FOURTH EDITION

# *Introducing Communication Theory*

## ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION

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CHAPTER 2

# Thinking About the Field: Traditions and Contexts

**Jenny and Lee Yamato**

As the 18-year-old daughter of a single parent, Lee Yamato knows that life can be difficult. She is the only child of Jenny Yamato, a Japanese American woman whose husband died from a heart attack several years ago. Jenny raised her daughter in Lacon, a small rural town in the South. It was stressful being a single mom, and Jenny was sometimes the target of overt racist jokes. As a waitress, Jenny knew that college would be the way to a better life for her daughter. She saved every extra penny and worked at the children's library for several months to bring in extra income. Jenny knew that Lee would get financial aid in college, but she also wanted to be able to help her only child with college finances.

As Lee finished her senior year in high school, she knew that before too long she would be leaving to attend a public university. Unfortunately, the closest college was over 200 miles from Lacon. Lee had mixed feelings about her move. She was very excited to get away from the small-town gossip, but she also knew that leaving Lacon meant that her mom would have to live by herself. Being alone could be devastating to her mom, Lee thought. Still, Lee recognized that her education was her first priority and that in order to get into veterinary school, she would have to stay focused. Thinking about her mom would only make the transition more difficult and could sour her first year as a college student.

Jenny, too, felt ambivalent about Lee leaving. When Jenny's husband died, she didn't think that she could raise a 13-year-old by herself. In fact, given that single moms were not viewed with a lot of respect, Jenny felt even more overpowered. However, her own tenacity and determination had paid off, and she was extremely proud that her child was going away to college. Like her daughter, though, Jenny felt sad about Lee's departure. She felt as if her best friend was leaving her, and she couldn't imagine her life without her daughter. She knew that they would talk on the phone, but it couldn't replace the hugs, the laughter, and the memories.

On the day that Lee was to leave, Jenny gave her a box with chocolate chip cookies, some peanut butter cups (Lee's favorite), a photo album of Lee and Jenny during their camping trip to Arizona, and a shoe box. Inside the shoe box were old letters that Jenny and her husband had written to each other during their courtship. Jenny wanted Lee to have the letters to remind her that her dad's spirit lives on in her. When Lee looked at the first letter, she put it down, hugged her mom, and cried. She then got into her car and slowly drove away, leaving her house and her only true friend behind.

Chapter 1 provided a foundation for conceptualizing what communication is and understanding the complexity of the communication process. In this chapter, we further unravel the meaning of communication by articulating two primary ways of looking at the field of communication.

The communication discipline is vast, and its depth is reflected in the lives of people across the United States, people like Lee and Jenny Yamato. Their relationship is obviously a close one, marked now by a common and often emotional point in a family's development: college. As the two begin to adapt to a new type of relationship characterized by distance, their communication will also take on new levels of importance. As Bethani Dobkin and Roger Pace (2006) state, "communication has the potential to shape identities, relationships, environments, and cultures" (p. 6). The Yamato family will likely communicate with an appreciation for the full impact that communication can have on their lives. Let's begin our discussion of the communication field by looking at seven traditions in communication. We will then examine various settings in which communication occurs. These two approaches guide this chapter. The first approach ("The Seven Traditions") is theoretical in nature; the second framework ("The Seven Contexts") is more practical in its approach. We describe each in the following pages.

### *Theory Into Practice*

T*I*P

**Trish**

To be honest, I wasn't sure how to explain my communication major to my mom and dad when I went home for Thanksgiving. They had no idea why I wanted to major in it! After I talked to them about what communication is (and what it isn't!), I think they were pretty happy that I found a major that made sense to me. I know I'm more employable by understanding communication, but I also just love knowing how broad a field it is. I think I convinced some of my dormmates to switch their major!

## Seven Traditions in the Communication Field

Robert Craig (Craig, 1999; Craig & Muller, 2007) outlines communication theory in one of the more thoughtful, intellectually valuable ways. Craig believed that communication theory is a vast and often unwieldy area of study and, to this end, provided categories to aid over understanding of it. Craig and Muller note that trying to make sense of communication theory is often complicated because of different intellectual styles in the field. A classification system for understanding communication theory, then, helps us to break down the challenges associated with understanding theory.

