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# The Basic Course in Communication Theory: A Shift in Emphasis

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*Warren Sandmann*

Leonard C. Hawes (1977) asks of communication theory that it, in a sense, go back to the beginning. Hawes wants to make sure that we in communication know just what it is we are studying before we start applying grand social scientific theories of communication (or borrowed theories from other disciplines such as psychology and sociology). In this essay, I am suggesting that we need to go even further back. In teaching the basic course in communication theory, I believe we need to question the basic assumptions which undergird communication theory.

We should do this questioning for at least three reasons. The first reason concerns the relationship between theoretical perspectives and communication. To start with the assumption that communication should be studied as a social science, as a means to ". . . understand and predict communicative arts . . ." (Hickson and Stacks, 1993, p. 261), greatly increases the chance that whatever communicative behavior we study will be interpreted within a scientific frame, thus producing a world which looks a lot like the inside of a laboratory. While this may be an accurate view of what the world looks like, it may not be. Operating solely within the frame of the social scientist makes it highly unlikely that we could create a different picture of the world.

This leads to the second reason to question the basic assumptions of the social scientific perspective on communication: There may be a better perspective. Conversely, of

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course, there may not be. Unless we try to understand and therefore teach communication theory from other perspectives, we have no way of knowing which perspective actually does offer a better view. The final reason is one of pedagogy: We as teachers owe it to our students to present all possible and plausible perspectives on the study of communication. There is a pragmatic dimension to this reason as well. Not all communication programs across the United States operate from a social scientific perspective. To limit the study and teaching of communication theory, which may be the only general communication course for both communication majors and other students, to a social scientific perspective is to present a skewed view of what the discipline of communication is (or can be) all about.

This essay is not solely concerned with the emphasis on a social-scientific perspective. Others have offered extended critiques and defenses of the social scientific perspective, and a section of this essay introduces some of these critiques. What is more important than the perspective taken is the pedagogical approach aligned with taking one perspective as a given. As Edwin Black reminded communication theorists in 1965, it is not that the model being taught is presented as the paradigm method, it is the very idea of a monolithic model, of a dominant paradigm. The method overpowers the object of study. Communication theory is taught from an approach that emphasizes the acquisition and compilation of knowledge, not the critical questioning of such knowledge. This is the major concern of this essay: That treating communication theory as primarily a method of inquiry, with accepted and largely unquestioned procedures and assumptions, blocks and distorts much of what is being studied. The proposal is for a change in emphasis in the teaching of communication theory, for adopting a more critical perspective (not a critical model) for the teaching of communication theory. The need is not to stop teaching the basic ideas of standard communication theory, but to go beyond the stages of comprehension and

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application, to the stages of analysis and criticism and even creation of theory. Certainly, some and maybe even many teachers of communication theory do this in the classroom now. But if that is the case, they are doing it in opposition to the content and methods suggested as standards in the field. The remainder of this essay will offer additional reasons for teaching communication theory from this critical perspective, and propose the outlines of how we can shift the emphasis in the teaching of communication theory.

According to a 1986 study, the basic communication course is often the only communication course to which non-majors are exposed. In a survey completed by Trank, Becker and Hall, 85 percent of colleges and universities reported that the basic course in communication was required of all non-majors. Instruction in the basic course generally follows one of three basic formats: Format number one involves instructing students in the theories of human communication. Trank (1990) terms this approach the interpersonal approach to the basic course. The second format is a public speaking approach to communication, where presentational skills are emphasized. The third basic format is described by Trank as a combination, or blend approach, where both presentational skills and human communication theories are taught.

Of these three formats, national surveys of communication programs indicate that the public speaking format seems to be the most popular format used. A 1985 survey of basic course programs (Gibson, Hanna & Huddleston) indicated that over half of the respondents were utilizing the public speaking format, with a third reporting that they used a combination approach, and the remainder divided between several varieties of communication theory approaches.

