

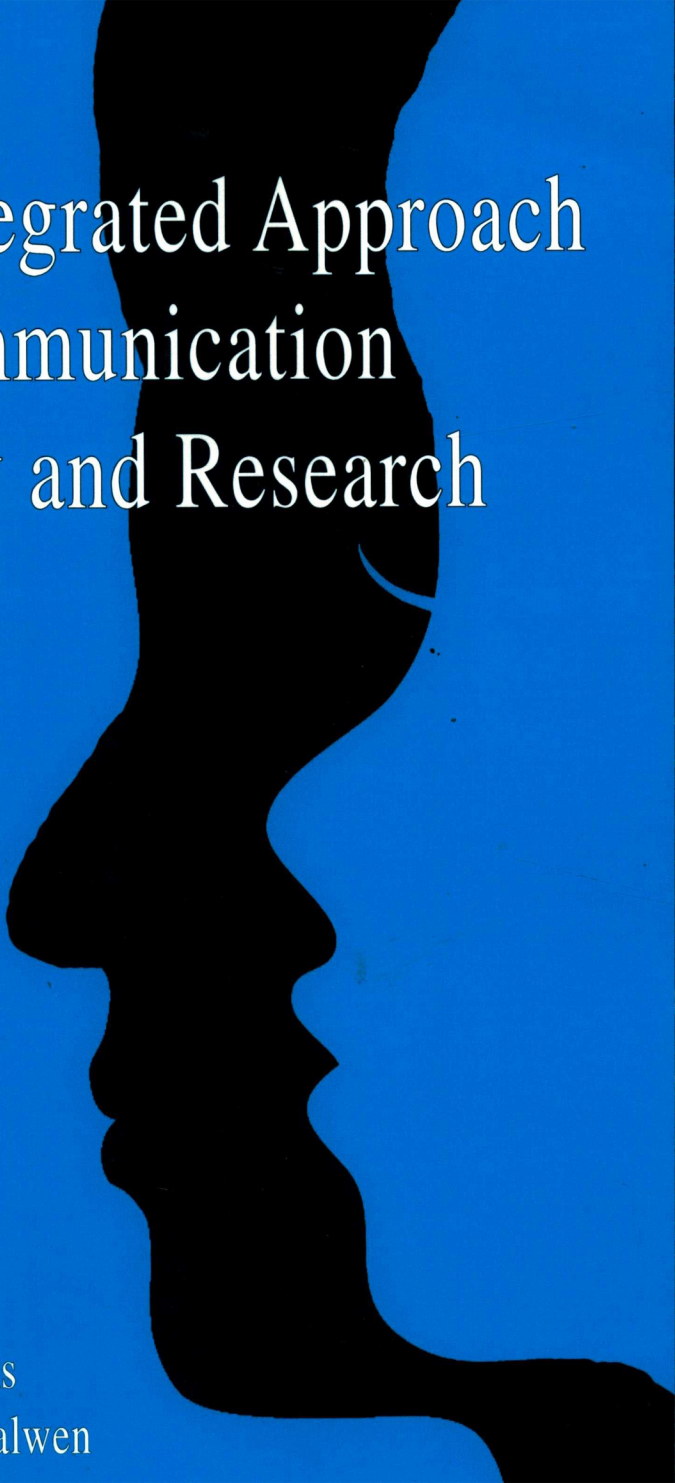
Second Edition

# An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research

Edited by

Don W. Stacks

Michael B. Salwen



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Second Edition

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*Michael B. Salwen*

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published by  
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates,  
10 Industrial Avenue  
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430

Reprinted 2010 by Routledge

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group  
711 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10017

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group  
2 Park Square  
Milton Park, Abingdon  
Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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Typeset in Goudy by EvS Communication Network, Inc.

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*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

An integrated approach to communication theory and research / edited by Don W. Stacks and Michael B. Salwen. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

1. Communication—Methodology. 2. Mass media—Methodology. I. Stacks, Don W. II. Salwen, Michael Brian.

P91.1558 2008

302.201—dc22

2008016359

ISBN 10: 0-8058-6381-8 (hbk)

ISBN 10: 0-8058-6382-6 (pbk)

ISBN 10: 0-203-88701-8 (ebk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-8058-6381-9 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-8058-6382-6 (pbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-203-88701-1 (ebk)



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## PREFACE TO THE 1996 EDITION

### The Integrative Process

This volume focuses on *integrating* theory and research in communication study. The terms "theory" and "research" are often linked together, like bread and butter, bagel and cream cheese, or speech communication and mass communication. It is stating the obvious to say that theory and research should be similarly linked together. Despite the obviousness of this statement, it comments on our field that a volume such as this that links communication theory and research in the same chapters is needed.