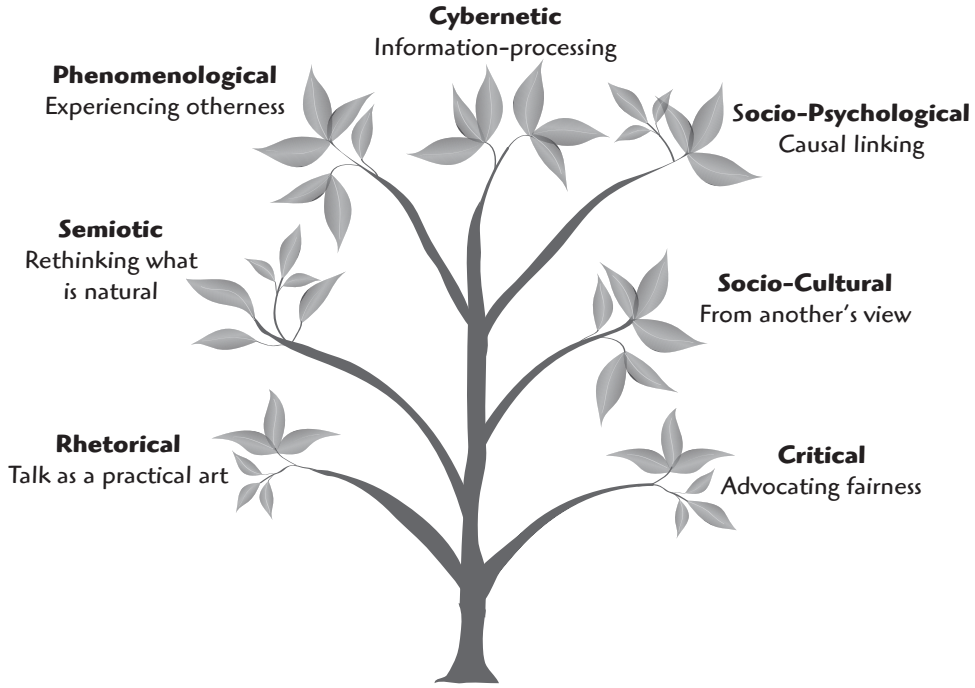


**Figure 2.1**
**Traditions in Communication Theory**

Craig terms the following framework as "traditions" to highlight the belief that theoretical development doesn't just occur naturally. Indeed, theorizing in communication is a deliberative, engaging, and innovative experience that happens over time. As Craig and Muller (2007) point out, "theorists invent new ideas to solve problems they perceive in existing ideas in a particular tradition" (p. xiii). And, although traditions suggest adhering to a historical preference, Craig and Muller are quick to point out that traditions change frequently and, like communication, are dynamic. Further, they caution that many theories are not easily categorized: "Even a theory that rebels against its tradition and rejects major parts of it can still belong to the tradition in significant ways" (p. xiv). So let's examine the seven traditions of communication theory as advanced by Craig (1999). To honor the integrity of each tradition yet avoid irrelevant detail for this section of the chapter, we will provide you an overview of each tradition. If you'd like additional details, you are encouraged to consult Craig's research. See Figure 2.1 for an overview of the traditions.

### *The Rhetorical Tradition*

At the heart of the rhetorical tradition is what Craig notes as the "practical art" (p. 73) of talk. This tradition suggests that we are interested in public address and public speaking and their functions in a society. Rhetorical theory is especially valued in many Western societies because it helps us understand the influence of speech and how we can cultivate our public speaking effectiveness. This tradition also includes the ability to reflect on different viewpoints before arriving at a personal view. It is the usefulness of the rhetorical tradition that remains attractive to researchers, theorists, and practitioners.

The rhetorical tradition necessarily involves elements pertaining to language and the audience. It also includes a discussion pertaining to audience appeals; how do audience members respond to emotions, for example? To what extent does the power of language move people to emotional and decisive action? How are we influenced or swayed by the appeals by mass media? What role does personal example play in having others accept our point of view? What effect does speaking to a large group of people have on the perceptions or actions of that group? Or, to what extent does the rhetorical tradition challenge the common belief that "telling the plain truth is something other than the strategic adaptation of a message to an audience" (Craig, 2007, p. 73)? Answering such questions is not easy and yet needs to be considered as we reflect on the value and historical importance of looking at communication theory using a rhetorical lens.

### *The Semiotic Tradition*

**semiotics**
the study of signs

Simply put, **semiotics** is the study of signs. Signs are part of a social life and *signs* stand for something else. Children laughing and running around is a *sign* of play. A ring on the ring finger of the left hand is a *sign* of a married individual. An adult crying in a funeral home is a *sign* of sadness. Most common among these signs are "words" or what we generally consider as language usage. According to the semiotic tradition, meaning is achieved when we share a common language. As noted in Chapter 1, people arrive at a communication exchange with various fields of experience and values placed on these experiences. Pioneer linguist I. A. Richards (1936) observed that words are arbitrary and have no intrinsic meaning. Consequently, achieving commonality in meaning is more difficult than first imagined—particularly if one is using language that is not recognized nor valued by another.

Semiotics suggests that what we think of as "natural" or "obvious" in public discourse needs to considered in context. That is, our values and belief structures are often a result of what has been passed down from one generation to another (a tradition). What was considered to be a "given" years ago may simply not be that way today. Semiotics challenges the notion that words have appropriate meanings; indeed, words change as the people using those words change. Consider, for example, the use of the words "war" and "peace" in the 1940s (World War II), the 1960s/70s (Vietnam War), the 1990s (Gulf War), and today (Iraq War). There are also likely to be multiple meanings of these two words if, for example, someone lost a family member in one of these wars and if another person protests war on a regular basis. Consider the phrase "single parent." In the 1950s, it did not resonate deeply in society. However, as time evolved, the divorce rate soared and marriage was not a "default" choice; being a single mom (like Jenny Yamato) or single dad is now commonplace.

### *The Phenomenological Tradition*

**phenomenology**
a personal interpretation of everyday life and activities

Let's explore the term *phenomenology*, a concept derived from the field of philosophy. **Phenomenology** is a personal interpretation of everyday life and

activities. Often, phenomenology is intuitive and involves looking at things and events through a personal lens.

Craig (2007) believes that the phenomenological tradition is marked by communication that he contends is an "experience of otherness" (p. 79). What this means is that a person tries to attain authenticity by eliminating biases in a conversation. Many phenomenologists believe that an individual's system of beliefs should not influence the dialogue taking place. As you're probably figuring out, this is quite challenging, or, as Craig points out, is a "practical impossibility" (p. 80). Consider, for example, the challenge many people have communicating with other people who have different points of view or are from different backgrounds. Craig notes that many phenomenological ideas are especially applicable to issues pertaining to diversity, identity, class, sexuality, and religion.

