2 THEORY DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

1. Describe the differences between inductive theory and deductive theory, especially in terms of the theory development process

2. Articulate the differences between primary and secondary research

3. Explain the major research methods used by communication theorists, including what they reveal and what they conceal about the communication process

4. Discuss the differences between humanistic and social scientific approaches to communication study

5. Summarize the ways theories change and grow

In Chapter 1, we defined theory as "any systematic summary about the nature of the communication process." We further introduced the topic of scholarly theory, which is different from other forms of theory because it has been carefully researched. The focus of this chapter is on the methods by which scholarly theories are created, developed, and modified. Our first concern is the nature of how theory and research are related.

THEORY–RESEARCH LINK

As much as we would like to provide a simple answer to how theory and research are linked, we can't easily articulate the connection because of debate about the theory–research relationship akin to the classic question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" In this case, scholars disagree as to what starts the process: theory or research.

Some scholars argue that research comes before theory. This approach is known as **inductive theory**. Scholars using inductive theory, also known as grounded theory, believe the best theories emerge from the results of systematic study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). That is, these scholars observe or examine a particular topic, and, based on patterns that emerge over time,

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they develop a theory; the research comes *before* the theory. If someone wanted to develop a theory about how management style affects employee performance, then that person would study management style and employee performance in great depth before proposing a theory. Preliminary theories may be proposed, but the data continue to be collected and analyzed until adding new data brings little to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon or situation.

On the other hand, some scholars believe in **deductive theory**. Deductive theory is generally associated with the scientific method (Reynolds, 1971). The deductive approach requires that a hypothesis, or working theory, be developed before any research is conducted. Once the theory has been developed, the theorist then collects data to test or refine the theory (i.e., to support or reject the hypothesis). What follows is a constant set of adjustments to the theory with additional research conducted until evidence in support of the theory is overwhelming. The resulting theory is known as a law (Reynolds, 1971). In short, deductive theory development starts with the theory and then looks at data. As an example, a researcher might start with the idea that supportive management styles lead to increased employee performances. The researcher would then seek to confirm his or her theory by collecting data about those variables.

As indicated earlier, these two approaches represent different starting points to what is in essence a "chicken or the egg" argument. But neither approach advocates a single cycle of theorizing or research. Instead, both approaches suggest theories are dynamic—they are modified as the data suggest, and data are reviewed to adjust the theory. Consider the model depicted in Figure 2.1. We believe this is the most accurate illustration of the link between theory and research. In this model, the starting points are different, but the reality of a repetitive loop between theory and research is identified.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ The Theory–Research Link

Deductive

Theory

Research

Inductive
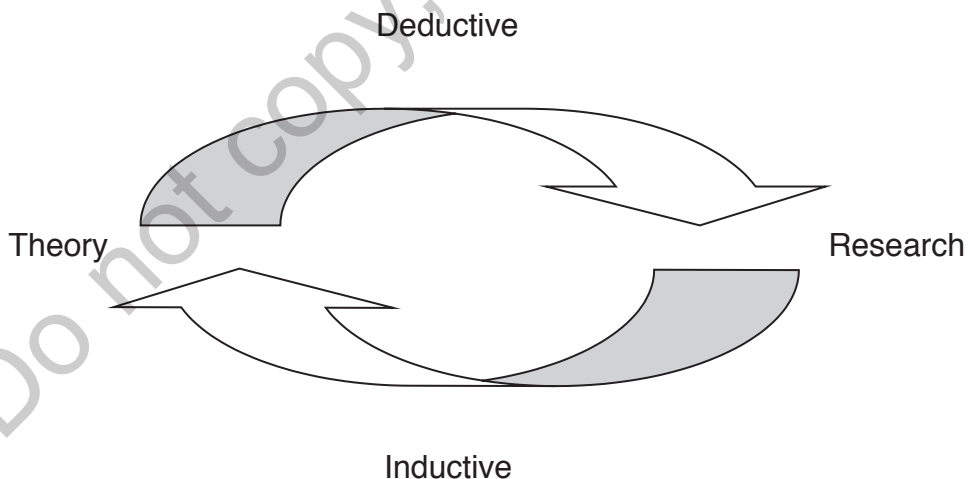
WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Because research is a fundamental part of theory development, we must turn our attention to the question of what counts as research. Frey et al. (2002) described research as "disciplined inquiry that involves studying something in a planned manner and reporting it so that other inquirers can potentially replicate the process if they choose" (p. 13). Accordingly, we do not mean informal types of research, such as reflections on personal experience, off-the-cuff interviews with acquaintances, or casual viewing of communication media. When we refer to research, we mean the methodical gathering of data as well as the careful reporting of the results of the data analysis.