Despite this emphasis on presentational skills in the basic course, instruction in communication theory remains an important aspect of the basic course and the communication discipline. Approaches to the basic course that emphasize a theoretical dimension, or that call the course an introduction

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to interpersonal communication, or human communication, or courses that utilize a combination approach, all require the teaching of theories of human communication. Even a course that emphasizes presentational skills (Sandmann, 1991) will still, to at least some extent, ground these skills in theory. Additionally, a course that introduces theories of human communication to majors in communication still fills a vital role, and can be thought of as the basic course *within* the discipline. As Hickson and Stacks (1993, p. 262) note, there seems to be an increasing interest in teaching communication theory at the introductory and undergraduate level.

It is for these reasons that a more thorough examination of instruction in introductory communication theory courses is needed. Whether this instruction is part of a basic course for all students, majors and non-majors, or whether this course more adequately serves as an introduction for communication majors, a better understanding of both the substance and the form of this course is important to the discipline.

In this essay I will first briefly describe standard approaches to teaching the communication theory course, with some examples from texts used in teaching an introductory communication theory course. This summary will focus on content of the texts, the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the theories being taught, and the explicit and implied teaching methods for these courses. Included in the summary section will be a brief critique of the standard approaches, pointing out what may be some unexamined assumptions in the teaching of communication theory. The remainder of this essay will feature a proposal for an approach to teaching introductory communication theory that puts more emphasis on the critical nature of communication theory, on the links between communication and human understanding and knowledge, and on the function of communication in the uncovering, utilization and creation of knowledge. This approach is not designed to trash the dominant paradigm, but to problematize it. In this approach,

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communication theory is thought of less as a body of knowledge to be transmitted to students, and more as an analytical tool for discovering the manner in which communication functions to create, recreate and reinforce knowledges. In other words, communication theory would be taught less as a set of theoretical perspectives to be comprehended and utilized, and more as an approach that focuses on the manner in which these theoretical perspectives create and recreate frameworks for understanding the world. Students would still be asked to comprehend these theories, but the course would go beyond comprehension to include a more critical perspective in which students would learn the skills to question these theories, along with the necessity to question these theories.

## **PART ONE: WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT?**

Donaghy (1991) offers a detailed description of an approach to teaching communication theory as the basic course, including in this description a rationale for the course, objectives, a description of content and theoretical premises, and a description of teaching methods for the course. Donaghy's introductory communication theory course is designed for both majors and non-majors at his institution. He argues for the importance of the course based primarily on the growth within the communication discipline of a solid body of theoretical knowledge, a body that should be presented to all students in the field as early as possible in their education (p. 56).

This introductory communication theory course is based on a view of human communication as a social science. As such, this course devotes some time at the beginning to look at the theoretical perspective of social science, ". . . how knowledge is created, the process of inquiry, the nature and elements of theory, the scientific method, philosophical issues and the like" (p. 57). As Donaghy notes, the major purpose of

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the course is to relate the study of communication theory to the study of other behavioral sciences.

As noted in the objectives section describing this approach, Donaghy's course is seen primarily as a course in which students are introduced to a group of selected theories about human communication, asked to become familiar with the basic concepts, issues and terminologies of a social scientific perspective, and then apply this knowledge in practical communication situations (p. 58). The course is taught as a lecture, with students responsible for readings, note-taking, some in-class activities, quizzes and formal examinations (pp. 63-64).

Donaghy's description of this introductory communication theory course may not necessarily be typical, but it is enlightening. Communication theory is grounded in the social sciences, though as Donaghy notes, the text he most commonly uses, Stephen Littlejohn's, does include communicative theories (Foucault, Derrida) that are not at home in the social sciences. This course is also primarily a course in knowledge acquisition, comprehension and application, and its lecture format prohibits much if any critical analysis of the material, at least as part of a class activity.

Hickson and Stacks (1993) offer an additional model for the teaching of communication theory. Like Donaghy, their approach is grounded in a social scientific perspective that pictures communication theory as a set of tools which students can utilize to ". . . know why certain communication strategies provide the best results, how to obtain the best possible communication outcome, and in general how to predict how their and others' communication will be received" (p. 261)<sup>1</sup>. Hickson and Stacks argue that in teaching commu-

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<sup>1</sup>As a means to understand a perspective that is not grounded in a social science framework, contrast Hickson and Stacks' view of the purpose of studying communication theory with another perspective on communication, that of Jacques Derrida. A very concise description of the theory of deconstruction offers the idea that deconstruction is the study of

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nication theory, there are seven basic questions which need to be addressed (p. 263). These questions arise from the social scientific framework adopted by the authors, and basically require students to comprehend the history and use of these theories.

