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— A FIRST LOOK AT —
COMMUNICATION THEORY

Em Griffin

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A FIRST LOOK AT COMMUNICATION THEORY

FIFTH EDITION

EM GRIFFIN

Wheaton College

Special Consultant: Glen McClish

San Diego State University

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A FIRST LOOK AT COMMUNICATION THEORY

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 DOC/DOC 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN 0-07-248392-X

Editorial director: *Phillip A. Butcher*
Sponsoring editor: *Nannette Kauffman*
Developmental editor II: *Jennie Katsaros*
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Photo research coordinator: *Jeremy Cheshareck*
Lead supplement producer: *Marc Mattson*
Typeface: *10.5/12 Palatino*
Compositor: *ElectraGraphics, Inc.*
Printer: *R. R Donnelley & Sons Company*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Griffin, Emory A.

A first look at communication theory / Em Griffin; special consultant, Glen McClish.—
5th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-07-248392-X (alk. paper)

1. Communication—Philosophy. I. Title.

P90.G725 2003

302.2'01—dc21

2002021270

Conversations with Communication Theorists CD-ROM 2.0

The "Conversations" sections at the end of these 14 chapters link the text to 14 original video interviews conducted and produced by Em Griffin. These videos are part of the Conversations CD-ROM 2.0 and are also available in VHS format.

Chapter 5 Barnett Pearce—*Coordinated Management of Meaning*

Chapter 6 Judee Burgoon—*Expectancy Violations Theory*

Chapter 7 David Buller—*Interpersonal Deception Theory*

Chapter 8 Jessie Delia, Brant Burleson, Jim Applegate—*Constructivism*

Chapter 10 Charles Berger—*Uncertainty Reduction Theory*

Chapter 11 Barbara Montgomery—*Relational Dialectics*

Chapter 16 Randy Hirokawa—*Functional Perspective on Group Decision Making*

Chapter 17 Scott Poole—*Adaptive Structuration Theory*

Chapter 20 Stan Deetz—*Critical Theory of Communication*

Chapter 28 Max McCombs—*Agenda-Setting Theory*

Chapter 29 Byron Reeves, Clifford Nass—*Media Equation*

Chapter 31 Stella Ting-Toomey—*Face-Negotiation Theory*

Chapter 32 Gerry Philipsen—*Speech Codes Theory*

Chapter 35 Cheris Kramarae—*Muted Group Theory*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Em Griffin is Professor of Communication at Wheaton College in Illinois, where he has taught for the past 32 years and has been chosen Teacher of the Year. He received his bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Michigan, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Communication from Northwestern University. His research interest centers on the development of close friendships.

Em is the author of three applied communication books: *The Mind Changers* analyzes practical techniques of persuasion; *Getting Together* offers research-based suggestions for effective group leadership; and *Making Friends* describes the way that quality interpersonal communication can build close relationships.

In addition to his teaching and writing, Em serves with Opportunity International, a microenterprise development organization that provides opportunities for people in chronic poverty to transform their lives. He is also an active mediator at the Center for Conflict Resolution in Chicago.

Em's wife, Jeanie, is an artist. They have two married, adult children, Jim and Sharon, and five grandchildren, Amy, Sam, Kyle, Alison, and Danny.

PREFACE FOR INSTRUCTORS

A First Look is written for students who have no background in communication theory. It's designed for undergraduates enrolled in an entry-level course, whatever the students' classification. The trend in the field is to offer students a broad introduction to theory relatively early in their program. *A First Look* is written for those beginning students. Yet if a department chooses to offer its first theory course on the junior or senior level, it will still be the students' first look, so the book will meet them where they are.

Balance as a Guide in Theory Selection The aim of this text is to present 33 specific theories in a way that makes them both interesting and understandable. By the time readers complete the book they should have a working knowledge of theories that explain a wide range of communication phenomena. My ultimate goal is to help students see the relationship between different theoretical positions. The final chapter offers an integrative synthesis. But before students can integrate the leading theoretical ideas in our field, they need to have a clear understanding of what the theories are. The bulk of the book provides that raw material.