Note that *how* the research is reported differentiates two categories of research. **Primary research** is reported by the person who conducted it. It is typically published in peer-reviewed academic journals. **Secondary research** is reported by someone other than the person who conducted it. This is research reported in newspapers, popular or trade magazines, handbooks and textbooks, and the Internet. Certainly, there is value to the dissemination of research through these media. Textbooks, for example, can summarize hundreds of pages of research in a compact and understandable fashion. The Internet can reach billions of people. Trade magazines can pinpoint the readers who may benefit most from the results of the research. Regardless of whether the source is popular or academic, however, primary research is typically valued more than secondary research as a source of information. With secondary research, readers risk the chance that the writers have misunderstood or inadvertently distorted the results of the research. Similar to the childhood game of "whisper down the lane," the message typically becomes more vague and less accurate as it gets passed from person to person—or website to website.

RESEARCH METHODS IN COMMUNICATION

Every 60 seconds over 15 million texts are sent, 210 million emails are sent, almost 700,000 videos are viewed on TikTok, and there are over 4 million Google© searches (Chaffey, 2021). Those figures are for *every* minute of *every* day. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2020), teens spent approximately 9 hours a day looking at a screen *before* the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, this number likely rose significantly. These are astonishing numbers. It is clear that we are inundated with information. But what value does this information have? The proliferation of verifiably fake news (i.e., flagrant untruths), as well as hyperpartisan stories intended to pander to readers' preexisting beliefs, makes information literacy more important than ever. Even if you never conduct a research study in your life, knowing which information has been methodically collected and reported accurately will undoubtedly help you make more informed personal and professional decisions. This section focuses on the four research methods commonly used in the development of scholarly communication theory. When reading about these methods, pay particular attention to the

types of information revealed and concealed by each method. This approach will allow you to be a better consumer of research.

Experiments

When people think of experiments, they often have flashbacks to high school chemistry classes. People are often surprised that communication scholars also use experiments, even though there isn't a Bunsen burner or beaker in sight. What makes something an experiment has nothing to do with the specific equipment or instruments involved; rather, experimentation is ultimately concerned with control. It is important to emphasize that an **experiment** is the *only* research method that allows researchers to conclude that one thing causes another. For example, if you are interested in determining whether friendly customer service causes greater customer satisfaction, whether advertisers' use of bright colors produces higher sales, or whether sexuality in film leads to a more promiscuous society, the only way to determine these things is through experimental research.

Experimental research allows researchers to determine potential causes and effects because experiments are so controlled. In experimental research, the researcher is concerned with two variables. A **variable** is simply any concept that has two or more values (Frey et al., 2002). Sex is a variable because we have men and women. Note that just looking at maleness is not a variable because there is only one value associated with it; it doesn't *vary*, so it isn't a *variable*. Masculinity is considered a variable, however, because you can be highly masculine, moderately masculine, nonmasculine, and so on.

Returning to our discussion of experimental research, then, the research is concerned with two variables. One of the variables is the presumed cause. This is known as the **independent variable**. The other is the presumed effect. This is known as the **dependent variable**. If you are interested in knowing whether bright colors in advertisements cause increased sales, your independent variable is the color (bright versus dull), and the dependent variable is the amount of sales dollars (more, the same, or less). The way the researcher determines causality is by carefully controlling the study participants' exposure to the independent variable. This control is known as **manipulation**, a term that commonly conjures negative connotations but in the research world is imperative to establishing causality. In the study of advertisements just described, the researcher would expose some people to an advertisement that used bright colors and other people to an advertisement that used dull colors, and then they would observe the effects on sales based on these manipulations.

