

# I

## Evolving Trends in Interpersonal Communication Research

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Two books edited by G. R. Miller, and published by SAGE, revolutionized interpersonal communication research (Miller 1976a; Roloff & Miller, 1987). These volumes set the tone for interpersonal communication research as we know it today. Every researcher who we know bought the books and assigned them in graduate courses. Our copies are literally falling apart from use. There were 11 years between the two Miller volumes, and now 21 years have passed. This is a time that vital, collaborative, and interdisciplinary research with its roots in interpersonal communication is being conducted, and we want to showcase that research in this new volume.

The prior volumes were loosely structured around the themes of explorations in interpersonal communication and interpersonal processes, and here we highlight new directions in interpersonal communication. Miller invited scholars who he thought were doing interesting and important work to explain their research programs—their basic commitments, central concepts, key findings—in a way that engaged readers. We have tried to do the same with this volume by asking the authors to tell the personal stories of their research programs that have roots in interpersonal communication and to provide future directions that this research should take.

Our goals for this book crystallized as we talked over the years about the breadth and reach of the study of interpersonal communication. Some of these conversations centered on our mutual roles as chair of the International Communication Association's (ICA) Interpersonal Communication Division and the apparent meshing of interpersonal communication research into many other divisions. Others became clear as we met with colleagues like Denise Solomon, John Caughlin, and Walid Afifi before we began the book. In the sections that follow, we explain our vision for the book, discuss evolving trends in interpersonal communication research, and provide an overview of the sections and chapters of the book that follow.

## Vision for the Book

This book is motivated by three interrelated goals. First, we want to showcase interpersonal communication as an area of study where exciting, vital work continues to be done. As Michael Roloff notes in his commentary on this book (Foreword), the 1976 volume played a key role in establishing interpersonal communication as an area of study. Miller's (1976b) foreword to that first volume noted that it was published at a time when scholars were struggling with questions such as "How is the interpersonal communication process to be conceptualized and researched?" and "What aspects of the interpersonal communication process merit research scrutiny?" Thirty years later, these remain important questions; however, well-developed positions now exist regarding how interpersonal communication can be conceptualized as a developmental process involving qualitative shifts in inference making, as a symbolic process involving the presentation of selves, or as an interactional process involving mutual influence, and each position has motivated large bodies of research (see Berger, 2005; Cappella, 1987; Roloff & Anastasiou, 2000). Put simply, in 1976, interpersonal communication was a new and exciting area of study, whereas today, some may not view it as cutting edge. Due to various trends (some identified by Roloff in his commentary to this volume, others which we discuss below), some may even question whether interpersonal communication is still central to our discipline or worthy of research scrutiny.

To dispel such notions, we have invited authors doing exciting work in interpersonal communication to tell the stories of their programs of research, some of which are their life's work, and in which they have a strong personal investment. Like the Miller volumes, we invited not only senior scholars but also individuals earlier in their scholarly career. What all the contributors

have in common are research programs that showcase how interpersonal scholarship can simultaneously address fundamentally important questions about communication itself (Burlleson, 1992) and pragmatic concerns about families, health, work, technology, culture, and other issues salient in our contemporary society.

Second, we have strived to create a volume that will be useful for a broad audience. Based on this goal, we have asked authors to avoid the somewhat encyclopedic style typically found in three editions of the *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication Research* (Knapp & Daly, 2002; Knapp & Miller, 1985, 1994)—these handbooks are extremely important resources for anyone interested in interpersonal communication, but they often seem dense when first encountered by students and sometimes sacrifice the depth valued by seasoned scholars to adequately cover broad areas of study. To achieve accessibility and depth, we have encouraged authors to tell the stories of their own research programs. Specifically, we asked each contributor to address the following questions:

- What projects with roots in interpersonal communication are you working on right now? What is the purpose of these projects, and what key concepts are being explored? What was it that led you to these projects? How do they build on and/or fill gaps in prior research on interpersonal communication?
- What methods have you employed in these projects? What have you found so far?
- Why are these projects relevant? What central questions/issues about interpersonal communication do they highlight/explore? How do they extend/challenge current theories of interpersonal communication? How do these projects address issues that actually matter to and impact individuals, communities, and the larger society?
- What are you doing right now to move these projects forward? What conceptual, methodological, pragmatic (e.g., resource), and/or ethical challenges are you facing in making progress? How are you addressing these challenges?
- What future directions should be taken in this line of research?

Our third goal is to highlight the permeability of boundaries between interpersonal communication and other areas of communication. The Miller volumes crossed boundaries by inviting contributors from several disciplines, including interpersonal communication, social and clinical psychology, and

sociology. Several things have changed since the publication of the two earlier volumes. Large bodies of theory and research have accumulated on topics such as uncertainty management, message production, and interpersonal adaptation (see Berger, 2005; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008). At the same time, there has been a proliferation of divisions and identifications within the communication discipline (see below). Given these trends, we felt that it is important to cross boundaries within our own discipline. Hence, all the contributors to this volume reside within communication departments, but several might be characterized as divisional “boundary spanners.” Some of our contributors are clearly identifiable as interpersonal communication scholars but apply theory and research to topics of interest in other areas; others are scholars whose primary identification may lie in another area but whose theory and research is informed by and/or informs work viewed as central by interpersonal communication scholars.