With the help of journal and yearbook editors, and the feedback of over 150 communication theory professors, I've selected a wide range of theories that reflect the diversity within the discipline. Some theories are proven candidates for a Communication Theory Hall of Fame. For example, Aristotle's analysis of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals continues to set the agenda for many public-speaking courses. Mead's symbolic interactionism is formative for interpretive theorists who are dealing with language, thought, self-concept, or the effect of society upon the individual. The axioms of Watzlawick's interactional view continue to be debated by interpersonal scholars. And no student of mediated communication should be ignorant of Gerbner's cultivation theory, which explains why heavy television viewing cultivates fear of a mean and scary world.

It would be shortsighted, however, to limit the selection to the classics of communication. Some of the discipline's most creative approaches are its newest. For example, Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery's theory of relational dialectics offers insight into the ongoing tensions inherent in personal relationships. Byron

Reeves and Clifford Nass' bold media equation is just beginning to be seriously discussed within the communication discipline. And Gerry Philipsen's speech codes theory upgrades the ethnography of communication from a methodology to a theory that can be used to explain, predict, and control discourse about discourse. I've also included cutting-edge theories generated by communication scholars who currently test and hone their ideas at conventions, workshops, and seminars sponsored by ICA, NCA, and other communication associations.

Organizational Plan of the Book Each chapter introduces a single theory in 10–12 pages. I've found that most undergraduates think in terms of discrete packets of information, so the in-depth coverage gives them a chance to focus their thoughts while reading a single chapter. In this way, students can gain a true understanding of important theories rather than acquire only a vague familiarity with a jumble of related ideas. The one-chapter-one-theory arrangement also gives teachers the opportunity to drop theories or rearrange the order of presentation without tearing apart the fabric of the text.

The opening chapter, "Talk About Theory," lays the groundwork for understanding the difference between objective and interpretive theories. Chapter 2, "Mapping the Territory," introduces seven traditions within the field of communication theory. Based on the overall conception of Robert Craig, University of Colorado communication professor and the first editor of *Communication Theory*, the chapter locates seven distinct theoretical traditions within our discipline. I then offer a definition of communication that captures the practical focus of that tradition and an example of an early scholar who operated from that theoretical stance. At the end of the chapter I present a map showing the relationship between the seven traditions on an objective-interpretive continuum, an epistemological distinction I carry throughout the book. I also suggest an eighth tradition.

Chapter 3, "Weighing the Words," presents two sets of criteria for determining a good objective or interpretive theory. I apply these standards to Bormann's symbolic convergence theory because he has dual scientific and rhetorical agendas. Then in the successive 32 self-contained chapters, I present the other theories featured in the book. Each theory is discussed within the context of a communication topic: interpersonal messages, cognitive processing, relationship development, relationship maintenance, influence, group decision making, organizational communication, public rhetoric, media and culture, media effects, intercultural communication, gender and communication. These communication context sections usually contain two or three theories. Each section has a brief introduction that outlines the crucial issues that the theorists address and places the subsequent chapters within that context. The placement of theories in familiar categories helps students recognize that theories are answers to questions they've been asking all along. The final chapter cuts across these contextual categories and integrates theories by the choices and commitments their authors have made.

Because all theory and practice have value implications, I've interspersed 11 one- to two-page Ethical Reflections throughout the text. Consistent with the focus of this text, each ethical principle is the central tenet of a specific ethical theory. I also raise ethical questions within many chapters. Other disciplines may ignore

these thorny issues, but to discuss communication as a process that is untouched by questions of good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice would be to disregard an ongoing concern in our field.