Experiments take place in two settings. A **laboratory experiment** takes place in a controlled setting so the researcher might better control efforts at manipulation. In the communication field, laboratories often simulate living rooms or conference rooms. Typically, however, they have two-way mirrors and cameras mounted on the walls to record what happens. For example, John Gottman has a mini "apartment" at the University of Washington. He has married couples "move in" to the apartment during the course of a weekend, and he observes all of their interaction during that weekend.

Some experiments don't take place in the laboratory but in participants' natural surroundings; these are called **field experiments**. These experiments often take place in public places,

such as shopping malls, libraries, or schools, but they might take place in private areas as well. In all cases, participants must agree to be a part of the experiment to comply with ethical standards set by educational and research institutions.

Surveys

The most common means of studying communication is through the use of surveys. Market research, audience analysis, and organizational audits all make use of surveys. Unlike experiments, the use of surveys does not allow researchers to claim one thing causes another. The strength of **survey research** is that it is the *only* way to find out how someone thinks, feels, or intends to behave. In other words, surveys capture people's perception. If you want to know what people think about your organization, how they feel about a social issue, or whether they intend to buy a product after viewing an advertising spot you created, you need to conduct a survey.

In general, there are two types of survey research. An **interview** asks participants to respond orally. It might take place face-to-face or over the phone. One special type of interview is a **focus group**, which is when the interviewer (called a facilitator) leads a small group of people in a discussion about a specific product or program (Frey et al., 2002). A **questionnaire** asks participants to respond in writing. It can be distributed by mail, via the Internet, or administered with the researcher present. Some research is more suited for interviews than questionnaires. Interviews allow the researcher to ask more complex questions because they can clarify misunderstandings through probing questions. Questionnaires, however, might be more appropriate for the collection of sensitive information because they provide more anonymity to the respondent (Salant & Dillman, 1994).

The key concepts associated with any type of survey research are questioning and sampling. First, the purpose of a survey is quite simple: to ask questions of a group of people to understand their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Questions might take two forms. **Open-ended questions** allow respondents to answer in their own words, giving as much (or as little) information as they would like. For example, a market researcher might ask study participants to describe what they like about a particular product. Or an interviewer might ask someone to respond to a hypothetical situation. **Closed-ended questions** require respondents to use set answers. In this case, a market researcher might say something like "Respond to the following statement: Product X is a useful product. Would you say you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?" Neither method is better than the other; the two types of questions simply provide different kinds of data that are analyzed using different means.

The second key concept associated with survey research is **sampling**. Researchers are typically concerned with large groups of people when they conduct surveys. These groups are known as a **population**, which means all people who possess a particular characteristic (Frey et al., 2002). For example, marketing firms want to study all possible consumers of a product. Newspaper publishers want to gather information from all readers. Pharmaceutical industries want to study everyone with a particular ailment. The size of these groups makes it difficult to study everyone of interest. Even if every member of the population could be identified, which isn't always the case, studying all of them can be extremely expensive.

Instead, survey researchers study a sample, or a small number of people in the population of interest. According to a basic premise in statistics known as the law of large numbers (LLN), if a sample is well selected and of sufficient size, the survey's results are likely also to hold true for the entire group. A **random sample**, in which every member of the target group has an equal chance of being selected, is better than a **nonrandom sample**, such as volunteers, a convenience sample (college students), or a purposive sample (people who meet a particular requirement, such as age, sex, or race). Essentially, a random sample of consumers is more likely to give representative information about brand preferences than a convenience sample, such as stopping people at the mall on a particular day to answer a few questions.

Textual Analysis

The third method used frequently by communication scholars is textual analysis. A text is any written or recorded message (Frey et al., 2002). Comments on a social media post, a transcript of a medical encounter, and an employee newsletter can all be considered texts. **Textual analysis** is used to uncover the content, nature, or structure of messages. It can also be used to evaluate messages, focusing on their strengths, weaknesses, effectiveness, or even ethicality. So textual analysis can be used to study the amount of violence on television, how power dynamics play out during doctor–patient intake evaluations, or how an organization responds to negative social media posts about their products or services.