### *The Cybernetic Tradition*

Communication as information science was first introduced by Shannon and Weaver, two scholars associated with the linear model we discussed in Chapter 1. Recall that this model's fundamental shortcoming pertained to the fact that human communication is not as simplistic as linearity suggests. Nonetheless, what Shannon and Weaver did advance was the belief that communication involves noise. Cybernetics in particular looks at problems such as noise in the communication process. But it goes further. Cybernetics tries to unravel the complexities of message meaning by underscoring the unpredictability of the feedback we receive.

By advocating a cybernetic approach, communication theorists are embracing an expansive view of communication. As Craig (2007) states: "[I]t is important for us as communicators to transcend our individual perspectives, to look at the communication process from a broader, systemic viewpoint, and not to hold individuals responsible for systemic outcomes that no individual can control" (p. 82). In other words, the cybernetic tradition asks us to understand that communication is not only information processing, but also that individuals enter into communication settings with different abilities in that information processing.

### *The Socio-Psychological Tradition*

Those who adhere to the socio-psychological tradition uphold a cause–effect model. That is, communication theory is examined from a view that holds that someone's behavior is influenced by something else—something social psychologists call a "variable" (we return to the issue of quantitative research in Chapter 3). Craig (2007) believes that underlying this tradition is the assumption that our own communication patterns and the patterns of others vary from one person to another. It is up to the social psychologist to unravel the relationship among these patterns.

An early advocate of the socio-psychological tradition was Carl Hovland. Hovland, a Yale psychologist, examined attitude change and investigated the extent to which long- and short-term recall influences an individual's attitudes

and beliefs. In the 1950s—long before personal computers came into existence—Hovland also was the first to experiment with computer simulations and the learning process. His work and the work of other social psychologists underscored the importance of experimental research and trying to understand causal links. It is this scientific evidence for human behavior that continues to pervade much communication theorizing from this tradition.

### *The Socio-Cultural Tradition*

The essence of the socio-cultural tradition can be summed up this way: "Our everyday interactions with others depend heavily on preexisting, shared cultural patterns and social structures" (Craig, 2007, p. 84). The core of the socio-cultural tradition suggests that individuals are parts of larger groups who have unique rules and patterns of interaction. To theorize from this tradition means to acknowledge and become sensitive to the many kinds of people who occupy this planet. Theorists should not instinctively nor strategically "group" people without concern for individual identity.

Socio-cultural theorists advocate that we abandon the binary "you/me" or "us/them" approach to understanding people. Instead, appealing to the *co-creation* of social order/reality is a worthier goal for consideration. As people communicate, they produce, maintain, repair, and transform (Carey, 1989). Dialogue and interaction must be characterized by an understanding of what Craig (2007) calls "voice," (p. 84) an individual point of view that inevitably finds its way into everyday conversation.

### *The Critical Tradition*

Individuals who are concerned with injustice, oppression, power, and linguistic dominance are those who would likely identify themselves as critical theorists. Critiquing the social order and imposing structures or individuals on that order are at the heart of critical theory. Among the critical theorists most known for protesting social order is philosopher and political economist/revolutionary, Karl Marx. Marx believed that power in society has been hijacked by institutions that have no real concern for the working class. In his book, *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and his colleague Friedrich Engels (1848) contended that the history of a society is best understood by looking at the class struggles in that society. We explore more of Marx's influence in Chapter 21.

Critical theorists find that openly questioning the assumptions that guide a society is legitimate. In doing so, communicators expose the beliefs and values that guide their decision making and actions. As is suggested in our opening story of Jenny and Lee Yamato, Jenny felt that as a single mom, she could never achieve the level of respect afforded to other family types. Critical theorists would attempt to unravel how a society defines freedom, equality, and reason, three qualities identified by Craig (2007), in order to understand Jenny's experiences. Who or what are the principle forces on social order? How does one achieve the freedom to express one's will? These and a host of other questions are at the core of the critical tradition.

### *Putting It All Together*

This discussion provides you one way of looking at the texture of the communication field. Communication theory, as you will discover, is not created in a vacuum. Scholars enter into the theory-building process with particular positions, some of which influence the direction of the theories they construct and refine.

With this backdrop, we now wish to explore a more practical framework from which to view communication theory. We turn our attention to the various contexts, or environments, of communication from which research and theory develop.

## Seven Contexts in the Communication Field

In order to make the communication field and the communication process more understandable and manageable we now look at the various contexts of communication. What is a context? **Contexts** are environments in which communication takes place. Contexts provide a backdrop against which researchers and theorists can analyze phenomena. Contexts also provide clarity. Our discussion of context focuses on **situational contexts.** To suggest that a context is situationally based means that the communication process is limited by a number of factors—namely, the number of people, the degree of space between interactants, the extent of feedback, and the available channels.

**contexts**
environments in which communication takes place

**situational contexts**
environments that are limited by such factors as the number of people present, the feedback, the space between communicators, among others

Earlier we noted that the communication field is very diverse and offers various research opportunities. This can be a bit cumbersome, and at times even communication scholars lament the wide array of options. Still, there seems to be some universal agreement on the fundamental contexts of communication. In fact, most communication departments are built around some or all of the following seven communication contexts: intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, organizational, public/rhetorical, mass/media, and cultural (Figure 2.2). Keep in mind, however, that communication departments in colleges and universities across the United States divide themselves uniquely. Some, for instance, include mass communication in a department of communication whereas others may have a separate department of mass communication. Some schools have a department of interpersonal communication and include every context therein. This diversity underscores that the discipline is permeable, that boundary lines among the contexts are not absolute.