Given these goals, we envision the primary audience for this book to be faculty and graduate students who consider interpersonal communication one of their areas of interest. We hope the book will be one that any faculty member who teaches graduate and/or upper-level undergraduate courses in interpersonal communication feels compelled to own, as was the case with the Miller and Roloff books. We hope that it is adopted widely as a text in graduate-level courses on interpersonal communication and perhaps also in senior-level undergraduate courses. Graduate students working on their theses or dissertations in interpersonal communication also should be attracted to this compilation of cutting-edge research. Secondary audiences for the book are faculty and graduate students in related areas such as family, health, intercultural, mass, and organizational communication who find interest in the “boundary spanner” chapters that apply theory and research with roots in interpersonal communication to these related contexts. We also hope that this work reaches scholars in related disciplines, such as those in social psychology, child and family studies, and sociology who belong to interdisciplinary groups such as the International Association of Relationship Researchers as well as the International Association of Language and Social Psychology.

## **Evolving Trends**

Our goals for this volume have been influenced by evolving trends that we see as present in interpersonal communication research today. We show how a proliferation of identifications, globalization, the focus on the dark side of interpersonal communication, dominant and alternative metatheoretical

voices, the increase in funded and applied scholarship, and technology affect interpersonal communication research today and differ from what was occurring in the 1970s and 1980s.

### *Proliferation of Identifications*

The chapters that follow show that interpersonal communication is a phenomenon that can be examined through an evolutionary perspective lens, through dialectic theory, as it is situated on a cultural level, as it occurs in organizations, on television, and online. The definition of interpersonal communication changed fundamentally in 1975 when Miller and Steinberg wrote *Between People* and claimed that there were varied positions on what constitutes interpersonal communication. No matter the level, Miller (1976b) claimed that the focus on interpersonal communication research is dyadic, and there is a symbiotic relationship between interpersonal communication and relational development. These emphases continue today; for example, chapters by Caughlin and Scott (Chapter 9) as well as Fitch (Chapter 12) analyze examples of dyadic interaction, while those by Baxter and Braithwaite (Chapter 3) as well as by Solomon, Steuber, and Weber (Chapter 6) explore how relationships are defined and transformed via communication. Due to the fact that interpersonal communication is a basic process, it is applicable in widespread contexts.

Perhaps this widespread applicability, more than any other reason, has contributed to one of the most fundamental changes in interpersonal communication scholarship over the past 20 years. For example, ICA initially was founded with just 8 divisions, whereas today it includes 19 divisions as well as several interest groups. Not only are there myriad new divisions, but also scholars who would have made Interpersonal Communication their primary, if not only, home when the Miller volumes were published have partially, if not fully, migrated to other divisions. A 2004 network analysis of ICA division membership shows very strong links between membership in the Interpersonal Communication Division and the Health Communication, Language and Social Interaction, Organizational Communication, and Intercultural Communication divisions, with moderate links to Information Systems, Mass Communication, Developmental Communication, and Communication and Instructional Technology. This indicates that most interpersonal communication scholars now have multiple identifications because their work cuts across multiple divisions (for one discussion of the implications for this proliferation of divisions, see Bochner, 2008).

As previously noted, the 1976 and 1987 Miller books featured authors from several disciplines. Those from Communication made their home in the Information Systems and Interpersonal Communication Divisions of ICA

primarily. Pearce, Cushman, Craig, Cappella, Millar, Rogers, Duck, Berger, Parks, Miller, Roloff, Harrison, and Burgoon were authors in the 1976 book, and Boster, Seibold, Sillars, Kellermann, Poole, Folger, and Hewes joined many of them again in the 1987 book. Of those authors who are still active today, many of them have become associated with other divisions such as Organizational, Group, Health, and Technology, while others have retained their primary association with Interpersonal Communication. In response to this first trend, we emphasize the boundary-spanning metaphor to highlight how theory and research with its roots in interpersonal communication is informing current work in many areas of study.