There are three distinct forms textual analyses take in the communication discipline. **Rhetorical criticism** refers to "a systematic method for describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating the persuasive force of messages" (Frey et al., 2002, p. 229). There are numerous types of rhetorical criticism, including historical criticism (how history shapes messages), genre criticism (evaluating particular types of messages, such as political speeches or corporate image restoration practices), and feminist criticism (how beliefs about gender are produced and reproduced in messages).

Content analysis seeks to identify, classify, and analyze the occurrence of particular types of messages (Frey et al., 2002). It was developed primarily to study mass-mediated messages, although it is also used in numerous other areas of the discipline. For example, public relations professionals often seek to assess the type of coverage given to a client. Typically, content analysis involves four steps: the selection of a particular text (e.g., newspaper articles), the development of content categories (e.g., "favorable organizational coverage," "neutral organizational coverage," "negative organizational coverage"), placing the content into categories, and an analysis of the results. In our example, the results of this study would be able to identify whether a particular newspaper has a pronounced slant when covering the organization. One modern derivation of this type of research is **text mining**, also known as **data mining**. Data mining is the use of advanced "data analysis tools to discover previously unknown, valid patterns and relationships in large data sets" (Seifert, 2007, p. 2). Given the immense amount of information available on the Internet, organizations can use complex programs to sift through enormous amounts of data to uncover the frequency and uses of particular words or ideas. In addition, communication professionals also tend to use **data analytics**, which are "all activities related to gathering relevant social media data, analyzing the gathered data, and disseminating findings

as appropriate to support business activities such as intelligence gathering, insight generation, sense making, problem recognition/opportunity detection, problem solution/opportunity exploitation, and/or decision making" (Holsapple et al., 2014, p. 4).

The third type of textual analysis typically conducted by communication scholars is **interaction analysis** (also known as **conversation analysis**). These approaches typically focus on interpersonal or group communication interactions that have been recorded, with a specific emphasis on the nature or structure of interaction. The strength of this type of research is that it captures the natural give-and-take that is part of most communication experiences. The weakness of rhetorical criticism, content analysis, and interaction analysis is that *actual* effects on the audience can't be determined solely by focusing on texts.

Ethnography

Ethnography is the final research method used by scholars of communication. First used by anthropologists, **ethnography** typically involves the researcher immersing himself or herself into a particular culture or context to understand communication rules and meanings for that culture or context. For example, an ethnographer might study an organizational culture, such as Johnson & Johnson's corporate culture, or a particular context, such as communication in hospital emergency rooms. The key to this type of research is that it is naturalistic and emergent, which means it must take place in the natural environment for the group under study and the particular methods used adjusted on the basis of what is occurring in that environment.

Typically, those conducting ethnographies need to decide on the role they will play in the research. A **complete participant** is fully involved in the social setting, and the participants do not know the researcher is studying them (Frey et al., 2002). This approach, of course, requires the researcher to know enough about the environment to be able to fit in. Moreover, there are numerous ethical hurdles the researcher must overcome. Combined, these two challenges prevent much research from being conducted in this fashion. Instead, **participant–observer** roles are more frequently chosen. In this case, the researcher becomes fully involved with the culture or context, but they have admitted their research agenda before entering the environment. In this way, knowledge is gained firsthand by the researcher, but extensive knowledge about the culture is not necessarily a prerequisite (Frey et al., 2002). Researchers choosing this strategy may also elect which to emphasize more: participation or observation. Finally, a researcher may choose to be a **complete observer**. Complete observers do not interact with the members of the culture or context, which means they do not interview any of the members of the group under study. As such, this method allows for the greatest objectivity in recording data, while simultaneously limiting insight into participants' own meanings of the observed communication.

In short, Communication scholars use four primary research methods: experiments, which focus on causation and control; surveys, which focus on questioning and sampling; textual analysis, which focuses on the content, nature, or structure of messages; and ethnography, which focuses on the communication rules and meanings in a particular culture or context. A summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four methods is summarized in Table 2.1.

