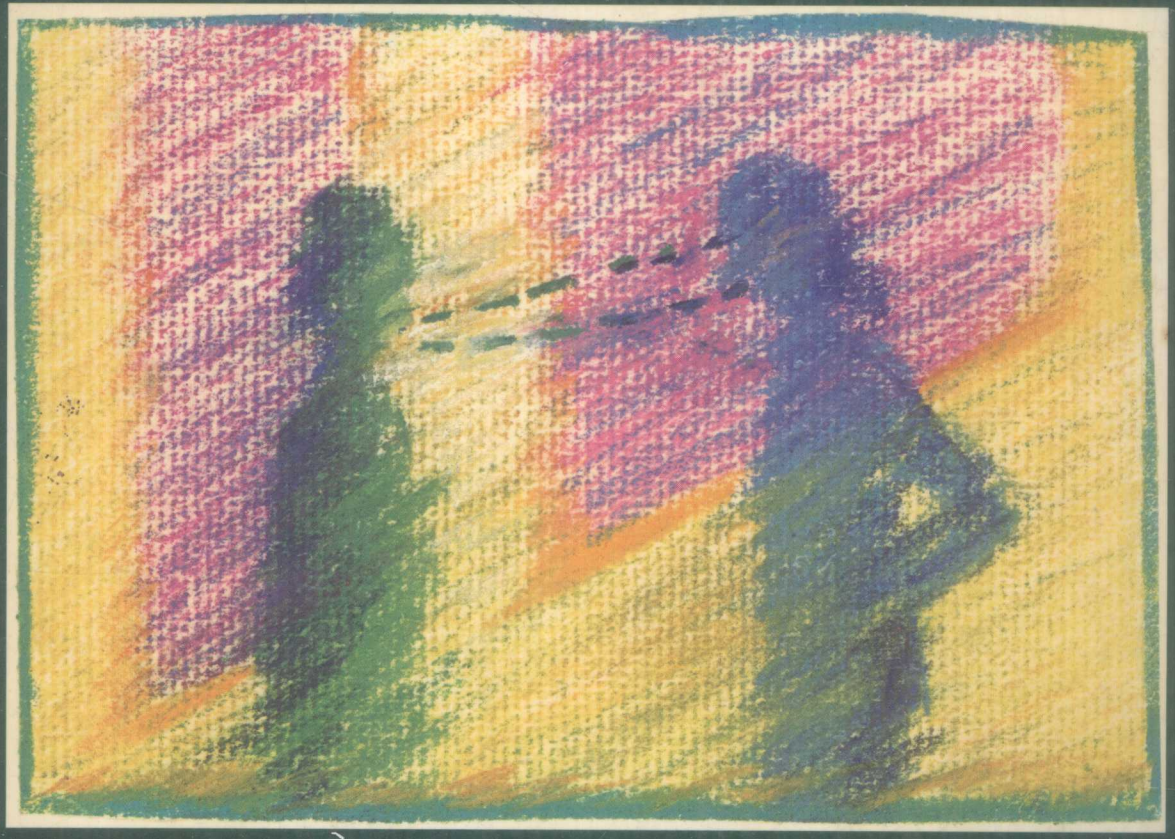
# THE DYNAMICS OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION



## A LABORATORY APPROACH

Gail E. Myers / Michele Tolela Myers

Fifth Edition

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# THE DYNAMICS OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

## A LABORATORY APPROACH

FIFTH EDITION

Gail E. Myers
*Temple University*

Michele Tolela Myers
*Byrn Mawr College*

McGraw-Hill Book Company

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# THE DYNAMICS OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION
## A Laboratory Approach

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Since 1972, Michele and Gail Myers have published three communication textbooks with McGraw-Hill: *Communicating When We Speak, Managing by Communication,* and this title, *The Dynamics of Human Communication,* now in its fifth edition.

Michele Tolela Myers, currently Dean of the Undergraduate College at Bryn Mawr, is a native of Paris, France, where she graduated from the Institute of Political Science at the University of Paris before coming to the United States to study communication at the University of Denver. She earned an M.A. and Ph.D., later adding an M.A. in clinical psychology at Trinity University in Texas. Before her appointment at Bryn Mawr, Michele was Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at Trinity University and was an American Council of Education fellow in administration at Northwestern University and at Trinity. In addition, she taught at the University of Denver, Manchester College in Indiana, Monticello College in Illinois, and Trinity University before moving into academic administration.

Gail E. Myers came to the faculty at Temple University from an emeritus professorship in communication at Trinity University where earlier he had been Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. His administrative career also includes alumni and publications director, University of Northern Iowa (Cedar Falls), technical editor, Colorado School of Mines, vice president and then president of Monticello College (Illinois), and founding president of Lewis and Clark Community College (also in Illinois). In addition to part-time teaching during his administrative assignments, he has taught full time at the University of Denver and Trinity University. He has a B.A. and M.A. in journalism from the State University of Iowa and a Ph.D. from Denver.

*To David and Erika*

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# PREFACE

The first edition of this textbook—published nearly a decade and a half ago—grew out of a need to combine the essential *practice of communication* with the rapidly growing *knowledge about communication.* The first edition of *Dynamics of Human Communication* was a pioneer in the field, as it put theories to work with the skills of applying them to human interaction.