### *Globalization*

The world is smaller and more interconnected than it was in 1976 or even 1987, and the resulting trends are reflected in interpersonal communication programs and research. When Steve began his PhD studies at Purdue University in 1984, there were no international students in the graduate program. International students were represented in fields such as Engineering or Agriculture at Purdue at that time, but not in Communication. Today, nearly one third of the Communication graduate students at Purdue are international students, and at last count, they originated from at least 11 different countries (Bangladesh, Canada, Chile, Germany, India, Lebanon, Romania, People's Republic of China, Singapore, South Korea, and Turkey). Communication graduate students at Purdue now have the opportunity to study abroad in northern Italy and to participate in exchanges of faculties and graduate students with universities in Belgium, China, and Dubai, among other places. This type of international diversity and connection is occurring in many graduate programs in the field. Although international students have been part of the Michigan State University (MSU) graduate program for a longer period of time (e.g., Everett Roger's research, funded by USAID, on how international students could become change agents in their own cultures), the diversity of students with interests in interpersonal communication also has increased at MSU over time.

Globalization has not just broadened the nationality of scholars studying interpersonal communication; rather, it has made scholars more reflexive about cultural assumptions underlying theory and research. In the initial volume, Miller (1976b) argued that interactions shift from being non-interpersonal to interpersonal as participants move from relying primarily on shared knowledge about culture and social roles to knowledge of each other as individuals (i.e., persons possessing unique psychological attributes and desires). Despite or perhaps because of this definition, contributors to the first volume paid virtually

no attention to culture; indeed, a chapter by Harrison (1976), which reviewed Ekman and Friesen's classic work on cross-cultural similarities in facial displays of affect, is one of the few places where culture is mentioned at all. That Miller's developmental perspective, which equates interpersonal communication with interactions where we really know the other party as an individual, itself reflects a particular cultural view of the self (Kim, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) became apparent to us (and perhaps to many others) only over time. Culture is also rarely mentioned in the 1987 volume, with the exception of a chapter by Sillars and Weisburg that devoted considerable space to assessing how alternative cultural values regarding expressivity, privacy, and individuality might lead to differing perceptions of the competence of conflict-management strategies across ethnic groups and social classes.

In the past two decades, interpersonal communication scholars, including several contributors to this volume, have conducted research comparing participants from different countries (e.g., Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Fitch, 1998; Lapinski & Levine, 2000) as well as participants from the United States who are diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, disability status, and social class (e.g., Afifi et al., 2006; Braithwaite & Eckstein, 2003; Wilson, Morgan, Hayes, Bylund, & Herman, 2004). More important, scholars have become increasingly aware that their theories may reflect particular cultural views or values. Two books illustrate this trend. In *Non-Western Perspectives on Human Communication*, Kim (2002) contrasts independent versus interdependent views of the self to highlight the implicit U.S.-centrism that underlies research on a wide range of topics explored by interpersonal scholars, including communication apprehension, conflict management styles, attitude-behavior consistency, deception, self-disclosure, and silence. In her book *Speaking Relationally: Culture, Communication, and Interpersonal Connection*, Fitch (1998) presents a detailed ethnographic analysis of communication and personal relationships in an urban Columbian speech community, and then shows how the interpersonal ideology of connection in this speech community leads to different interpretations and assumptions than those commonly made by interpersonal scholars. Reflecting this trend, many authors in our volume discuss culture as part of their ongoing research programs or plans for future research.

### *The Dark Side*

Prompted by the publication of three edited collections (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1994, 1998, 2007) published in between the Miller volumes and this book, the "dark side" has become an influential metaphor guiding interpersonal communication research. These volumes have drawn attention

away from seemingly positive topics such as authenticity, intimacy, and openness that pervaded the early interpersonal communication landscape (Parks, 1982) to also examine dysfunctional and ethically questionable practices such as bullying, deception, hurtful messages, infidelity, stalking, and physical/sexual/verbal aggression—topics that have garnered a great deal of research attention in the past two decades, including by several contributors to this volume. These dark topics also reflect how personal relationships often are represented in contemporary television programming (see Smith & Granados, Chapter 14, this volume).

Yet as Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) note, the dark side metaphor is more than a call to investigate the dysfunctional and ethically objectionable. Instead, it offers a lens for asking more complicated questions that draw attention to

the ambivalent, multivalent, and multifunctional nature of our needs, goals . . . and courses of action. The dark side seeks acceptance that all social processes unfold in ways that produce both gains and losses, and gains that appear to be losses and losses that appear to be gains. (p. 8)

Thus, seemingly “bright” practices (e.g., assertiveness, self-disclosure, social support) can have negative consequences, whereas seemingly “dark” practices (e.g., avoidance, deception, messages eliciting guilt or shame) can have functional consequences for individuals, relationships, and/or social groups (Kim, 2002; Parks, 1982; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). This type of thinking can be found in some chapters from the Miller volumes, such as Morton, Alexander, and Altman’s (1976) argument that openness and privacy form a dialectic process that participants regulate as part of the process of achieving a shared relational definition. Dialectical perspectives have had a major impact on interpersonal communication research over the past two decades (see Baxter & Braithwaite, Chapter 3, this volume). Several other contributors also appear to have been influenced by dark-side thinking, such as Burleson’s exploration of the conditions under which highly person-centered comforting messages may not be evaluated as much more sensitive or sophisticated than less person-centered messages or Caughlin and Scott’s exploration of different forms of demand-withdraw patterns, some of which may not be detrimental to marital or parent/adolescent relationships.