Features of Each Chapter Most people think in pictures. Students will have a rough time understanding a theory unless they apply its explanations and interpretations to concrete situations. The typical chapter uses an extended example to illustrate the “truth” a theory proposes. I encourage readers to try out ideas by visualizing a first meeting of freshman roommates, responding to conflict in a dysfunctional family, trying to persuade other students to support a zero tolerance policy on driving after drinking, considering whether they might really treat their computer as if it were another person, and many more. I also use the films *Nell*, *Erin Brockovich*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Children of a Lesser God*, *Blade Runner*, Toni Morrison’s book *Beloved*, and Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech to illustrate principles of the theories. Finally, I bring my own life to the pages with extended examples such as twenty years of teaching an off-campus group dynamics seminar on a remote island in Lake Michigan, my role as a voluntary mediator at a center for conflict resolution, and my sometimes anxious intercultural experiences at a Belaan Indian school in the Philippine Islands. The case study in each chapter follows the pedagogical principle of explaining what students don’t yet know in terms of ideas and images already within their experience.

Some theories are tightly linked with an extensive research project. For example, cultivation theory is supported by Gerbner’s repeated surveys that document people’s fear of a mean and scary world cultivated by years of watching violence on television. Philipsen’s speech codes theory began with a three-year ethnographic study of what it means to speak like a man in Teamsterville. And Delia’s constructivist research continues to be dependent on Crockett’s Role Category Questionnaire. When such exemplars exist, I describe the research in detail so that students can learn from and appreciate the benefits of grounding theory in systematic observation. Thus, readers of *A First Look* are led through a variety of research designs and data analyses.

Students will encounter the names of Baxter, Berger, Burke, Burgoon, Deetz, Fisher, Gudykunst, Kramarae, Pacanowsky, Pearce, Philipsen, Ting-Toomey, Wood, and many others in later communication courses. I therefore make a concerted effort to link theory and theorist. By pairing a particular theory with its originator, I try to promote both recall and respect for a given scholar’s effort.

The text of each chapter concludes with a section that critiques the theory. This represents a hard look at the ideas presented in light of the criteria for a good theory outlined in Chapter 3. I usually provide a brief summary of the theory’s strengths and then turn to the weaknesses, unanswered questions, and possible errors that still remain. I try to stimulate a “That makes sense, and yet I wonder . . .” response among students.

I include a short list of thought questions after the text of each chapter. Labeled “Questions to Sharpen Your Focus,” these probes encourage students to make connections between ideas in the chapter and also to apply the theory to their everyday communication experience. As part of this feature, the words printed in italics remind students of the key terms of a given theory.

Every chapter ends with a short list of annotated readings entitled "A Second Look." The heading refers to resources for students who are interested in a theory and want to go further than a 10- to 12-page introduction will allow. The top item is the resource I recommend as the starting point for further study. The other listings identify places to look for material about each of the major issues raised in the chapter. The format is designed to offer practical encouragement and guidance for further study without overwhelming the novice with multiple citations. The sources of quotations and citations of evidence are listed in an "Endnotes" section at the end of the book.

I believe professors and students alike will get a good chuckle out of the cartoons I've selected, but their main function is to illustrate significant points in the text. As in other editions, I'm committed to using "Calvin and Hobbes," "The Far Side," "Dilbert," "Cathy," "Zits," and quality art from the pages of *The New Yorker* and *Punch* magazines. Perceptive cartoonists are modern-day prophets—their humor serves the educational process well when it slips through mental barriers or attitudinal defenses that didactic prose can't penetrate.

While no author considers his or her style ponderous or dull, I believe I've presented the theories in a clear and lively fashion. Accuracy alone does not communicate. I've tried to remain faithful to the vocabulary each theorist uses so that the student can consider the theory in the author's own terms, but I also translate technical language into more familiar words. Students and reviewers cite readability and interest as particular strengths of the text. I encourage you to sample a chapter dealing with a theory you regard as difficult so that you can decide for yourself.

New Features in the Fifth Edition Until now, I've replaced four or five theories with each new revision. But this time I've decided to keep all 32 theories that I covered in the previous edition. Most instructors are pleased with the theories I've included, and they've urged me not to churn the contents just for the sake of change. I have, however, reintroduced Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory. Although it springs from the field of social psychology, most communication teachers want their students to grasp a theory of influence based on cognitive consistency. And a resurgence of research on the minimal justification hypothesis of the theory has spawned new dissonance explanations for students to consider.

