Preface

When I began writing the first edition of this textbook a number of years ago, I thought I had a pretty clear understanding of what I was getting myself into. I had been in the field of communication for a number of years, had worked in several departments with active scholars in a variety of areas, and had taught communication theory at several levels. However, while writing the book, I was both humbled and amazed by what I still had to learn: for theory within the communication discipline is wide-ranging and complex, encompassing huge differences in scholarship in terms of topic areas and in terms of philosophical foundations and approaches to the theory development process. I was once again floored as I took up revising the text for the second edition. Although theory serves as a bedrock for much of our work in the communication discipline, I found that the bedrock was at the same time both durable and changing. This book, then, is my attempt to understand—and help students understand—the burgeoning world of communication theory and to see both the enduring and evolving features of that world.

I had several goals in writing this book. The first of these was to help students understand the intricacies and nuances of theories that were developed by communication theorists or that have been used extensively by communication researchers and scholars. Because I wanted the coverage of theories to be comprehensive and current, I was faced with the task of limiting the number of theories considered. As I explain in Chapter 1, three criteria guided my choices. First, I would include only work that could be clearly distinguished as a theory. That is, I did not include individual research efforts or areas of interest in communication that had not been codified into coherent theoretical statements. Second, I would include only theories developed by scholars working in the communication disci-

pline or widely used and extended by scholars in the field. Finally, I would concentrate on theories that would be chiefly considered social science theories. This is not to say that all theories with rhetorical roots are ignored, but those that are highlighted have had a strong influence on a wide range of communication scholars.

My second goal in writing this book was to help students think critically about the theories they encounter. For me, critical thinking is enhanced through processes of analytical comparison and by using an appropriate critical lens. To facilitate critical thinking, then, I grouped theories into sets of two to four per chapter, with each chapter covering an important substantive area within communication studies. These groupings allow students to compare and contrast theoretical approaches regarding similar communication phenomena. More important, though, I tried to enhance critical thinking by giving extensive coverage to the theoretical perspectives and frameworks that under gird communication theories. Thus, the first five chapters of this book deal not with specific theories of communication but with the conceptual and philosophical frameworks within which these theories were developed. I consider general definitions of communication and theory as well as specific perspectives on theorizing rising from postpositivist, interpretivist, and critical traditions.

My third goal in writing this text was to make communication theories—and the process of theorizing—accessible to students. Thus, I have tried to write in a style that is understandable and conversational but which does not lose the complexities of the theories at hand. I have developed numerous examples and tables that will help to clarify theoretical issues for students, and each chapter provides key terminology and discussion questions.

I maintained these goals as I worked on revisions for the second edition of this textbook and,

indeed, tried to make the book even more complete and accurate, and even more accessible to students. Given that a revision always requires an author to make choices about both additions and deletions, I made these choices with an eye toward current work in the communication discipline and toward theoretical coherence.

Features

To reach my goals, I have built into the textbook a number of key features:

- **Organizing Framework:** The book is organized into three parts. Part 1 (Perspectives on Communication Theory) provides strong foundational chapters that will help students understand the scope and nature of theory development processes generally and within the field of communication more specifically. These chapters cover conceptualizations of communication, the nature of theory and metatheoretical considerations that guide its development, and the three major theoretical perspectives: post-positivist, interpretivist, and critical studies. These paradigms are discussed in terms of their historical roots and their current commitments, and provide a framework for understanding theories in the remainder of the book.

In Part 2 (Theories of Communication Processes) and Part 3 (Theories of Communication Contexts), the text moves to a consideration of specific theories developed and used in communication studies. These theories were chosen with specific criteria in mind, and I believe this selection allows for deeper coverage, understanding, and critique of each theory's complex features.

- **Spotlight on the Theorist:** I have tried to show the human side of theorizing by including boxes that spotlight some of the theorists that students encounter in this book, giving them a face and describing some of the tribulations and rewards of the theory development process. Through these Spotlights, I also hope that students will make connections between theories and theorizing and communication in their everyday lives.

- **Real Life Insight:** This new feature relates communication theory to serious real-world issues. These concern such topics as child abuse, communication with health care providers, school board meetings, nuclear proliferation, welfare legislation, and the space shuttle disasters. Real Life Insights highlight the ways in which communication theories can shed light on contemporary societal issues and problems.

- **Current Research and an Extensive List of References:** The coverage of the theories is current, and extensive references are included for further research. The new edition includes over 170 new references; most of these are from works published since 2000.

- **Comparison and Commentary Sections:** In Parts 2 and 3, theories are conceptually grouped into sets of two to four per chapter. These groupings allow students to compare and contrast related theories. The Comparison and Commentary Sections at the end of each chapter facilitate the crucial critical-thinking process.

- **End-of-Chapter Pedagogy:** Each chapter closes with key terms and discussion questions to point students to critical issues raised throughout the text. A new "Into Your World" feature encourages students to apply chapter concepts to their own everyday concerns.

- **Instructor's Manual:** This textbook is accompanied by an Instructor's Resource CD-ROM (IRCD), which includes a number of features that will help instructors in their pedagogical tasks. The IRCD includes sample syllabi, suggested assignments, key terms, chapter outlines, and extensive test

items (in true/false, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and essay formats). Web sites and video resources are also suggested.

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Katherine Miller