### *Intrapersonal Communication*

As you review theories in this book, keep in mind that a theory may focus on how individuals perceive their own behavior. At the root of this thinking is intrapersonal communication. Intrapersonal communication theorists frequently study the role that cognition plays in human behavior. **Intrapersonal communication** is communication with oneself. It is an internal dialogue and may take place even in the presence of another individual. Intrapersonal communication is what goes on inside your head even when you are with someone.

**intrapersonal communication**
communication with oneself

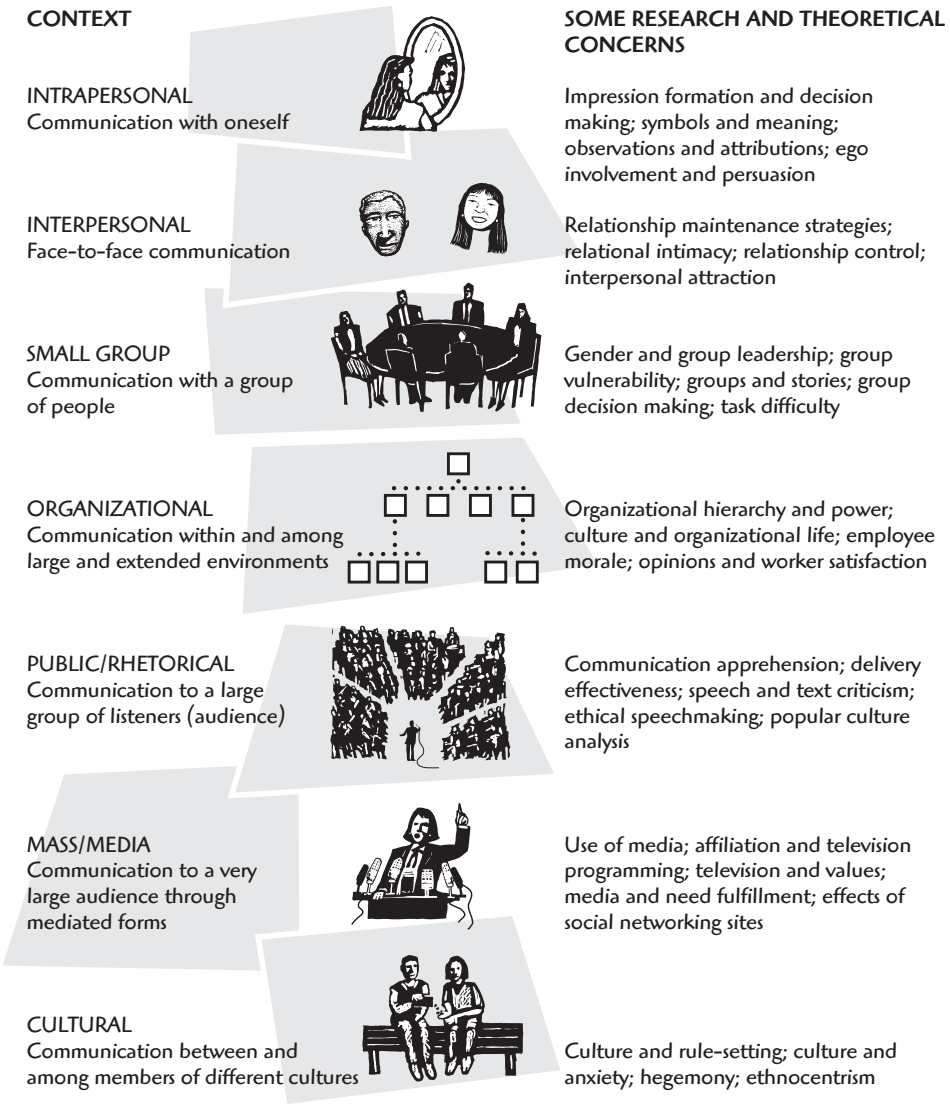


**Figure 2.2**
**Contexts of Communication**

Intrapersonal communication is usually more repetitive than other communication; we engage in it many times each day. This context is also unique from other contexts in that it includes those times when you imagine, perceive, daydream, and solve problems in your head. Intrapersonal communication is much more than talking to oneself. It also includes the many attributions you may make about another person's behavior. For instance, an employer may want to know why an employee arrives late to work and looks disheveled each day. The supervisor may believe that the worker's tardiness and demeanor are a result of some domestic problems. In reality, the employee may have another job in order to pay for his or her child's college tuition. We all have internal dialogues, and these internalized voices can vary tremendously from one person to another.

Intrapersonal communication is distinguished from other contexts in that it allows communicators to make attributions about themselves. People have

the ability to assess themselves. From body image to work competencies, people are always making self-attributions. You may have thought seriously about your own strengths and shortcomings in a number of situations. For example, do you find that you are an excellent parent but not so excellent as a statistics student? Are there times when you feel that you are a trusted friend, but not so trusted in your own family?