If you are disappointed that I'm not bringing back other theories from earlier editions, remember that students can find that chapter in the archive section of the website that supports the book:

www.afirstlook.com

You may continue to assign the theory, and while at the site, you might browse through a series of aids that support the text and enrich the course. During the school year, the site is used 25,000 times a month, so there may be something there that will increase student interest and deepen learning. The McGraw-Hill Online Learning Center icon at the end of each chapter reminds students that they can self-test their understanding of the theory on a website the publisher provides.

I have, of course, retained the features that students appreciated in earlier editions of the text—writing style, short chapters, extended examples, and cartoons. But in response to faculty and student feedback, I've significantly revised the following chapters:

- Talk About Theory
- Mapping the Territory
- Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)
- Narrative Paradigm
- Adaptive Structuration Theory
- Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations
- Technological Determinism
- Agenda-Setting Theory

I've also revised four of the section introductions. The "Media and Culture" section now offers an extended discussion of postmodernism. In "Relationship Development," I introduce attachment theory typology, and the "Influence" introduction now focuses on attitude structure and change. Finally, since all three theories in the "Organizational Communication" section are offered as alternatives to classical management theory, I outline the principles of this traditional mechanistic approach.

At the end of fourteen chapters, you will see photographs of the theorists taken from the video/CD, "Conversations with Communication Theorists." The text that accompanies each picture previews a few intriguing comments that the theorist makes so that students will watch the interview with a specific purpose in mind. The 2.0 version of "Conversations" adds interviews with Max McCombs (agenda-setting theory) and Cheris Kramarae (muted group theory).

This edition of *A First Look* contains 16 new cartoons and 100 new citations in the "Second Look" feature. I've also expanded the contents of the appendices. There are now 15 more terms in the Glossary, 20 more titles in the list of communication-related journals, 30 more feature films that illustrate communication theories, and a reproduction of the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication.

Acknowledgments Glen McClish, now Chair of the Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies at San Diego State University, is the person who has provided the greatest scholarly wisdom, suggested revisions, editorial assistance, cartoon ideas, and motivational encouragement for the last three editions of *A First Look*. Teachers who are familiar with the instructor's manual that Glen and his wife Jackie Bacon created for the 4th edition will understand just how fortunate I am to have their assistance. Their notes on each theory prepare teachers to walk into the classroom with far more understanding than they would have had otherwise. They have served me the same way, and fortunately for all of us, they have again written the Instructor's Manual that accompanies this 5th edition.

Glen has been instrumental in the development of the media and culture section and has made significant contributions to the public rhetoric and integrative section as well. As stated on the title page, he is indeed a very special consultant.

I am pleased to acknowledge the wisdom and counsel of many other generous people who through the life of this book have helped me do a better job. I'm particularly grateful for 11 advisors and friends who have repeatedly answered questions, offered suggestions, combed through drafts of chapters, and encouraged me when I got bogged down. They are:

Glenn Sparks, Purdue University, who contributed the Monster.com commercial analysis for the opening chapter, is my ongoing advisor for media effects, and is a close friend.

Marty Medhurst, Texas A & M, who also wrote a Monster.com commercial critique for Chapter 1 and has continually enriched my understanding of rhetoric.

Bob Craig, University of Colorado, who even though he knew my use of his "Communication Theory as a Field" would greatly truncate his sophisticated analysis, graciously gave me access to his work prior to publication and spent hours discussing definitions of communication, characteristics of traditions, and where different theories might fit.

Larry Frey, University of Memphis, who had a strong influence on the introductory framework of Chapters 1 and 3 and on the group decision making section.

Linda Putnam, Texas A & M, who graciously invested many hours at the start of this project so that I might gain an understanding of organizational communication.

Cliff Christians, University of Illinois, who over two decades has helped me appreciate the breadth and depth of communication ethics.

Brant Burleson, Purdue University, who led me through a vast quantity of constructivist research and made me aware of cutting-edge developments in our field.