### *Dominant and Alternative Metatheoretical Voices*

Interpersonal communication as an area of study has, from its early days, been influenced by those who advocated taking a social science perspective. Miller himself was a strong proponent of scientific approaches to the study



of communication, arguing that such approaches offered feasible, efficacious, and democratic means of acquiring knowledge about communication (Miller, 1981; Miller & Berger, 1978).

Social science perspectives on interpersonal communication scholarship have been described as “empirical” or “post-positivist.” Whatever the label, we suspect that many interpersonal scholars would concur with the epistemological and ontological assumptions of what Pavitt (1999, 2000, 2003) terms *scientific realism*:

- Interpersonal communication scholars have never adhered to extreme views associated with the labels “empiricism” or “positivism” such as claims that the only thing about which we can have knowledge is brute sense experience or that unobservable intervening variables should not be part of our theories.
- Observation is theory laden, but this does not necessitate complete “perspectivism” or the position that there is no basis for judging the probability of a knowledge claim independent of one’s personal beliefs.
- People are volitional beings, and yet some degree of predictability can be achieved with regard to human action; people make choices, albeit from sets of options and circumstances not entirely of their own making.
- There is no single form that scientific theories or explanations must take; different questions (e.g., “How did X come about?” vs. “What purpose is served by X?”) require different answers (i.e., causal vs. functional).
- Interpersonal communication research is influenced by the social and historical contexts in which it is conducted. Scholars need to be reflexive regarding how the questions they ask or the explanations they offer are shaped by cultural values.
- Social science theories of interpersonal communication can be of practical value when they offer general accounts of how desired outcomes can be achieved and hence provide actors with some sense of “control” (i.e., understanding about factors that will influence the probability of them achieving those outcomes, without which they likely will experience feelings of confusion or hopelessness).

Other elements of Pavitt’s view (e.g., whether scientific explanations must be “reductive” in the sense he argues) are more controversial, but the preceding points describe the assumptive base for a good deal of interpersonal communication theory and research.

Apart from this dominant perspective, interpersonal communication from its early roots also has included alternative voices who challenged these assumptions. Barnett Pearce presented the Coordinated Management of Meaning in the first chapter of the 1976 volume, a rules-based perspective that rejected the notion that most interpersonal communication was amenable to causal explanation (for a reply, see Miller & Berger, 1978). Bochner (1985, 1994, 2002) has published a “perspectives” chapter in each edition of the *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication Research*, where he initially argued that there is more than one legitimate view about the goals that should underlie interpersonal communication research (also see Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008) and more recently has discussed the value and challenges in doing narrative inquiry on interpersonal communication. Over time, those advocating “social” (e.g., Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995; Shepherd, 1998) and “feminist” (e.g., Wood, 1993) perspectives also have challenged many of the aforementioned assumptions.

Interpersonal communication also has been the subject of ideological critiques, where scholars working within (e.g., Parks, 1982) and outside (e.g., Lannamann, 1991) of the dominant perspective have explored how taken-for-granted assumptions about interpersonal communication reflect cultural and historical forces. Based on this work, Lannamann advocates a critical perspective on interpersonal communication that moves analyses of power away from only interpersonal or dyadic levels to consider societal forces that shape taken-for-granted meanings. In contrast, Parks (1995) draws on the metaphor of an “intellectual commons” to propose guidelines for how scholars working from different perspectives might productively engage each other’s work.

We expect that the study of interpersonal communication will continue to feature dominant and alternative metatheoretical voices, a trend that we personally view as healthy. Although most contributors to this volume adopt what has been the dominant voice in interpersonal communication scholarship, contributors working from dialectical (Baxter & Braithwaite), ethnographic (Fitch), and social constructionist (Myers) views reject at least some of the assumptive base that has guided interpersonal research.

### *Focus on Applied and Funded Scholarship*

The focus in our field on applied scholarship is long standing. In fact, the Applied Communication Division of what is now the National Communication Association (NCA) began in 1976, the year that the first Miller volume was published. The division had a focus on organizational and governmental applications at that time. NCA documents of that year

contained a statement that the organization would assist members in writing grants and that this was seen as a desirable, but peripheral, service to their other missions. In 1991, NCA officially took over the publication of *The Journal of Applied Communication Research*, although it had been published for some years previously. At MSU in 1973–1975 and 1976–1978, G. R. Miller was heading up a grant funded by the National Science Foundation on videotape in the legal environment (VILE). This grant served as the focus of many theses and dissertations, and the book that resulted won the NCA Golden Anniversary Award. The Hawes and Foley work on Group Decisions in the 1976 book was funded by the Department of Education. Clearly, then, applied and funded research has been a priority in the field of interpersonal communication for quite some time, but today the focus is even stronger. NCA has continued this focus by engaging in a mission to promote funded research in our field (Morgan & Brashers, 2008).