Because this textbook is oriented toward students who are likely to use theory and research in the professional realm, we wish to make clear that people who work in the professions also

TABLE 2.1 ■ Four Methods of Communication Research		
Research Method	**What It Reveals**	**What It Conceals**
Experiments	Cause and effect	Whether the cause–effect relationship holds true in less controlled environments
Surveys	Respondents' thoughts, feelings, and intentions	Cannot establish causality; cannot determine what people actually do
Textual analysis	The content, nature, and structure of messages	The effect of the message on receivers
Ethnography	Rules and meanings of communication in a culture or context	May provide a highly subjective (and therefore biased) view of the culture or context

use research, although that research is not used to develop scholarly theory (although it might be used to develop or refine a working theory). Marketing and public relations professionals, human resources executives, and managers in many industries conduct research as part of the creation and assessment of campaigns, for strategic planning, and for decision-making. Like academics, professionals also use experiments (typically for product testing), surveys (especially focus groups), textual analysis (especially media monitoring), and ethnographies of a sort (typically observations of how customers use a product).

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND THE HUMANITIES

Thus far, we have talked about the central role research plays in the development of theories and how research comes either before creating the theory (in the case of inductive theory development) or after (in the case of deductive theory development). The reason for these differing approaches can be traced back to philosophical divisions within the field of communication. Communication has been described as both an art and a science (Dervin, 1993). On one hand, we respect the power of a beautifully crafted and creatively designed advertisement. On the other hand, we look to hard numbers to support decisions about the campaign featuring that advertisement. Although art and science are integrally related in the everyday practice of communication, in the more abstract realm of theory the two are often considered distinct pursuits. This concept can be traced to distinctions between the academic traditions of the humanities (which includes the arts) and the social sciences.

You might have some ideas about the terms *humanistic* and *social scientific* because most college students are required to take some courses in each of these areas. The distinctions between the humanities and social science are based on more than just tradition; however, they are based on very different philosophical beliefs. The interpretation of meaning is of central concern in the humanities (Littlejohn, 2002). Meaning is presumed to be subjective and unique to the individual, even though meaning is likely influenced by social processes. For individuals

trained in the **humanistic approach**, **subjectivity** is a hallmark; one's own **interpretation** is of interest. Think about the study of English literature, a discipline at the heart of the humanities. English scholars study the interpretation of texts in an effort to understand the meaning of the object of study.

On the other hand, **objectivity** is a central feature of social science. Social scientists believe that through careful standardization (i.e., objectivity), researchers can observe patterns of communication that can hold true for all (or most) people, all (or most) of the time. These patterns that hold true across groups, time, and place are known as **generalizations**. To illustrate, psychology is a discipline rooted in the social sciences. As such, psychology scholars seek to explain general principles of how the human mind functions. These principles are intended to explain all people, all over the world, throughout history.

Because the humanities and social sciences have different areas of interest, they treat theory and research differently. Table 2.2 seeks to identify some of those distinctions. The first area of difference is the philosophical commitment to understanding the nature of human beings and the extent of their free will. Certainly, no one believes human beings are mere puppets who have no choice in how they behave. Communication theorists vary, however, in the extent to which they believe people *act* versus *react* to communication. For example, social scientists tend to follow **determinism**, which means they believe past experience, personality predispositions, and a number of other antecedent conditions *cause* people to behave in certain ways. Accordingly, deterministic approaches to human interaction propose that people in general tend to react to situations. Social scientists tend to look at the causes and effects of communication, such as what causes a public health message to fail or the effects of a particular marketing campaign.