Although some people may believe that talking to oneself is a bit peculiar, Virginia Satir (1988) believes that these internal dialogues may help individuals bolster their **self-esteem**—the degree of positive orientation people have about themselves. Often, intrapersonal communication is difficult; it requires individuals to accept their accomplishments and confront their fears and anxieties. Looking in a mirror can be both enlightening and frightening. Of course, mirrors can also be distorting. Jenny Yamato, for example, may think that her world is over once her daughter leaves for college. The reality for the vast majority of parents, however, is that they survive the "loss." As a single parent, Jenny may think that she is incapable of moving on without Lee. Once Lee leaves, however, Jenny may find that she is more empowered living alone.

**self-esteem**
the degree of positive orientation people have about themselves

The research in intrapersonal communication centers a great deal on the cognitions, symbols, and intentions that individuals have. To this end, researchers in this area have examined attitudes toward specific behaviors and events, including dating (Guerrero & Bachman, 2008), father–daughter relationships (Punyanunt-Carter, 2007), dreaming (Ijams & Miller, 2000), imagination (Engen, 2002), self-embarrassment (Sharkey, Park, & Kim, 2004), and motivation of business executives (Millhous, 2004).

Our discussion of intrapersonal communication has focused on the role of the self in the communication process. Recall from Chapter 1 that as individuals communicate with themselves, the process may be either intentional or unintentional. Intrapersonal communication is at the heart of a person's communication activities. Without recognizing oneself, it is difficult to recognize another.

### *Interpersonal Communication*

From its beginnings, **interpersonal communication** referred to face-to-face communication between people. Contemporary views of interpersonal communication incorporate a technological lens (e.g., dating websites, etc.). Several theories that you will read about in this book have their origins in the interpersonal context. This context is rich with research and theory and is perhaps the most expansive of all of the contexts. Investigating how relationships begin, the maintenance of relationships, and the dissolution of relationships characterizes much of the interpersonal context.

**interpersonal communication**
face-to-face communication between people

One reason researchers and theorists study relationships is that relationships are so complex and diverse. For instance, you may find yourself in dozens of relationship types right now, including physician–patient, teacher–student, parent–child, supervisor–employee, and so forth. Interacting within each of these relationships affords communicators a chance to maximize the number of channels (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory) used during an interaction. In

this context, these channels function simultaneously for both interactants: A child may scream for his mom, for instance, and as she is able to calm him with her caress, she touches the child, looks in his eyes, and listens to his whimpering subside.

The interpersonal context itself comprises many related subcontexts. Interpersonal researchers have studied the family (Metts & Lamb, 2006), friendships (Patterson, 2007), long-term marriages (Hughes & Dickson, 2006), physician–patient relationships (Richmond, Smith, Heisel, & McCroskey, 2001), and relationships in the workplace (Bruning, Castle, & Schrepfer, 2004). In addition, researchers are interested in a host of issues and themes (for example, risk, power, teasing, gossip, liking, attraction, emotions, and so forth) associated with these relationships.

Researchers have also examined the link between interpersonal communication and mass media, organizations, and the classroom (Frymier & Houser, 2002). Finally, relationships that have not been studied enough, including gay and lesbian relationships, cohabiting relationships, and computer network relationships, are gaining researchers' attention (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Galvin, 2004; Peplau & Beals, 2004). As you can see, researchers have framed some very diverse and exciting work within the interpersonal communication context, and studying relationships and what takes place within them has broad appeal.

### *Small Group Communication*

A third context of communication is the small group. Small groups are composed of a number of people who work together to achieve some common purpose. Small group research focuses on task groups as opposed to the friendship and family groups found in the interpersonal context. Communication theory centering on small groups frequently concerns the dynamic nature of small groups, including group roles, boundaries, and trust.

Researchers disagree about how many people make up a small group. Some scholars argue that the optimal number for a small group is five to seven members, whereas others put no limit on the maximum number of members. Nearly all agree, however, that there must be at least three people for a small group to exist (Schultz, 1996; Poole, 2007). For our purposes, then, **small group communication** is defined as communication among at least three individuals.

**small group communication** communication among at least three individuals

The number in a group, is not as important as the implications of that number. The more people, the greater the opportunity for more personal relationships to develop. This may influence whether small groups stay focused on their goals and whether group members are satisfied with their experiences (Shaw, 1981). A classic study (Kephart, 1950) revealed that as the size of the group increases, the number of relationships increases substantially. With a three-person group, then, the number of potential relationships is 6; with a seven-person group, there are 966 possible relationships! When there are too many group members, there is a tendency for cliques to form (Mamali & Paun, 1982). However, large numbers of group members may result in additional resources not present in smaller groups.

**cohesiveness**
the degree of togetherness between and among communicators

**synergy**
the intersection of multiple perspectives in a small group

**networks**
communication patterns through which information flows

**roles**
positions of group members and their relationship to the group

People are influenced by the presence of others. For example, some small groups are very cohesive, which means having a high degree of togetherness and a common bond. This **cohesiveness** may influence whether the group functions effectively and efficiently. In addition, the small group context affords individuals a chance to gain multiple perspectives on an issue. That is, in the intrapersonal context, an individual views events from his or her own perspective; in the interpersonal context there are more perspectives. In the small group context, many more people have the potential to contribute to the group's goals. In problem-solving groups, or task groups in particular, many perspectives may be advantageous. This exchange of multiple perspectives results in **synergy,** and explains why small groups may be more effective than an individual at achieving goals.