Hickson, Stacks and Hill (1991) acknowledge the need to go beyond the basic assumptions of the different theoretical perspectives, but argue that the basic course in communication theory is not the place for this more critical perspective. The basic course, they state, should provide ". . . a treatment that is deep enough to provide the major assumptions and critical knowledge needed to understand a particular theory or approach, and sufficient to provide a base from which the student can move to more advanced treatments of the material" (p. xiii).

The problem with this approach, at least from the perspective adopted in this essay, is that simply requiring students to master the basic assumptions without providing them the skills to question those assumptions has the potential to lead students to understand communication only from those assumptions. The critical perspective is not only left untouched, it is dampened. More "advanced treatments of the material" would probably only mean more advanced treatments starting with the same assumptions, such as those that argue that the purpose of studying communication is to make better predictions about communicative behaviors (pp. xiii-xiv).

Another textbook designed for the introductory course in communication theory is Em Griffen's *A First Look at Com-*

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"the impossibility of anyone writing or saying . . . something that is perfectly clear . . . [and] of constructing a theory or method of inquiry that will answer all questions . . ." (Stephens, 1994, p. 23). If communication theory *begins* from a perspective that privileges and even assumes the explanatory and predictive nature of communication, then there is little room left for theories that argue against this explanatory and predictive nature.



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*munication Theory* (1994). Like Stacks, Hickson and Hill, Griffen argues for the need to place communication theory at the beginning of a student's study of communication. And like Stacks, Hickson, and Hill, Griffen argues for teaching introductory communication theory as primarily a course in knowledge acquisition. As Griffen notes, ". . . before students can integrate the leading ideas in our field, they need to have a clear understanding of what the theories are" (xvii). While Griffen is less apparent in a preference for a social scientific perspective than are Stacks, et. al., this preference is still there in his statement that these different communication theories should be integrated. The search for a meta-theory for communication studies is a search usually more closely associated with a social scientific perspective than with a humanistic perspective, as many humanistic perspectives, especially those that are loosely grouped under any number of "post-" headings, actively oppose the idea of meta-theory.

To briefly summarize, the standard approach to the teaching of communication theory is primarily an approach that emphasizes the transmission, comprehension and application of theoretical bodies of knowledge, knowledge that is approached as a "thing" to be studied, not primarily as a way of study. Additionally, the preferred approach to communication theory is the social scientific approach, which treats communication as a body of knowledge to be studied through a scientific lens in order to discover how the world works. The world is *a priori* accepted as the site for studying communicative behaviors, and at least part of the purpose of communication theory is to discover the *a priori* nature of both the physical and social world. Of course, this brief discussion can not deal with all of the complexities of these theoretical perspectives, but it does offer a starting point for further discussion.

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## PART TWO: A PROPOSAL

Leonard Hawes (1975) presents one proposal for a different approach to communication theory. Hawes explains, in response to a criticism from Lawrence Grossberg and Daniel J. O'Keefe (1975), his attempt to build a "human science" of communication by creating a rapprochement between objectivist/empiricist and subjectivist/phenomenological epistemologies.<sup>2</sup> For Hawes, the basic distinction between social scientists operating from an objectivist/empiricist orientation and those operating from a subjectivist/phenomenological orientation is not necessarily in their epistemological approaches nor in their goals (p. 213). Both groups utilize various versions of the scientific method, and both aim to develop objectively verifiable theories. The difference lies in the origination of the data.

Those social scientists operating from the objectivist/empiricist orientation start with an *a priori* conception of both the physical and social world; those social scientists operating from the subjectivist/phenomenological orientation accept the *a priori* physical world, but not the social world. The task of Hawes, then, is to demonstrate the manner in which those social scientists operating from the subjectivist/phenomenological orientation transform subjective behaviors and actions into objective data (p. 214).