There is a current focus in interpersonal communication scholarship on conducting theoretically grounded research with applied value, and much of this scholarship is funded by grants from foundations and governmental agencies. In fact, two books, *Applied Interpersonal Communication Matters: Family, Health, and Community Relations* (Dailey & LePoire, 2006) and *Studies in Applied Interpersonal Communication* (Motley, 2008) summarize several programs of research that do just this. They highlight socially meaningful research with an interpersonal focus on issues such as substance abuse, violence, sexual intimacy, health problems, divorce, safety, and aging. Although applied research is not our sole focus in this volume, the work of the authors of the present volume and interpersonal communication researchers who are authors in the other two volumes presents strong evidence of the breadth of fine scholarship that is occurring in applied interpersonal communication research today.

Several reasons exist for this upturn in applied and funded research in interpersonal communication. First, granting agencies and scholars in other fields are realizing the importance of communication for their endeavors. Second, funded scholarship has great benefits for departments of communication, although there are some drawbacks as well. Finally, scholars of interpersonal communication are dedicated to conducting socially meaningful research that will benefit others.

Granting agencies are finding communication research increasingly attractive (Buller, 2002). Internally, as universities realize that interdisciplinary teams are beneficial for research, communication is becoming a more central focus on these teams (Harrington, 2002; Slater, 2002). As one example, translational research in health, often referred to as bringing findings from the bench to the bedside, involves communication at its core. Health

communication scholars such as Teri Albrecht, Don Cegala, and Rick Street who have long studied doctor-patient communication, and the results from many health campaigns have documented that interpersonal communication is as central to positive outcomes as are mass communication campaigns. A communication team at Michigan State is part of a federally funded Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Center communication core that stands alongside the biology core.

The nature of funded research in communication was the topic of a special issue of *The Journal of Applied Communication Research* in 2002. The authors of the articles in that volume highlighted how funded, applied research has many benefits but some drawbacks as well. It is beneficial to the university at large, particularly if it comes with full indirect costs (Buller, 2002; Harrington, 2002; Slater, 2002). Our field benefits as it receives notice in the social sciences, and more broadly, we are increasingly called on to contribute to policy decisions (Slater, 2002). It is beneficial to colleges and departments because as their reputation within universities and in the field increases, universities are more willing to give seed funds to projects that they believe will later be grant supported; they are more willing to give money for research initiatives, support staff, equipment, and graduate students, and salary savings can be spent on departmental needs (Harrington, 2002). It is beneficial to researchers because they can do socially meaningful work that benefits others, they can think creatively as they apply and further theory that has the potential to solve social problems, their professional reputations are enhanced, and they have the opportunity to fund and mentor graduate students on their research projects (Buller, 2002; Slater, 2002). Some of the drawbacks for departments and researchers as they pursue funded research programs are the time that grant applications and grant management take away from their other duties, the tasks and skills that have to be mastered, the resources that are needed including staff support, and the void in filling departmental teaching slots that is left when faculty and graduate students spend most of their time on funded research.

As noted briefly above, one reason that interpersonal communication scholars have emphasized applied scholarship is their genuine desire to do work that is socially meaningful and that will help others. As one example, Walid Afifi's work with Susan Morgan applied his theory of motivated information management (TMIM) to better understand how family communication affects decisions about organ donation, research that was funded by the Department of Transplantation of the Health Resources and Services Administration (Afifi et al., 2006).

Both of us have worked on applied and funded research within the domain of interpersonal relationships. Sandi worked with Brad Greenberg

to investigate interpersonal communication on TV talk shows in 1985, research that was funded by the Kaiser Family Foundation (Smith et al., 1999). Subsequently, she and Stacy Smith received two grants from the Fetzer Institute to conduct research on the portrayal of altruism on television (Smith, Smith, et al., 2006; Smith, Smith, et al., 2008). Currently, she is working on approaches to reduce extreme drinking on campus using the social norms approach and merging it with persuasion theory research, which is funded by the Social Norms Research Institute and the U.S. Department of Education (Smith, Atkin, Martell, Allen, & Hembroff, 2006). Sandi also works on the aforementioned Center Grant for Breast Cancer and the Environment at MSU that is funded by the National Cancer Institute and National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. She and others, including Chuck Atkin, Kami Silk, Pam Whitten, and Cynthia Stohl, are investigating a variety of communication phenomena related to breast cancer, including memorable messages about breast cancer examining speech acts, emotions evoked, preferred sources, and types of those messages (Smith, Atkin, et al., in press; Smith, Munday, et al., in press).

Steve works as part of a team of academics and service providers evaluating the impact of a new community program designed to enhance children's healthy development and school readiness by providing high-quality early childhood education, parenting education, and home visits (funded by the Lilly Endowment) and also is part of a "Safe Schools/Healthy Students" grant submitted to the Departments of Education and Justice that would evaluate the impact of drug resistance and bullying curricula as they were implemented in middle/high schools in his community.