Networking and role behavior are two important components of small group behavior. **Networks** are communication patterns through which information flows, and networks in small groups answer the following question: Who speaks to whom and in what order? The patterns of interaction in small groups may vary significantly. For instance, in some groups the leader may be included in all deliberations, whereas in other groups members may speak to one another without the leader. The small group context is made up of individuals who take on various **roles,** or the positions of group members and their relationship to the group. These roles may be very diverse, including task leader, passive observer, active listener, recorder, and so forth.

Before we close our discussion of small groups, we should point out that as with the interpersonal communication context, research on small groups spans a variety of areas. Small group communication scholars have studied power in small groups (Boulding, 1990), juries (Gastil, Leighter, Deess, & Black, 2008), gossip in public school classrooms (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005), conflict (Gross, Guerrero, & Alberts, 2004), creativity (Sabatine, 1989), and cultural diversity (Brooks & Ward, 2007). Much theory and research today continues to underscore the fact that groups exist to meet certain needs (Adams & Galanes, 2009).

Working in small groups seems to be a fact of life in society. At times, it may seem as if we cannot go anywhere without some sort of small group forming. From peer groups to task groups to support groups, the small group experience is a ubiquitous one. Very few students can receive their degree without working in small groups. From study groups to presentations, you may feel as if you are immersed in small group activities. Company supervisors relish team approaches to problem solving. Some families have weekly or monthly family meetings, at which the group discusses such issues as vacations, sibling rivalry, and curfew.

The United States will continue to rely on small groups, even as we increase our reliance on technology. Although we have reached a point at which nearly 71 percent of all U.S. adults are Internet users (www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband%202007.pdf), we're confident that person-to-person contact will never go out of style. Computers may crash and break down, but people will continue to function and communicate in small groups.


**Figure 2.3**
**Example of Hierarchy in Higher Education**

### *Organizational Communication*

It is important to distinguish between small group communication and organizational communication. **Organizational communication** pertains to communication within and among large, extended environments. This communication is extremely diverse in that organizational communication necessarily entails interpersonal encounters (supervisor–subordinate conversations), public speaking opportunities (presentations by company executives), small group situations (a task group preparing a report), and mediated experiences (internal memos, e-mail, and teleconferencing). Organizations, then, are groups of groups. Theories of organizational communication are generally concerned with the functionality of the organization, including its climate, rules, and personnel.

**organizational communication**
communication within and among large, extended environments

What distinguishes this context from others is that a clearly defined hierarchy exists in most organizations. **Hierarchy** is an organizing principle whereby things or persons are ranked one above the other. For an example of the hierarchy in many colleges and universities, see Figure 2.3. Does your school follow the same hierarchy? Michael Papa, Tom Daniels, and Barry Spiker (2008) point out that most Western organizations are traditionally hierarchical in that there are clear ideas about "division of labor, unity of command, and unity of direction" (p. 45). Organizations are unique in that much of the communication taking place is highly structured, and role playing is

**hierarchy**
an organizing principle whereby things or people are ranked one above the other

often specialized and predictable. Employees and employers alike are clear in their chain of command. Unlike in the interpersonal context, several modes of communication can substitute for face-to-face interaction: memos, e-mail, and teleconferencing.

The uniqueness of organizational communication is also represented by the research and theory conceptualized in this context. Many of the present-day organizational communication theories had their origins in a series of studies conducted in the mid-1920s to early 1930s. These studies, known as the **Hawthorne experiments,** were significant influences on modern theory in that they inaugurated the human relations approach to organizations. Researchers at the Western Electric Hawthorne Plant in suburban Chicago were interested in determining the effect of lighting levels on employee productivity. Interestingly, results of this research indicated that not only did the environmental conditions influence employee output but so did the interpersonal relationships with other employees and supervisors. One conclusion arising from these studies was that organizations should be viewed as social entities; to speed up production, employers must consider workers' attitudes and feelings. These studies were among the first to put a human face on the impersonal corporate world (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

**Hawthorne experiments**
a set of investigations that ushered in a human relations approach to organizations

Although the human relations approach has enjoyed a great deal of theoretical and research attention, today there are a number of additional organizational orientations, including cultural systems and scientific management. Further, organizational communication theory and research today address various eclectic issues, including the *Challenger* disaster (Gouran, Hirokawa, & Martz, 1986), uncertainty on the job (Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004), whistle-blowing (Gabriel, 2008), rumor (Jian, 2007), job training (Waldron & Lavitt, 2000), sexual harassment (Keyton, Ferguson, & Rhodes, 2001), and workplace aggression (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007). In addition, as with other contexts, the influence of ethnic and racial culture has also been examined (Nkomo & Cox, 1996) within organizations.

What is important to glean from this discussion is that, like other contexts, the organizational context has a rich tradition. The Hawthorne studies of human behavior on the job have led today's researchers and theorists to expand their perspectives of organizations and organizational life.

### *Public/Rhetorical Communication*

The fifth context is known as the **public communication** context, or the dissemination of information from one person to a large group. This is not a new context; speech presentations have existed since the beginning of time and continue today. Colin Powell, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, and Bono are just a few of the contemporary public figures who are in high demand as public speakers.

**public communication**
the dissemination of information from one person to many others (audience)

In public speaking, speakers usually have three primary goals in mind: to inform, to entertain, or to persuade. This latter goal—persuasion—is at the core of rhetorical communication. Many of the principles of persuasion—including audience analysis, speaker credibility, and verbal and nonverbal delivery of a message—are necessarily part of the persuasive process. As you

reflect on your own public speaking experiences, you may be surprised to learn that in actuality you have been following rhetorical strategies rooted in early Greek and Roman days. How people have constructed their persuasive speeches has been the focus of study for more than 2,500 years.