Hawes discusses the work of the subjectivist/phenomenological oriented social scientist Alfred Schutz in demonstrating the manner in which subjective data can be transformed into objective data. Schutz uses the technique of typification. In observing the actions and behaviors of human beings, social scientists (and all others who operate in an intersubjective world) are unable to exactly understand and

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<sup>2</sup>For the original exposition of this approach, see Hawes, 1973, "Elements of a Model for Communication Processes"

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interpret those subjective behaviors. So in order to make sense of these subjective behaviors (and therefore transform them into objective data), we transform the actions and behaviors into "types" of behaviors so as to be able to assign meaning to these behaviors. As Hawes puts it, "we construct ideal types of typical others who enact typical courses-of-action" (p. 212).

Hawes program for creating a rapprochement between these two different perspectives on communication theory and research is important in understanding the need for a shift in the teaching of the basic course in communication theory. As Hawes notes, even those social scientists who operate from such seemingly disparate worlds as objectivist/empiricist and subjectivist/phenomenological share some of the same assumptions and the same goals. Even with an understanding of communication utilizing this epistemological rapprochement, the field of communication theory will still be interpreted through one dominant paradigm, that of the social scientist interested in "the connection of events in the social world" (p. 215). Such a perspective constrains and strongly predetermines the interpretation of human communication and the generally accepted view of how humans relate to each other and their world. It still makes it difficult to take a critical perspective on communication theory.

Why is it important that communication theory instruction take on a more critical aspect? Jo Sprague (1990), offers one answer. She identifies four fundamental goals of education in general and communication education in particular: transmitting cultural knowledge, developing students' intellectual skills, providing students with career skills, and reshaping the values of society (pp. 19-22). In providing a more critical aspect to the instruction of communication theory, we are allowed to go beyond the concept of simple transmission of knowledge (goal #1 ) to a more intellectually and philosophically demanding goal: Reshaping the values of society. It is important to note here, as Sprague does, that this

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goal does not require nor imply that what is being called for here is revolution or revolt. Though Sprague cites Paolo Friere as one model for teaching, she also notes that this approach to communication has a long, classical history, a history that grounds it more in the tradition of standard critical thinking than in the tradition of revolutionary thinking (though often times critical thinking can and does lead to revolutionary thoughts).

Teaching communication theory from a more critical perspective does not eliminate the other three educational goals that Sprague cites. To truly critique, to truly offer an informed position on a body of knowledge or on a theoretical perspective, it is necessary to attempt to understand that perspective in its original form. Therefore, it is still necessary to instruct students about the original theory. Critique without knowledge is polemic. Providing a more critical perspective to the teaching of communication theory also enhances the remaining two goals. Since critique requires comprehension of material, as well as synthesis and evaluation (Bloom, 1956), students in courses where communication theory is taught from a critical perspective are required to develop and employ more complex intellectual skills.

These are important reasons for the teaching of communication theory from a more critical perspective. We also need to teach communication theory from a more critical perspective because of what we are learning about how theories operate (not only in communication, but in all the disciplines) and how language operates to not only uncover and transmit knowledge, but to produce and reproduce knowledge. Without a critical perspective, such production and reproduction of knowledge occurs without the questioning to which it should be subjected.

Along with many other contemporary theorists of language and culture, Michel Foucault has drawn attention to the manner in which what we traditionally perceive of as "knowledge," and, more specifically, what we consider within

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our own disciplines to be coherent and cohesive theories, are not natural occurrences. The connections that we take for granted between the different elements of a seemingly cohesive theory are connections that have been made by us, not necessarily connections that simply exist a priori our discovery of them.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault addresses this issue by focusing on his own discipline, history. The focus is on what appears to be an opposition between what we know as history (the study of long-term continuative themes) and the history of ideas, which seems fixed on the discontinuities in the study of ideas. This distinction becomes less apparent when one notices that both trends are focused on the documents of history, the "texts" of history. These texts are what we are studying, and the battle is really over determining the appropriate way to choose, select, modify, study and define a "text." For Foucault, the study of history (or the study of any discipline) is not simply discovering any immutable relations between histories, or within a specific history. The study of history and other disciplines is the study of how and why these connections are made, and why these connections have been given the appearance of immutability (p. 15).