Conversely, most humanists believe people have control over their behavior and make conscious choices to communicate to meet their goals. Theorists taking this stance are called pragmatists because they believe people are practical and plan their behavior. **Pragmatism** believes human beings are not passive reactors to situations but dynamic actors. Humanists, then, tend to focus on the choices people (or organizations) make, such as the CDC's inconsistent and confusing messages about mask wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 2.2 ■ Differences Between Social Scientific and Humanistic Approaches to Communication		
Issue	**Social Science**	**Humanities**
Belief about human nature	Determinism	Pragmatism
Goal of theory	Understand and predict	Understand only
Process of theory development	Deductive	Inductive
Focus of research	Particularism	Holism
Research methods	Experiments, quantitative survey, and textual analysis	Ethnography, qualitative survey, and textual analysis

A second way to differentiate between humanistic and social scientific scholarship is through a focus on *why* theories are developed. For example, the goal of social scientific theory is to both understand and predict communication processes. Because social science is interested in generalizations, the ability to predict is paramount. If a theorist understands the general pattern at the heart of a social scientific theory, they should be able to predict how any one individual might communicate. Those in the humanities, however, believe interpretations are always subjective; they are unique to the individual. Accordingly, humanists believe theorists can never actually predict how a person will behave; all that can be done is to try to understand human communication.

Although not directly related to the distinction between social science and the humanities, we note that some theories strive to do more than simply predict or understand. A special group of theories, called critical approaches, seeks to improve the world through social change. The goal of critical theory is to empower people in their professional and personal lives. For more information on critical communication theory, see Craig (1999).

The third difference between social science and the humanities is the process of theory development. Recall our discussion of the theory–research link discussed earlier in the chapter. Deductive theory is based on the scientific method, so it should be no surprise that the **social scientific approach** to theory development is *deductive*. Those in the humanities, however, tend to start with data and subsequently develop theory. For example, scholars of English literature would start with reading Shakespeare's plays before developing a theory about them. Thus, those in the humanities tend to use inductive theory development.

Finally, the focus and methods of research also vary in the social scientific and humanistic approaches. The focus of research for the social scientific method is on standardization and control. Because of these objectives, social scientists incrementally study narrowly defined areas at a time, believing the whole picture will be uncovered eventually. This approach is known as **particularism**. Humanists, on the other hand, believe in looking at the big picture; they propose that all pieces of the puzzle contribute to an understanding of the problem. Accordingly, they use holism, looking at the situation in its entirety, as the focal point of research.

Given the different areas of focus, it's not a surprise that the final difference between social scientists and humanists is the research methods they use. Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the four research methods used by communication scholars. Of the four, one is clearly social scientific, and one is clearly humanistic. Experimental methods, with their concern for causation and control, are uniquely suited for the social sciences. Remember that social science seeks to make predictions, and the best way to do that is to have research that supports particular causes and effects. Similarly, ethnography is uniquely suited for humanistic research. Ethnography leans to the understanding of communication in contexts and cultures, which is appropriate for theory that uses holism in its quest for interpretation of communicative events.

The uses of survey research and textual analysis cannot be easily classified. Instead of the methods themselves being associated with either social science or the humanities, the specific way data are analyzed determines whether the method is social scientific or humanistic. The two methods of data analysis are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methods are adapted from those used in the hard sciences, such as chemistry and biology. Accordingly, quantitative

methods are associated with social science. Qualitative methods are those that have historically been used by the humanities.

Quantitative methods typically rely on numbers or statistics as the data source (Reinard, 1998). These data and statistics are generally explanatory and comprehensive; they seek to predict what will happen for large groups of people. To accomplish this, researchers control the study by identifying the variables of interest before data collection takes place and trying to prevent extraneous influences from affecting the data. As described earlier, these commitments allow social scientists to make generalizations.

Qualitative methods reject the limitations on individual interpretation that control requires. Moreover, qualitative research eschews the use of numbers and uses verbal descriptions of communicative phenomena. Typically, the data are in the form of extended quotes or transcripts of communication. Finally, qualitative research typically centers on a description or critique of communication rather than on generalizations (Reinard, 1998).

Social scientists tend to use quantitative surveys or textual analyses. For example, they'll collect data about how many people prefer a new formulation of a product versus a previous formulation of a product or how frequently a manager uses a particular communication strategy in interaction. Humanists tend to use qualitative surveys and textual analyses. They ask participants to respond at length to questions in their own words about a particular product, or they identify various communication themes evident in a corporate brochure.

