



Social Approaches to Communication

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Long before there were formal organizations or mass media, there was face-to-face interaction--the practice which comprises very core of the study of communication. Until recently, however, research in the field of interpersonal communication has been dominated by a behavioral science approach closely aligned with experimental social psychology. This timely and provocative volume critiques the limitations of past models, exploring a range of "social approaches" which help bring communication up to date. Social approaches, writes Leeds-Hurwitz, question whether the traditional theoretical assumptions and research methods followed in the field are still valid and appropriate. While the roots of these approaches are diverse and interdisciplinary, they overlap in their concern for the social construction of self, other, and event, and in their acknowledgment of the researcher's role in establishing not only the research questions but also the research context. Social approaches stress the necessity of recognizing the impact of cultural differences on communication research, and identify the ways in which research inquiry creates meanings at the same time as it investigates them. Most importantly, they focus on instances of contact between individuals, the actual social transactions in which people engage. Together they demonstrate the ability to disregard labels in pursuit of a common goal, the construction of a more adequate understanding of human interaction.

Robert T. Craig's Foreword describes the historical tension in interpersonal communication between behavioral science approaches, on the one hand, and interpretive social approaches, on the other. Parts I and II of the volume highlight the theoretical underpinnings of social approaches and the philosophical grounding of some of the more central ideas. Part III elaborates on the assumptions shared by social approaches, focusing on a series of key concepts, including the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research; reflexivity; social constructionism; and the individual. Part IV begins the task of applying social approaches to particular research topics, including the use of case studies, rapport in research interviews, ethnography as theory, continuity in relationships, and the co-construction of personal narratives. Part V examines where the various chapters lead us, making a strong case for practical theory as the necessary next step.

A unique overview of current theoretical innovations in the study of interpersonal communication, **SOCIAL APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION** belongs on the shelf of every professional and student in communication. It will be especially valuable to those interested in communication theory, interpersonal communication, and social interaction.

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