Foucault challenges all academics to question, at least, and dissolve, if possible, the standard connections between ideas and events that we have taken for granted, ideas such as linearity, influence, intention, causality, and the discrete and autonomous individual. Once we have dissolved, or "held in suspense," these standard connections, we are then free to form new connections, to examine the conditions which lead to the formation and reproduction of these standard connections, and to explore the ramifications of these "taken-for-granted" connections on how we have studied and taught our own disciplines.

We are asked, in effect, to look at much of what we have looked at before, but without the theoretical perspectives that gave meaning to these occurrences and phenomenon. We are

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asked to look anew at numerous occurrences of human behavior without the automatic assumptions of causality, intention or influence (pp. 28-29). It may well be that we find that many of these concepts remain important in our study, but we will then have created these connections through study, rather than beginning our study with these connections.

Shifting our study from using these automatic assumptions to questioning connections and searching for connections is more than just changing what we take for granted. It is also a process of changing what we are looking for. The purpose of study would not be simply the discovery of connections, but would also be to discover the rules by which these connections ("discursive formations") are and have been made, what Foucault calls the "rules of formation" (p. 38). And this study would be focused on language, on discourse, for it is in our discourse that we create these connections. As Foucault notes time and time again, these connections are not immutable, are not part of a Platonic world in which ideal forms are awaiting our discovery. These connections are the result of practices and procedures, the "rules of formation," that each discipline employs, that academic practices in technological and scientific cultures live by, and that, by and large, remain unquestioned.

What this means to the study and teaching of communication theory is at once both basic and far-reaching. As noted above, much of what we do in teaching communication theory is based on the acceptance and transmission of many of these automatic assumptions. At the root of many of the theories of contemporary communication lie such assumptions as linearity, rationality, causality, influence, and the autonomous subject. So at least at the basic level we can see that what this approach would require is a refocusing of our pedagogical efforts: A shift in emphasis from the transmission of received knowledge to a study of how this material came to be received knowledge; a shift in emphasis from the study of

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the application of these theories to a study of reasons why these theories were developed and employed in specific circumstances; and a shift in emphasis from knowledge, comprehension, and application, to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Beyond these basic changes would be a new focus on communication theory. A shift from studying communication as a reflection of what we know and how we can manipulate this knowledge, to studying communication primarily as a constitutive element in the construction of knowledge, as a means by which we come to know how we know, rather than what we know.

These shifts in emphasis have been called for by others in the field of communication. Karl Erik Rosengren (1989), in discussing whether or not communication theory can accurately be described as encompassing a paradigm (a set of rules about procedures, practices and accepted methodologies) argues for the need to question those elements of paradigmatic thought that are most assumed, or most taken-for-granted. Rosengren goes further, and claims that the very act of questioning, or criticism, of these paradigmatic assumptions is a positive and even necessary step for academic growth (pp. 25-26).

Stuart Hall (1989) has also called for a rethinking of the manner in which communication theory is practiced (and therefore taught). Hall has offered a critique of what he describes as the "dominant paradigm" of communication. Along with this critique, Hall calls for a transition to a "critical paradigm," acknowledging that this "paradigm" is only a loose confederation of approaches, a "looseness" of which he approves. This transition would involve, among other elements, a shift from the isolated, behavioristic, experimental approach to the study of human communication, to a context-laden and context-bound theory of human communication:

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. . . an understanding of each element's cultural aspect, its semiotic or discursive character; an awareness that the media function in and through the domain of meaning. There is no "message" that is already there in reality, that reality possesses exclusively and unproblematically, that language and other media systems. as transcriptive relay systems, can simply transpose into the blank minds and consciousness of their receivers. Meaning is polysemic in its intrinsic nature; it remains inextricably context-bound (p. 47).