A final note should be made about the distinctions between social science and the humanities. The purpose of talking about these two academic traditions is because communication is *both* social scientific and humanistic. As such, you shouldn't view these distinctions as dichotomies but as continua. Individual theories may be more or less social scientific or humanistic (not either/or), with elements borrowed from both traditions.

HOW THEORIES CHANGE AND GROW

Our final concern in this chapter is to be clear that once developed, theories continue to change and grow. As we indicated in Figure 2.1, whether a researcher starts with the theory or starts with research, theory development continues the loop between research and theory, refining, modifying, and extending the theory. Specifically, Kaplan (1964) argues that theories can change by extension or by intension. Growth by **extension** means the theory adds more concepts and builds on what was already established. For example, in 1959, Thibaut and Kelley created interdependence theory, which is described in Chapter 4. One central aspect of the theory is the prediction that relationship dependence (otherwise known as commitment) can be determined by examining an individual's satisfaction with the relationship, as well as his or her perception of the availability and quality of alternatives to the relationship. Caryl Rusbult (1980), a student of John Thibaut, continued working on the theory and presented an expanded version of the theory, which she called the investment model. Her model argues that looking at satisfaction and alternatives is not enough to predict commitment; one also has to examine how much an individual has invested in the relationship. That is, people who are unhappy in their relationship, and who believe they can find a better partner, might stay in the relationship

because they have invested a great deal of time, money, or even love, and they don't want to "lose" their investment. Thus, we can conclude that interdependence theory has grown through extension because a new concept—investment—was added to the theory to make its predictions more robust.

Conversely, growth by **intension** means scholars gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the original concepts presented in the theory. For example, communication accommodation theory, which is described in Chapter 5, was originally called speech accommodation theory, as the focus was purely on how our dialects and word choice varied based on to whom an individual was speaking. However, researchers quickly realized that accommodation occurs in other areas of verbal and nonverbal communication, such as speaking rate, politeness, and listening (see Gallois et al., 2005, for a review). The theory has grown by intension; the same principles of accommodation are still acknowledged by the theory, and no new concepts were added. Instead, additional research has allowed scholars to understand more fully the complex ways accommodation occurs, adding to the scope of the theory.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we looked at how theories are developed and changed. We looked at two ways to create theory: inductive and deductive theory development. We discussed the links between theory and research, and we differentiated between primary and secondary research. We also identified the four primary research methods used by communication scholars: experiments, surveys, textual analysis, and ethnography. In addition to describing the key elements of each of these methods, the chapter focused on what each reveals and conceals about communication. Next, we turned our attention to the differences between social scientific and humanistic approaches to theory and research, centering our discussion on beliefs about human nature, the goal of theory, the development of theory, the focus of research, and the research methods used. Finally, we talked about how theories change through the processes of extension and intension.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identify a research study that has been reported in either television news or in a newspaper. Then identify what the original researchers actually found. Discuss what this means in terms of primary versus secondary research.

2. Imagine that you want to study phubbing behavior (ignoring the people around you and focusing on your phone). Develop four different studies using each of the four research methods. What would you learn about phubbing from each of these approaches, and how would they differ from each other?

3. One of the essential differences between humanistic and social scientific scholarship has to do with determinism vs. pragmatism. What are your own views about human nature? Do you tend to focus more on the causes for people's communication or more on the choices that people make?

4. One way to think about the difference between holism and particularism is to imagine putting together a jigsaw puzzle. How would holism help you in putting together the puzzle, and how would particularism help you in doing so?

5. Refer back to one of the commonsense theories you identified in Chapter 1. Has this theory changed in any way? If so, was it through extension or intension? If not, why do you think it hasn't changed?