Several facts seem apparent in this climate of applied and funded scholarship. Graduate students who work on grants and are mentored in the process of acquiring and carrying out grant work in applied areas of interpersonal communication will have an advantage as they begin their academic careers if their institution encourages them to be grant active. Interpersonal communication scholars who can apply their work to help solve real-world problems will advance our field and will likely acquire funding to do so.

### *Technology*

Technology may be the evolving trend that has the most marked difference from when the earlier books were published. Early research on the use of technology in interpersonal relationships claimed that use of "lean" media, such as e-mail, would lead to depersonalization in interpersonal relationships. In the 1980s, there were still scholars arguing that

interpersonal communication could only occur between two individuals who were interacting face-to-face. However, even by that point, Gerald Miller's critique of this situational approach to defining interpersonal communication was well known.

Today, we see that interpersonal relationships can be initiated, escalated, maintained, and dissolved either wholly, or in part, through mediated technology. As the title of Walther's (1996) much-cited article claims, computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be impersonal, interpersonal, or even hyperpersonal. The hyperpersonal approach to communication examines how interactants experience affection and intimacy as they assess one another interpersonally through CMC and shows how this process can lead to higher levels of perceived affection and intimacy than can face-to-face interaction. Each person in the CMC relationship can engage in selective self-presentation, and they can, in turn, idealize one other to an extent not possible in face-to-face communication where impressions cannot be enhanced to the same extent.

CMC is now recognized as one of the most fertile venues for dynamics of self-presentation and discerning the veracity of impressions gleaned online (Smith, Yoo, & Walther, 2008, p. 4557). CMC favors strategic self-presentation because many messages can be carefully formed "backstage" and sent asynchronously. When interactants are going to meet or have met face-to-face, the messages need to strike a balance between what is real and what is desirable.

Social networking sites such as Facebook are becoming an increasingly popular means of relating to one another. In a recent study, Foregger (2008) conducted an analysis of uses and gratifications of Facebook. Eight factors emerged as uses for Facebook. Of them, five factors have direct implication for the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships: *connection*, *sexual attraction*, *utilities and upkeep* (e.g., posting photos and news about the self for others to see), *establish or maintain social ties*, and *social comparison*. Only *channel use* (as a replacement for e-mail), *marketplace* (to buy and sell), and *pass time* uses were less related to the establishment and development of interpersonal communication.

As technology further evolves, the study of the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships via CMC is an area that will thrive. The topics in the Miller and Roloff volume, such as reciprocity, uncertainty, self-concept, emotion, compliance-gaining, conflict, self-disclosure, information exchange, and methods to analyze interpersonal interaction, could all be profitably studied within the CMC domain of interpersonal relationships today. In that same light, the topics of the current volume are basic

interpersonal communication processes and domains that should remain timeless in their use and importance. We now turn to highlight and preview those theories, processes, and domains.

## Overview of Chapters

The text begins with Roloff's commentary and this opening chapter. Part I is on *Metatheoretical Approaches to Interpersonal Communication Research*. The chapters in this section present examples of two broad metatheoretical perspectives that underlie current interpersonal research. In Chapter 2, Ascan Koerner and Kory Floyd review the significance of the evolutionary approach to behavioral sciences, including interpersonal communication. Over the past decade, scholars in several disciplines (social psychology, child/family studies) have developed evolutionary perspectives to understand the dynamics of personal relationships. Although they have not collaborated before, Koerner and Floyd both are conducting cutting-edge programs of research in our own discipline based on evolutionary assumptions. Koerner discusses the importance of social instincts for interpersonal relationships and his research on relational schemata and a universal grammar of relationships. Floyd reviews his research on evolutionary explanations of family communication and affectionate behavior. They finish by offering guidelines for the future role of the evolutionary approach in interpersonal communication research.

In Chapter 3, Leslie Baxter and Dawn Braithwaite present the newest version of their relational dialectics theory (RDT), one of the best-known original metatheories of interpersonal communication. After clarifying the goals of dialectical research (and hence criteria appropriate for evaluating RDT), they summarize the core premise and key concepts of RDT. They employ the term *discursive struggles* rather than *contradictions* to highlight how oppositions inherent in relating arise from the broader culture in which relationships are embedded and not just the participants' psychological needs. They review research that applies RDT to understand how participants make sense of contradictions encountered as couples renew their marital vows, children live in stepfamilies, or older women have their husbands moved to a nursing home due to the onset of dementia. They also call for future research that moves beyond identifying competing discourses to explore how those discourses are embedded in the broader culture and the relationship's history, as well as the anticipated reactions of specific/generalized others and how they interanimate meanings created in the moment. These first two chapters work well in tandem (e.g., one stressing

universal, the other stressing culturally situated elements of relating) and show how interpersonal communication as an area of study has moved beyond prior metatheoretical debates between the “laws, rules, and systems” or “empirical, interpretive, and critical” scholarly camps.