What Hall is calling for, in other words, is what Foucault called for earlier: An understanding of the constitutive function of discourse to produce and reproduce what we call knowledge. The elements of the dominant paradigm that Hall critiques are elements that have remained largely unquestioned, and have, through the discourse of the communication discipline, become received knowledge, become taken-for-granted, become the paradigmatic rules that, according to Hall, both guide the study of communication phenomenon and, to a large extent, dictate the results of that study. As Hall phrases it: ". . . I believe that paradigms think people as much as people think paradigms" (p. 40). Hall wants, therefore, a communication theory that assumes little and questions much, that focuses not on assumed theory and the teaching of that theory as a practice of "transcriptive relay systems," but on the critical assessment of communicative practices.

What does this shift in emphasis, this move to a critical perspective, mean for the classroom instruction of communication theory? As noted above, the traditional model of communication theory has hewed closely to what Hall and others have described as the dominant paradigm, heavy on communication as a social science, heavy on theory as the accumulated knowledge of the past, heavy on theory as the necessary first steps for the study of the future.



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First, a shift to a more critical approach does not mean the dismissal and denial of the past. nor of the view of communication as a social science. It will involve a new understanding of the term "social" science, a term more in line with the understanding of what Giddens (1989) means by a "social" science. A shift to a more critical approach will require, first and foremost, exactly what Hawes asked for in 1977: A solid understanding of what is to be critiqued. Without a knowledge of the subject matter under analysis, the analysis is worthless. Thus, in the classroom, students will still need to become familiar with the basic principles of traditional theories of communication.

Secondly, such a shift does not mean that the communication theory course become nothing more than a trashing ground for the dominant paradigm. Critique is not synonymous with disparagement; critique is better understood as reasoned skepticism, even something more akin to Wayne Booth's (1974) "rhetoric of assent" (p. 40). A critical approach is an approach that questions traditional assumptions, and those questions may well provide answers that reinforce the assumptions. But they will then be answers after analysis, not assumptions before the search.

Third, such a shift will have a practical impact on the manner of instruction in courses on communication theory, especially those courses which function as the basic course in communication and enroll large numbers of students in lecture-hall formats (Trank, 1990, p. 411). A critical approach to communication theory simply cannot take place in a lecture hall, a format designed for the transmission of received knowledge, not the questioning of such knowledge (Allen, Wilmington and Sprague, 1991, p. 266). If administrative and budgetary considerations require such a format, then the use of graduate or undergraduate teaching assistants and/or discussion leaders will be essential.

More specifically, a shift to a critical approach to communication theory can be employed in a traditional classroom

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setting (25-35 students), and can even take place utilizing existing texts designed for the introductory communication theory course as it currently exists. The major change will be a move from a classroom designed around just the understanding and application of communication theories, to a classroom centered on five elements: 1 ) discovering the assumptions supporting a communication theory; 2) discovering the connection between this theory of communication and a theory of human knowledge; 3) critically analyzing the assumptions which support the theory and the connection between the communication theory and the theory of knowledge; 4) attempting to understand the reasons why this theory and its supporting assumptions have become received knowledge; 5) understanding the implications of this theory of communication as it effects theories of human development, thought and behavior.

This emphasis may require that we cover fewer theories in our introductory course, but since the emphasis will now be on critique rather than simple comprehension, the number of theories covered will be less important than the method used to teach critical analysis. Additionally, this approach will force us to be more selective in deciding which theories are most appropriate and most necessary for the purposes of our students, and that will depend on the mission and goals of our own departments and our own teaching philosophies.

The shift can be as simple as an addition to the questions that we ask our students to ask about communication theory and that we help them learn how to answer. Infante, Rancer, and Womack (1993), for example, ask these four questions: What are theories?; Why do scientists create and modify them?; How may theories be compared?; and How may theories be evaluated? I would add the following questions to this list, and would devote at least equal time in the classroom to helping students learn how to answer them:

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1. What assumptions support each theory or group of theories?
2. What does each theory have to say about the following:
  - a. The nature of knowledge
  - b. The relationship between language and knowledge
3. If we utilize these theories to study human behavior, what must we assume about human behavior?
4. If we assume these things, how will that affect the results of our study?
5. If we assume these things, what will our studies say about human beings?
6. If we utilize these theories based on these assumptions, to what use will or might our results be put?