Our purpose in editing this volume is to provide both seasoned scholars and beginning students unfamiliar with the state of theory and research in various areas of communication study to provide a taste, a sampler if you will, of current theory and research in communication. To explicate the integration process, the chapter contributors, experts in their respective areas, offer sample studies in the form of hypothetical studies, published studies, or unpublished research, showing how theory and research are integrated in their particular areas.

The idea for this book grew out of a series of informal discussions between the coeditors by the water cooler, in the photocopy room, in the hallway, by the coffee machine, and outside faculty mailboxes. In these discussions, we complained about the difficulty of teaching communication students communication theory and research. As with many programs, theory and research are taught in the University of Miami's School of Communication as separate courses. This clean curricular separation, however, bears no resemblance to how the courses are actually taught. Faculty who teach communication theory often digress into a discussion on research methods to make sense of exemplar studies. This is no small matter; sometimes an entire theory class is devoted to discussions of research methods. Likewise, faculty who teach research methods have—out of necessity—had to bring discussion of theory into their courses. It was clear that the teachers were not to blame for this situation; the curriculum was at fault. In attempting to alleviate the problem of linking theory and research in communication study, we were astounded to find that no single volume attacked the problem of linking theory and research in communication studies. Some volumes examine the human and speech communication areas, whereas others focus on the mass communication areas—but none could be found that combine both areas under the rubric *communication*.

We do not claim that this book will resolve the difficulties regarding the distinction between theory and research in general, and communication theory and research in particular. We are not arguing for a wholesale revamping in communication curriculum to integrate theory and research, for we realize how easy it is to advocate curricular change but how difficult it is to effect change in practice. The purpose is simply to explicitly recognize that theory and research are related and must be addressed together even in courses that involve largely theory or largely research.

While the book was in progress, we extended the integration process to address issues regarding the integration of mass and speech communication, what we call human communication. To do otherwise would have defied our purpose of leaving the reader with an appreciation of current theory and research in the various areas of communication study. It is important that all communication scholars, no matter what their areas, have some familiarity with the broader field. The state of communication study is such that most researchers are trained in either mass or human communication and, as a result, have a certain way of approaching communication or are more familiar with one area than the other.

In editing the book we wrestled with the best way of organizing the various theoretical approaches to communication. We originally opted for the traditional bifurcation of *communication* into mass communication and human communication, and, to some extent, we have followed this course. Part I examines general questions related to theory and research methodology. Part II examines important theoretical approaches to mass communication. Part III does the same with human communication approaches.

As we quickly learned, this bifurcation does not lend itself well to communication study. As we enter the 21st century, with new media technologies that do not fit neatly into either mass communication or human categories, the bifurcation promises to raise more problems. Therefore, while we were editing the book, we invited Kathleen Reardon and Emmeline G. de Pillis to write a lead chapter for an additional section, Part IV, to cover chapters that we were having particular difficulty classifying into sections, those that crossed the traditional divide between mass and human communication.

Even in the sections in which we classified chapters as mass or human communication, we recognize that others might have classified them differently. Our decisions were admittedly subjective, but not arbitrary. The decisions were based partly on how the contributors approached their chapters. In this regard, we might have placed the chapters in different sections had they been written in different ways. For example, it might seem traditional to place advertising and public relations back to back (the two are often grouped together, like theory and research); but we decided that the advertising chapter took a more traditional mass communication approach, while the public relations chapter addressed issues involving organizational communication, and therefore we placed it in Part IV, *Integrated Approaches*. Likewise, persuasive communication is an area of interest in both mass and human communication, but the chapter contributors took more of what we regarded as a human communication approach. Similarly, as the contributors of the chapter on the spiral of silence themselves noted, the model involves the interaction of both human communication as well as mass communication. But because of the chapter's emphasis on mass communication, it was placed in the mass communication section. The political communication chapter also took a largely mass communication approach.

Our point here—by noting our difficulties in classifying the chapters—is to emphasize the *artificiality* of the bifurcation. As editors, we treated the bifurcation as a convenient means of organizing a book, for a book must have organization. And practically speaking, despite the noted occasional problems, most chapters fit the bifurcation fairly well. Further, the bifurcation reflects a reality of communication study today which we would have been foolish to ignore. Still, our decision to bifurcate mass and human communication should not blind us to the similarities shared by all the areas of communication study.

In keeping with the difficulty in distinguishing mass and human communication, we invited Tony Atwater and Gustav W. Friedrich, former heads of leading mass (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) and human (Speech Communication Association) communication associations, respectively, to offer their thoughts in the final section, Part V, on where communication theory and research is going.

We are not so naive as to believe that this book will lead to a unified field of *communication*