Part II covers *Basic Interpersonal Processes* such as uncertainty and information management, relationship turbulence, and membership negotiation. The chapters in this section explore processes that occur over time as relationships unfold and that are accomplished via interpersonal communication. In Chapter 4, Leanne Knobloch reviews her emerging program of research on relationship uncertainty. She provides a history of research in this area from Shannon and Weaver to the present. Although her own work builds on Berger’s classic uncertainty reduction theory, she recasts uncertainty as a judgment made about relationships themselves (not simply conversational partners) and draws links between participants’ judgments and what they say as well as how they interpret their partner’s messages in close relationships. She provides an overview of work on sources, levels, themes, and outcomes of relational uncertainty research. She offers important lessons learned from her own research that new researchers can take to heart and more seasoned researchers can use as reminders for good practice in their own work. Finally, she provides some new directions for research in relational uncertainty.

In Chapter 5, Walid Afifi describes the process by which he has developed and tested TMIM, which attempts to explain when participants do (not) seek information from and disclose information to relational partners. TMIM asserts that uncertainty causes anxiety in some situations, and when anxiety arises, the desire to reduce it drives behavior. Interactants then evaluate the costs and benefits associated with information seeking and gaining, including assessments of efficacy. Finally, they either seek or avoid information or cognitively reappraise the situation. One unique feature of TMIM is the attempt to model information management at a dyadic level, exploring decision making by information seekers and providers. He provides a nice overview of all the work currently being done that features uncertainty in our field and shows how this work differs from traditional uncertainty reduction theory in three ways: Uncertainty is sometimes valued, people sometimes avoid information when they are uncertain, and self-efficacy has a role in information management. Future directions for research that highlight TMIM’s applied value are embedded within each of these three sections.

In Chapter 6, Denise Solomon, Kirsten Weber, and Keli Steuber explore the challenges that emerge when couples experience changes in their relationship prompted by life transitions. The relational turbulence model is



showcased as a theory that accounts for polarized emotions, cognitions, and communication by exploring how relational uncertainty and interdependence both must be renegotiated during transitional periods in romantic relationships. Although tests of the theory have focused on the transition from casual to serious involvement in dating relationships, the model may also provide insight into the impact of transitions confronted by partners within longer-term romantic associations. To develop this point, the authors discuss recent research on how couples experience relationship turning points created by receiving a breast cancer diagnosis and discovering infertility. The opportunities and obstacles for future research on turbulence and transitions beyond courtship are examined.

In Chapter 7, Karen Myers explores how workplace relationships developed between newcomers and organizational veterans can facilitate or impede newcomers' integration into the larger organization. Workplace relationships have important implications for employees, not the least of which is that they play an important role in the process of member negotiation—that is the process by which individuals come to view themselves as organizational members. After describing her development (with John Oetzel) of a six-dimensional model of member negotiation, Myers describes her recent research exploring how women and people of color may face challenges in member negotiation due to factors (e.g., perceived similarity and organizational commitment) that influence workplace relationships with more seasoned organizational members. Her chapter illustrates how interpersonal and organizational literatures can inform one another and also the importance of examining what Miller (1976b) would have termed non-interpersonal as well as interpersonal relationships.

Part III of the book, titled *The Light and Dark Sides of Interpersonal Communication* is composed of four chapters that discuss what people “do” with interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication can be used to deceive or hurt others, to manage conflict, and to provide support. By focusing on purposes that may be more or less healthy for relationships as well as complex message effects, the chapters in this section highlight the recent trend toward studying the “dark side” of interpersonal communication as described above.

In Chapter 8, Brant Burleson presents his recently developed dual-process model for the reception of social support messages. He describes his 30-year program of research on social support, from early work describing the characteristics and documenting the effects of highly versus less person-centered (HPC vs. LPC) comforting messages to later work (with Daena Goldsmith) developing a theory of conversationally induced reappraisal that explains how HPC messages influence a recipient's appraisals and hence emotional

reactions. Although HPC comforting messages typically are evaluated as much more sensitive and effective than LPC, research also has found smaller but reliable individual, situational, and cultural differences in the degree to which this is the case—differences that until recently had been largely ignored. Building on dual-process models of persuasion, the newest work by Burleson attempts to explain personality, gender, situational, and cultural differences in the degree to which people prefer HPC over LPC messages, arguing that a recipient's ability and motivation to process support messages will influence the degree to which what is said versus just being there matters. His chapter illustrates the evolution of a research program over time, including the variety of factors that influence the directions that one's research takes.