Effective public speakers owe their success to early rhetorical principles, a topic that we discussed earlier. For our purposes here, we define **rhetoric** as a speaker's available means of persuading his or her audience. This definition was advanced many years ago by Aristotle. Rhetoric has been described as an art that brings together speakers and audience (Hart, 1997). The study of rhetoric is expansive and can include the study of texts of speeches, presidential inaugural addresses, and rhetorical analyses of cultural themes and issues. Samples of rhetorical scholarship include analyses of the Catholic Church (Lamoureux, 1994), George W. Bush's war speeches (Zagacki, 2007), talk show host Rush Limbaugh (Appel, 2003), and abolitionist Frederick Douglass (Selby, 2000). We discuss rhetoric in more detail in Chapter 18.

**rhetoric**
a speaker's available means of persuasion

### *Theory Into Practice*

**T*I*P**

Bradley

They say that people can manage communication apprehension. I have to admit I didn't believe that . . . at first. Then, I had to give a speech in front of my lecture class (there were around 100 students in there). I was running for student senate and the professor asked if I wanted to say a few words. I was so nervous! My hands were sweaty and I almost fell over my own feet when I walked up to the front of the class. As I talked for a few seconds, though, I slowed down and saw a lot of friendly faces out in the audience. I was so relieved when it was all over, but I did manage my anxiety quite a bit.

One area in the public/rhetorical context that has received significant scholarly attention is **communication apprehension** (CA), or the general sense of fear of speaking before an audience. Research by James McCroskey and Virginia Richmond has been quite valuable as the communication field tries to unpack the challenges of speech anxiety. You will recall that boundaries between and among the contexts are often blurred, and CA research is one example of that blurring. Although communication apprehension is a public speaking concern, CA focuses on intrapersonal issues. Furthermore, CA has been studied with a number of different populations, including student athletes (Stockstill & Roach, 2007), at-risk children (Ayres, Ayres, & Hopf, 1995), employees (Bartoo & Sias, 2004), and those in romantic relationships (Theiss & Solomon, 2006), as well as across cultures (Hsu, 2004). In addition, researchers have advanced ways to reduce communication apprehension. Clearly, the public communication/rhetorical context addresses the confluence of theory, research, and skills.

**communication apprehension**
a general sense of fear of speaking before an audience

### *Mass/Media Communication*

**mass media** channels or delivery modes for mass messages

**mass communication** communication to a large audience via various channels (radio, Internet, television, etc.)

**new media** computer-related technology

The sixth context is the mass communication or mediated context, which targets large audiences. First, we need to define a few terms. **Mass media** refers to the channels, or delivery modes, for mass messages. Mass media include newspapers, videos, CD-ROMs, computers, TV, radio, and so forth. **Mass communication** refers to communication to a large audience via one of these channels of communication. Although mass communication frequently refers to "traditional" venues (e.g., newspapers), we expand our discussion to include **new media,** which encompasses computer-related technology. This communication technology includes the Internet, including emailing, blogging, and instant messaging; the influence of social networking sites (Facebook and MySpace) on communication; cell phone usage; and digital television. For our purposes, we identify mass communication as communication to a large audience via multiple channels of communication. The mass communication context, therefore, includes both the channel and the audience.

Like each of the preceding contexts, the mass communication context is distinctive. It allows both senders and receivers to exercise control. Sources such as a newspaper editor or a television broadcaster make decisions about what information should be sent, and receivers have control over what they decide to read, listen to, watch, or review. Suppose, for instance, that you are an advertiser who has slotted an expensive television commercial featuring Tiger Woods. You've paid Woods handsomely, and yet, to determine whether his endorsement has made a difference in sales, you have to wait for the numbers to come in. You have control over the choice of the endorser, but the audience also has control over what they watch and what they buy.

Some, like theorist Stuart Hall (see Chapter 21), suggest that mass media inherently serve the interests of the elite, especially big business and multinational corporations, who, Hall suggests, fund much of the research in mass communication. Many studies, however, are not underwritten by corporate sponsorship. They reflect the growing diversity of mass communication researchers and theorists. A myriad of topics using a mass media framework have been studied, including the portrayal of sex on prime-time television (Eyal & Finnerty, 2007), online support communities (Wright, 2000), heroes in the movie *The Matrix* (Stroud, 2001), television makeover programs (Kubic & Chory, 2007), email flaming (Turnage, 2007), grandparent personal websites (Harwood, 2000), and an analysis of quiz shows such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (Hetsroni, 2001). As you can see, a wide array of research studies characterize the mass communication context.

As we write this, some of our comments may already be out of date. Mass communication is rapidly changing, and what was promised as a marvelous advance today is often considered outdated tomorrow. Because of the pervasiveness and availability of mass media in our society, media theorists will have to deal with the impact of media on the communication process itself. Some researchers (for instance, Turkle, 2005) suggest that computers help (re)define the way we conceive of ourselves. This redefinition may have an inevitable impact on the communication process. Furthermore, although a large number of homes and businesses subscribe to new technologies, a gap will always exist

between those who have the resources and those who do not. Consequently, future mass communication theorists may have to rethink the universality of their theories.