A brief example might make this shift in emphasis a bit more clear. Griffen (pp. 344-353) provides a concise discussion of George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory. This theory, as a reminder, claims a positive causal relationship between the amount of television viewing and perception of a violent world. Griffen presents the basic terminology of this theoretical perspective, a summary of the research findings, and a short critique of both the methodology and the findings: In short, how the study was done, what the results were, and questions for further study; a familiar model from many of our academic journals.

Griffen offers a convenient approach to treating communication theory from a more critical perspective. In essence, shifting the study of communication theory from a perspective focused upon comprehension and application of a theory to a perspective focused upon comprehension and *questioning* of a theory is as simple as shifting the emphasis from a study of the findings (still needed) to a study of the methodology and

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assumptions supporting the entire theory. Five additional questions to be considered when studying communication theory were listed above. To begin to answer them in brief should provide a better picture of what the study of communication theory would look like following a more critical perspective.

What assumption(s) support this theory? Griffen provides us with a bit of this answer. Cultivation theory is designed to offer an "objective measure" of the level of TV violence (p. 345); the pervasive nature of television has made the entire society into "consumers" of this material (p. 346); people are either "light" or "heavy" users of television (p. 346); and people are, in essence, captives of television, unable to exercise much choice or critical understanding of television (p. 351). The critical student of communication theory would need to spend more time studying these assumptions, which would then lead to the other additional questions asked of these theories.

What does each theory have to say about the nature of knowledge and the relationship between language and knowledge? By better understanding (and questioning) the basic assumptions of the theory, students of communication theory would be in a better position to consider the role that language plays in the transmission and/or creation of knowledge. Students should be able to see that Gerbner's theory can be understood both as a case of language creating reality (a perception of fear) or as reflecting reality (the concept of resonance).

Understanding the basic assumptions of Gerbner's theory and methodology can also help students answer the question about the particular theoretical perspective and its assumptions about human behavior. Gerbner seems to be claiming that human behavior is primarily stimulus-response: Television shows violence; people watch television; people believe the world is a violent place and act accordingly. While this may be a plausible explanation for human behavior, students

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of communication theory should at least be encouraged to understand this assumption and realize that this assumption is a necessary one if this theory is to be valid.

Finally, better understanding the assumptions of the particular theoretical perspective (along with, of course, the methodology and findings) would allow students to go beyond comprehension and application to evaluation, and would allow them to attempt to answer the question about the possible uses (and misuses) of theory. Gerbner's model is very much a part of the academic and popular debate about television, violence, and possible government control of television content. In understanding not only what Gerbner's study has found, but also the manner in which the study was accomplished and the assumptions which made the study possible, students will be in a better position to critically evaluate the use of these findings.

This last element of this shift in the study of communication theory is the most essential. In a sense, this adds a layer of critical reflection in between comprehension and application. Students do more than learn and apply; they now learn, critique, and then consider if the theory is still viable and the application is still worthwhile. This layer of critical reflection is why a shift in the study of communication theory is just a shift, not a complete change in direction. This shift deepens our knowledge, and asks of both teacher and student a more careful consideration of the material being studied.

I believe that this shift offers a chance to strengthen the introductory course in communication theory. Asking and attempting to answer such questions as those listed above will require higher-level intellectual ability on the part of our students. Not only will students be required to comprehend and apply these theories, they will be required to critically analyze these theories, to consider all the elements of theoretical thought that passes unquestioned.

Certainly, instructors employing the texts discussed above and focusing on introducing students to a variety of theories

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can also teach students to critique, but the emphasis placed on the transmission of knowledge without the criticism of such knowledge makes that job more difficult. The standard texts focus on standard theories: their construction, principles and applications. Teaching from these texts predisposes us to focus on the same elements. As Kenneth Burke (1973) has reminded us: Form influences function. We need, as teachers of communication theory, to make a conscious effort to go beyond teaching just comprehension. To teach critique, to require students to develop their full intellectual capabilities, is what an introductory communication theory course can and should accomplish.

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