven traditions presented in this book have been constructed through acts of interpretation and are not cast in stone. Some theorists may interpret the traditions differently than we do. Some may prefer to cut the theoretical pie differently, producing fewer, or more, or

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just a different set of traditions. These differences should be acknowledged and discussed as they emerge, but this is not a reason to reject the idea of theoretical traditions.

As we have noted, all theories respond to problems and reflect biases specific to particular cultures, social groups, and times in history. Our own scheme of communication theory as a field is no exception. Although it is not possible to escape our own sociohistorical context or to eliminate all biases, an awareness of history at least sensitizes us to the possibility of discovering and revising our biases through dialogue with others and in response to changing circumstances. This is an advantage of taking a historical approach to theory. Traditions are characterized by change as well as continuity. Full engagement in the project of theorizing requires reflexive questioning and a willingness to revise our understanding of the field.

The communication theory course still is not yet highly standardized. It varies quite a bit between speech and media-oriented communication programs, between programs with an empirical social science orientation versus those more oriented to interpretive social science or humanities approaches, and between institutions where communication is now established as an academic discipline versus universities around the world where its institutional identity is more variable or unclear. This is one of the problems to which our approach to the field is a practical response. The widespread interest in Craig's (1999) integrative model seems to reflect an impulse toward standardization, but the continuing diversity of the field guarantees that not everyone will find the model equally suitable. It may not appeal to those who follow a strictly empirical social science approach, or to those who view communication theory primarily as media theory or critical cultural studies, or from within a particular tradition such as semiotics, rhetoric, or social psychology. Because it tries to construct a center to the field that connects all of those different approaches, it necessarily seems biased and unbalanced from a standpoint within any one of them. However, for those wanting a catholic approach to the field, it provides a way

to organize their own understandings and may allow thinkers who work primarily in different traditions a way to communicate with each other.

#### SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

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One way to become a reflective, engaged, and active participant in the conversation about communication theory is to approach this volume as a part of an ongoing project of theorizing one's own sociohistorical context. One key to doing so is to understand the close connection between theoretical ways of thinking and talking about communication and our everyday ways of thinking and talking. It is also important to understand the logic of practical theory and what it means to reflexively link theory and practical problems of communication. Finally, it is important to understand the traditions of communication theory and their potential usefulness as an integrative framework without reifying them. Rather, one must engage the traditions of communication theory as a critical inquirer seeking to further one's theoretical scholarship and improve one's ability to observe, analyze, and participate as an informed communicator. To facilitate engagement in the project of theorizing, this volume has been structured in the following way.

Unit I traces the history of the idea of communication, emphasizing the concept's historicity and cultural embeddedness. It contextualizes the volume by addressing the historical origins of the very idea of communication. These selections show that what is understood as communication is not static. Rather, the idea of communication is interwoven with the sociohistorical context of the time; as the context changes, so does the idea of communication. These four readings highlight four different conceptions of communication in their specific sociohistorical contexts. This historical perspective embraces a fluidity that is consistent with the identifiably different and yet permeable seven traditions; it is also consistent with the idea that what is gained through each tradition is a

particular discourse for understanding communication phenomena and a particular set of conceptual tools for tackling communication problems.

Unit II introduces the metatheoretical perspective of the book and invites debate on its assumptions. The section contains Craig's (1999) piece in which the idea of communication theory as a field including the seven traditions was introduced.

Units III through IX focus on the seven traditions. The core of each of the seven units on specific traditions of communication theory is a set of four or five readings. The readings are full or excerpted original texts, each holding a place of importance in its respective tradition. The progression of readings in each unit is similar. The first one or two are early texts representing "classic" statements of the tradition's distinctive way of conceptualizing communication. The next one or two readings present some specific concepts or approaches that are linchpins in defining the tradition and are integral to theorizing within it. The last one or two readings represent current statements of the tradition, in some cases radical new departures from the tradition or hybrids incorporating ideas from other traditions.

Also, each unit begins with a unit introduction and ends with a section on projects for theorizing. Although the introductions to units I and II are somewhat different in that they are not centered on one of the seven traditions, they are the same in spirit as those for units III through IX. In each introduction the background, central assumptions, and range of perspectives of the relevant field of theory are discussed. These introductions contextualize the readings and, especially for some of the longer or more difficult readings, provide access by highlighting some of the key ideas in each reading. The questions included in the introductions to each unit certainly might be used for class discussion, class projects, or papers. The projects for additional theorizing at the end of each unit contain three segments. The first is a set of additional readings broken down by the subsection of the tradition, which should enable further exploration into existing theory within the tradition. The second component is an application

exercise designed as a way to experientially explore key ideas, ways of thinking, and/or ways of talking within the tradition. These are intended as introductory exercises that could be used by a class or an individual to initially engage in practicing communication in a particular traditional fashion. The final segment of each of these sections consists of projects. These are provided as ideas for theoretically informed research projects that, if actualized, would extend, mix with other traditions, or critique a tradition. We intend these projects to be more advanced than the questions in the introductions or the application exercises, and yet they are constructed often through laying out a series of questions that could again be fodder for discussion, projects, or papers at various levels. There are five of these projects in each unit. These projects are often linked directly to readings in the unit and also include ideas for related additional reading.

While the progression of readings is similar across the units on the seven traditions, they were not designed to mimic or mirror each other. Rather, they were designed to illustrate the progression of thought in each tradition—to highlight developing strands of thought while allowing some insight into the diversity of each tradition. Scholars who are experts in a particular tradition can readily point out other readings that could or even must be included in order to fully understand the historical heritage and/or current thinking of that tradition. We hope, however, each reading we have selected provides a piece—a particular conceptualization that is linked and yet different from those in the other included pieces—of the conceptual puzzle that makes up a tradition. In keeping with the idea of conversation, each piece should allow some insight into a tradition but should also raise some questions about the tradition; in fact, while the readings are intended to provide grounding in key concepts necessary to the exploration of particular traditions, they have also been chosen to stimulate discussion about the very idea of theoretical traditions. The readings in each unit are not meant to be exhaustive, nor are they meant to be uniquely definitive. They are meant to introduce readers to significant lines of thought that

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contribute to the scholarship of communication theory. The discussions that emerge from this encounter with the traditions of communication theory will participate in the construction of the idea of communication in our contemporary sociohistorical context. And as readers propose alternative texts that could or should have been included in each unit, the discourse of each tradition will be continued.

In our Concluding Reflections, we step back and reflect on the state of the field of communication theory and address some problems that seem to hold the potential for fruitful theorizing, especially at the metatheoretical level. We also reexamine the seven traditions framework and highlight some critiques of this framework. The essay ends with thoughts about the future of the field of communication theory.

This book provides a foundation for ongoing work in the field of communication theory. As readers work to understand, discuss, apply, and critique these texts, their engagement in the practical discipline of communication, the project of theorizing communication, and the cultivation of communication practices in society will continue.

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