### *Cultural Communication*

The final communication context we wish to examine is cultural communication. To begin, we should define what we mean by *culture*. There are many definitions of *culture*. For our purposes, **culture** can be viewed as a "community of meaning and a shared body of local knowledge" (Gonzalez, Houston, & Chen, 2004, p. 5). **Cultural communication,** therefore, refers to communication between and among individuals whose cultural backgrounds vary. These individuals do not necessarily have to be from different countries. In a diverse country such as the United States, we can experience cultural communication variation within one state, one community, and even one block. It is not uncommon in many parts of this society, for instance, to see two people from different cultural backgrounds speaking to each other. Urban centers, in particular, can be exciting cultural arenas where communication takes place between members of different co-cultures. **Co-cultures** are groups of individuals who are part of the same larger culture but who—through unity and individual identification around such attributes as race, ethnicity, sexual identity, religion, and so forth—create opportunities of their own. The word *co-culture* is now widely accepted in the academic community as a replacement for *subculture,* a term suggesting that one culture has dominance over another culture.

**culture**
a community of meaning and a shared body of knowledge

**cultural communication**
communication between and among individuals whose cultural backgrounds vary

**co-cultures**
groups of individuals who are part of the same larger culture, but who can be classified around various identites (race, sex, age, etc.)

Cultural communication is a relatively young academic context, with its beginnings traced back only to the 1950s (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). However, much exciting work has been done since then. The growth of this area of study can be attributed to the growth across organizational cultures, with more U.S. companies doing business abroad. In addition, technological availability, population shifts, and genuine efforts to understand other cultures contribute to the growing interest and frequent conversations pertaining to this context. Some of these dialogues are still difficult, nearly fifty years after the signing of the Civil Rights Act. Some cultural events have helped jumpstart 21st century cultural conversations (Senator Barack Obama becoming president), but these conversations are still fraught with challenges.

The intercultural context differentiates itself from other contexts in a few ways. First, as you may have determined, this context is the only context that specifically addresses culture. Although some contexts, such as the organizational context, comprise research on racial and ethnic cultures, this work is often ancillary, with culture being examined for its effects on the organization, for example. In the intercultural context, however, researchers and theorists purposely explore the interactions and events between and among people of different cultures. Second, study in the intercultural communication context means that researchers inherently accept the fact that human behavior is culturally based. In other words, culture structures how we perceive and how we act.

To give you an indication of the type of research and thinking taking place in the cultural communication context, consider the following research titles: "*De Que Colores:* A Critical Examination of Multicultural Children's Books"(Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002), "Native American Culture and Communication Through Humor" (Shutiva, 2004), "Discursive Negotiation of Family Identity: A Study of U.S. Families with Adopted Children from China" (Suter, 2008), "When Mississippi Chinese Talk" (Gong, 2004), and "The Color Problem in Sillyville: Negotiating White Identity in One Popular 'Kid-Vid'" (Gonzalez & Gonzalez, 2002).

Although this research derives from a number of different cultural perspectives, you should be aware that much of what we know and how we relate is a result of a Western model of thinking—that is, many of us interpret events and behaviors through a European (American) lens (Asante, 1987). Gonzalez, Houston, and Chen (2004) state that when studying culture and communication, it's important to "invite *experience*" (p. 3) into the research arena. A great deal of intercultural communication theory and research embraces such an effort. This context is filled with opportunities to study areas that have not received a lot of attention in the past. Investigating culture and cultural groups holds continued promise as the United States grows more diverse.

### *Collating the Contexts*

In discussing these seven contexts, we have provided you with a basic category system for dividing the broad field of communication. These seven categories help us discuss the communication process more clearly and specifically. Yet the template is not perfect, and as you have probably noted in our discussion, there is often overlap among the categories. For instance, when people belong to a cancer support group online, their communication has elements of at least four contexts: intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, and mass communication. Thus, we caution you against viewing these categories as completely exclusive and distinctive from one another.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided a framework to use as you try to understand the communication field. We began by exploring the seven established traditions of communication theory that are inclusive of the theories you're about to read in this book. These traditions include Rhetorical, Semiotic, Phenomenological, Cybernetic, Socio-Psychological, Socio-Cultural, and Critical. We next examined the primary contexts of communication: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Small Group, Organizational, Public/Rhetorical, Mass/Media, and Cultural. As various theories are introduced to you, you will see that many of them fall neatly in these divisions. Other theories will cut across traditions and contexts.

You should now be able to discern the uniqueness of the communication discipline. As you read the next few chapters on theory building, you will begin to link the communication process with the theoretical process. These preliminary chapters offer important foundations to draw on as you encounter the theories presented later in the book.

## *Discussion Starters*

1. Lee and Jenny Yamato's experiences fall across several of the contexts we identified in this chapter. Which of the contexts are in play in their story?

2. Which of the seven traditions in the communication field most appeals to you? Why?

3. Which context of communication most appeals to you? Why?

4. If you had to add another context of communication based on your experiences, what context would it be? How would you interpret the context for others? What examples illustrate the context?

5. How would you illustrate—with a picture—the overlap between and among the various communication traditions.

6. Explain how politics can influence each of the communication contexts.

7. Suppose you were asked to differentiate between a tradition and a context? What would guide your thinking in your response?

## *Online Learning Center* www. mhhe.com/west4e

Visit the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/west4e for chapter-specific resources, such as story-into-theory and multiple-choice quizzes, as well as theory summaries and theory connection questions.