In Chapter 9, John Caughlin and Allison Scott present their program of research on demand-withdrawal sequences, a conflict pattern where one party complains or nags while the other avoids the issue. After describing how this pattern has been investigated over time as well as its association with aversive outcomes in marital and parent/child relationships, they highlight limitations in current explanations for the pattern. Although most explanations assume that demanding and withdrawing are enacted in pursuit of goals, they fail to recognize that communicators are responsive to multiple, conflicting goals. The authors then offer a new explanation grounded in the multiple goals literature: “Demanding” and “withdrawing” are behaviors that can be motivated by different combinations of goals, which suggests that they may take different forms. Going back to videotaped interactions from their earlier research, they tentatively identify four different patterns of demand-withdrawal sequences and speculate how these patterns may be differentially associated with relational satisfaction (a direction for future work).

Chapter 10 is authored by two scholars, Judee Burgoon and Tim Levine, who have engaged in vigorous scholarly debate about how and when individuals are able to detect when others (including close others) are deceiving them. The authors provide a foundation for their separate research by first delineating three widely accepted findings in deception detection research and the reasons why people exhibit only slightly better than chance accuracy as they detect truth and deception, why their confidence in their ability to detect deception does not lead to accuracy, and the fact that they have a truth bias, especially in face-to-face interactions and with close others. Burgoon lays out the basics of interpersonal deception theory and provides results from two selected studies that highlight various influences on receiver judgments of truth and deception. Levine provides more evidence for the truth bias, discusses that the results of deception laboratory experiments are

a function of the proportion of truth and lies presented to respondents, and reports on a study that found that lie detection in interpersonal relationships outside the lab often occurred after the fact. They end their chapter with a discussion of six directions that are important for the future of deception detection research. Both Burgoon and Levine focus on the interpersonal nature of the dyad as a main factor in truth bias and deception detection, and show the points on which they agree and what types of future studies are needed to resolve important controversies.

In Chapter 11, Anita Vangelisti and Alexa Hampel discuss their ongoing program of research on “hurtful” communication, how it fits in with several other programs of research on hurt in close relationships, how it has developed over time, and where it is headed in the future. Hurt feelings typically arise in response to relational transgressions that imply relational devaluation and thus threaten one’s sense of safety and security. The authors present a thorough review of individual and relational factors as well as family cultures that influence interpretations and reactions to hurtful behavior. Perhaps more than any other chapter in our book, this one illustrates the progress that can be made toward understanding an important phenomenon when research teams from multiple disciplines are focused on a common topic and directly engage one another’s work.

The last section of the book (Part IV) concerns *Relationships, Media, and Culture*. All three chapters in this section look at intersections between interpersonal communication, new/traditional media, and/or cultural portrayals of close relationships. In Chapter 12, Kristine Fitch describes her ongoing program of research on the cultural grounding of personal relationships. She describes her extensive ethnographic fieldwork on personal relationships in Columbia and how this work helped illuminate theretofore unexamined cultural assumptions underlying traditional literatures on compliance gaining, politeness, and so on. Her newer work uses ethnographic and semiotic (e.g., analysis of media texts) methods to compare relational codes—systems of meaning developed within particular relationships—embedded in four cultures. She discusses challenges in doing ethnographic research on interpersonal communication as well as writing for diverse audiences (interpersonal but also cultural studies scholars).

In Chapter 13, Joe Walther and Art Ramirez trace the development of theories and research on how individuals form relationships online. Given the widespread adoption and normalization of many forms of CMC, they argue for an explanation of media choice that focuses on the fact that different media channels may be chosen depending on participants’ interpersonal goals. Given their theoretical training as communication scientists with a focus on nonverbal communication, they adopt a functional perspective

that assumes that communicators use whichever cues are at hand when they communicate with others for various reasons. That belief underpins the development and testing of social information processing theory and the hyperpersonal model of CMC. Their chapter leads the reader through various technological situations and their interpersonal communication implications, ranging from photographic and avatar image-based CMC; plain text CMC, where conditions are ripe for idealization of a communication partner; and online and off-line mixed modes and social networking sites to the Web 2.0, which is essentially relationally based. Throughout the chapter, they highlight opportunities for future research.

Finally, Stacy Smith and Amy Granados, in Chapter 14, explore how close relationships are portrayed on television, focusing on violence, gender, and sexuality aspects of interpersonal relationships. The authors examine television portrayals of interpersonal relationships because they can be powerful sources of social learning for adolescents and adults about romantic relationships, friendships, emotional displays, race relations, or even antisocial behaviors. They examine theory and research on the effects that media depictions of violence, gender, and sexuality may have on viewers. They offer important insights about how interpersonal communication scholarship can inform media research in the future and discuss other future directions for research that they hope will set an agenda for both media and interpersonal communication scholars interested in assessing portrayals of interpersonal exchanges. Taken together, the chapters in this final section respond to historical calls for greater convergence between interpersonal and media studies as well as greater scrutiny of how people's conceptions of personal relationships are influenced by their larger culture.

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