KEY TERMS

Closed-ended questions (p. 19)

Complete observer (p. 21)

Complete participant (p. 21)

Content analysis (p. 20)

Data analytics (p. 20)

Data mining (p. 20)

Deductive theory (p. 16)

Dependent variable (p. 18)

Determinism (p. 23)

Ethnography (p. 21)

Experiment (p. 18)

Extension (p. 25)

Field experiments (p. 18)

Focus group (p. 19)

Generalizations (p. 23)

Humanistic approach (p. 23)

Independent variable (p. 18)

Inductive theory (p. 15)

Intension (p. 26)

Interaction analysis/conversation analysis (p. 21)

Interpretation (p. 23)

Interview (p. 19)

Laboratory experiment (p. 18)

Manipulation (p. 18)

Nonrandom sample (p. 20)

Objectivity (p. 23)

Open-ended questions (p. 19)

Participant-observer (p. 21)

Particularism (p. 24)

Population (p. 19)

Pragmatism (p. 23)

Primary research (p. 17)

Qualitative (p. 25)

Quantitative (p. 25)

Questionnaire (p. 19)

Random sample (p. 20)

Rhetorical criticism (p. 20)

Sampling (p. 19)

Secondary research (p. 17)

Social scientific approach (p. 24)

Subjectivity (p. 23)

Survey research (p. 19)

Text/data mining (p. 20)

Textual analysis (p. 20)

Variable (p. 18)

CASE STUDY 2
Attribution Theory Reconsidered

In Chapter 1 we provided a brief overview of Attribution Theory, which centers on the process of determining the motivations behind behavior. In short, the theory predicts that our attributions for why someone behaves the way they do influence our interpretations of the behavior. Although Fritz Heider is considered the creator of the theory, his work emerged from the classic philosophical problem of the connections between what happens in the real world and what happens in the human mind (Malle, 2011). Heider (1958) developed his theory to provide an answer to that problem. His work was largely theoretical, with little research conducted as a part of the development of the theory. He did conduct an experiment that provided support for one part of his theory; however, the study found that attributions do influence the interpretations of behavior (Heider, & Simmel, 1944).

Expanding on Heider's work, Jones and Davis (1965) focused specifically on the intentionality of dispositional (internally driven) behavior. Jones and Davis argued that we can make "correspondent inferences," or assumptions about the type of person someone is, by looking at the intentionality of their actions, whether the actions are socially desirable, and whether the actions have noncommon effects (the actions are unexpected). For instance, if one of your coworkers knows that a presentation to the board is important to the entire team, but fails to get his or her part of the presentation to the rest of the team members by the deadline, you are likely to perceive it as intentional, socially undesirable, and unexpected. As such, you will probably make the correspondent inference that this coworker is lazy (at best) or is maliciously sabotaging the team (at worst).

Continuing the study of attributions, Kelley's (1967, 1973) covariation model explains the causal nature of the complete attribution process. Specifically, this model has a greater scope than does Jones and Davis's correspondent inference theory because Kelley seeks to explain attributions overall, whereas Jones and Davis focused only on the intentionality of dispositional inferences. According to Kelley (1967, 1973), individuals judge the causality of another's behavior by examining four factors: consensus, consistency, distinctiveness, and controllability. When the first three of these features are combined (i.e., consensus, consistency, distinctiveness), a perceiver can judge whether the actions were internally controlled (i.e., disposition) or externally controlled (i.e., situational). That is, you assign meaning based on perceived controllability—how much command an individual had over the behavior.

To date, there have been over 15,000 published research studies that utilize Attribution Theory. Given that the theory makes predications about the types of attributions people are likely to make in particular situations, it should come as no surprise that much of this research is experimental in nature. However, some scholars have incorporated a broader range of research methods when using the theory. Cowan (2013), for example, interviewed Human Resources professionals about their

attributions for the causes of workplace bullying. She then did a thematic analysis of these interviews, finding that HR professionals believe that workplace bullying happens as a result of aggressive management styles, deficient communication skills, the organizational culture, contemporary issues, and personality clashes.

Questions for Consideration

1. Based on what you read in Chapter 1 and the additional information just provided, was Attribution Theory developed using an inductive or a deductive theory development process? Why?

2. Which research method(s) have been used to test the theory? Is this the best method? Why, or why not?

3. How has the choice of research methods influenced what we know about attributions? That is, what have the methods revealed, and what have they concealed?

4. Do you believe that Attribution Theory is social scientific or humanistic? Provide details from the information in Chapter 1 and this chapter to support your case.

5. In what ways has Attribution Theory changed or grown? Is this intension, extension, or both?