Feedback from students and teachers who have used this book has influenced each new edition—the content, the writing style, the kinds and sources of exercises, and the organization of the manuscript material. New theoretical developments, new ways of looking at human relationships, new emphases on discourse and transactions all have meant changes in what this textbook covers. New ways of viewing the human communicative condition gave rise to new research directions, new nomenclatures, and new scholars whose work deserves inclusion in the updated texts in this discipline. To update a textbook it is necessary to review the writing and research about human communication reported in many journals both outside the discipline (for example, in publications of the social and behavioral sciences) and in the communication field in such works as

*Human Communication Research, Quarterly Journal of Speech, Journal of Communication, Communication Education,* and *Communication Monographs,* as well as the regional journals in the field. You will still, however, find many references to classical research and theorists in human communication dating back many years; these must be included to help you gain a historical perspective on communication studies. These references also pay tribute to the earliest scholars, thinkers, and leaders in the field of interpersonal and speech communication.

Wide acceptance not only of this textbook but of the principle of "laboratory learning" has meant a significant change in the way many communication courses are taught. Invention of the Interpersonal Communication Laboratory by Elwood Murray at the University of Denver marked a new beginning in speech teaching—adopting as he did the laboratory principles from the physical sciences. Nobody seems to have questioned the need to apply chemical principles in a chemistry lab, or the idea that students develop a greater understanding of energy or motion in a physics lab. But it seemed a bit revolutionary two score years ago when Dr. Murray took that next logical step in developing a social science laboratory where communication theory can be brought to first-person experience in a safe and controlled learning environment.

## Organization of This Book

Let's refer to the latter part of the book first, since it is that feature which has continued to make this textbook clearly both student-related and participative in the experiences and assignments generated as "laboratory learning." Part V includes materials for your interacting with the text manuscript. Some are cases to solve or discuss; some are role-playing experiences; some are thought-provoking discussion topics. All are designed to give you more insights into the principles and theories you will read about in the first four parts. It is not likely you will have the opportunity in class to use all the incidents or activities; but if you are curious about your own or others' communication behaviors, you may want to read the items and answer for yourself some of the discussion questions suggested.

Back at the beginning, in Chapter 1, you are introduced to some of the more popular, interesting, and even useful theories about how people communicate with one another and with what effect. A brief historical overview in Part I helps place you and this study in perspective. Part II includes theories of perception, self-concept, values, and beliefs, and shows how these are developed and have an effect on your transactions with others.

In Part III you will explore how communication is related to language, meaning, and the fascinating and sometimes mysterious nonlanguage systems. Because language has the power to build or destroy, we propose some ways of looking at the use of language—by you and others around you—ways which may help you detect unhealthy use of language when it occurs and help make your own use of language more effective.

Putting together the self, others, and meaning is the primary thrust of Part IV as you study how those factors work together to determine the roles you play in building, maintaining, or modifying relationships. *Interpersonal is not a synonym for "intimacy."* While your most personal relationships must be considered, the study of relations goes much farther—from the family, to your friendships, to where you study or work and where people commit themselves to cross-cultural and international communication at many levels. Conflict and negotiation are treated as opportunities for healthy interaction and growth, not as wars to be won or disasters to avoid. Communication styles are available to all of you for all your needs, and being able to select from among the many possibilities is a measure of your communication freedom. How you may cope with communicative problems is part of this section; we assert that you are the only person in charge of your communication. You choose your own communicative behaviors from the options available to you. This textbook is one way for you to look at how your relationships fit the ever-present and exciting dynamics of interpersonal communication.

## Acknowledgments

Previous editions of this textbook, as well as our own personal and professional lives, were deeply influenced by Dr. Elwood Murray, a creative scholar and an innovative teacher. In this Preface we have already mentioned that Dr. Murray pioneered the interpersonal laboratory, and that is simply one of his accomplishments which has actually changed the way speech communication is taught today. At least three decades before the rest of the discipline had accepted the human transactional view of communication, Dr. Murray was writing, campaigning, arguing, and probing this set of then revolutionary formulations. His students, and *their* students in turn, have had a continuing effect on the field of interpersonal communication. In her excellent book on interpersonal communication, Kathleen Reardon credits Dr. Murray with substantial contributions to this field, including founding the International Communication Association (founded as the National Society for the Study of Communication) and positing the "important connection between personality and interpersonal relationships."[1] In this new edition of a textbook which comes directly from Dr. Murray's life and work, we want to simply add our most sincere and public acknowledgment to those many other accolades he has received, most recently Dr. Reardon's insightful recognition of Elwood Murray's significant place in the communication discipline.

Revisions in this edition—and they are major—have been prompted by the critical evaluations of highly qualified reviewers who have used this book or similar ones. We are grateful for their thoughtful suggestions, and

[1] Kathleen K. Reardon, *Interpersonal Communication: Where Minds Meet,* Belmont, Calif., Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987, p. 33.

can acknowledge those whose names the publisher has given us. Both the fourth edition and this present fifth edition are substantially improved because of the comments from John E. Agnlin, East Central College; Mary Ann Cunningham, North Central College; Karen L. Durst, University of Minnesota at Duluth; Sue Griffiths, Atlantic Community College; Eugene Rebstock, San Francisco State; Beatrice Shultz, University of Rhode Island; Jo Sprague, San Jose State University and Jimmie D. Trent, Miami University (Ohio). Faculty and graduate students at Temple University, and particularly Karen Tracy, have been patiently forthcoming in their reactions to my questions about better ways to approach interpersonal teaching.

An outstanding editing, production, and promotional staff at McGraw-Hill has again made this project enjoyable, and we want to recognize those with whom we have had the most contact including social sciences publisher Phil Butcher, Barbara Raab, Jim Belser, Inge King, and Margaret Tuttle.

Gail E. Myers
Michele T. Myers

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