Ron Adler, Santa Barbara City College, whose fingerprints are all over the symbolic interaction chapter, and who graciously regards me as a kindred spirit in our love of movies and our approach to writing.

Russ Proctor, Northern Kentucky University, who has stimulated my appreciation of the pedagogical value of feature films and who made many of the suggestions that appear in Appendix D.

James Anderson, University of Utah, who helped me construct and apply the objective-interpretive continuum that is the backbone of the integrative chapters.

Ripley Smith, Northwestern College, who suggested that Neil Postman is Marshall McLuhan's heir-apparent and provided a first draft of the Chapter 24 section on the new digital age.

The unselfish assistance of these 11 scholars gives fresh meaning to the term collegiality. If any of the portions of the text referred to above are less than helpful or in error, it's undoubtedly because I didn't sufficiently heed the advice and counsel of these tremendously forthcoming colleagues.

Since the inception of *A First Look*, McGraw-Hill has enlisted the aid of communication scholars to review each edition of the text. I also conducted 30 half-hour phone interviews with instructors who were “field testing” the 4th edition in their classroom. The extensive and helpful comments of both of these groups provided excellent suggestions on how to proceed in this current effort. I am thankful to the following scholars who gave their time and candid assessments to ensure that this edition would be responsive to instructor needs: Sue Balter-Reitz, DePauw University; David Brenders, DePaul University; Deborah Brunson, University of North Carolina, Wilmington; Bob Chandler, Pepperdine University; Lena Chao, California State University, Los Angeles; Lori Charron, Concordia University, St. Paul; Leeva Chung, University of San Diego; Laurel Church, Aurora University; Tom Feeley, SUNY Buffalo; Hal Fulmer, Georgia Southern University; Ken Hacker, New Mexico State University; Jean-Marie Higiroy, Western New England College; Scott Johnson, University of Richmond; Paula Justice, Old Dominion University; Chris Kennedy, Western Wyoming Community College; Dave Klope, Trinity Christian College; Igor Klyukanov, Eastern Washington University; Carol Koehler, University of Missouri, Kansas City; Dave Levasseur, Westchester University; Kristin Lindholm, Trinity International University; John Llewellyn, Wake Forest University; David Lowry, Pepperdine University; William Neher, Butler University; Rick Olsen, University of North Carolina, Wilmington; Charles Pavitt, University of Delaware; Mike Peter, University of Arizona; Marilyn Reineck, Concordia, St. Paul; Rajiv Rimal, University of Texas; Lenny Shedletsky, University of Southern Maine; Wally Schmidt, Rollins College; Jon Smith, Southern Utah University; Ripley Smith, Northwestern College; Teresa Thompson, University of Dayton; Scott Turcott, Indiana Wesleyan University; Sharon Varallo, Augustana University; Deb Whitt, Wayne State College; Robin Williamson, University of St. Thomas; Pamela Wilson, Reinhardt College.

McGraw-Hill also enlisted a cross-section of 100 communication theory teachers to respond to an extensive curriculum survey. The responses from these instructors was instrumental in my understanding of what theories they want to cover and what teaching aids they find valuable. I’m grateful for my publisher’s willingness to invest in this kind of research.

My relationship with the professionals at McGraw-Hill has been highly satisfactory. Publisher Phil Butcher, sponsoring editor Nanette Kauffman, and developmental editor Jennie Katsaros share my vision of a text accessible to students with no prior knowledge of communication theory, and they continually encourage me to reach out to this reader. It was with their encouragement and backing that the book is paired with the “Conversations with Communication Theories” 2.0 CD.

A special thanks goes to project manager Becky Nordbrock and designer Jenny El-Shamy for their incredible flexibility and responsiveness to my requests. I have never been inclined to do things “by the book,” and Becky has appeared unflappable throughout my continual calls asking for special consideration or a variance on normal procedures. I picture myself as the “high maintenance” person in the cartoon on page 153, and Becky in production and Jennie in editorial as

the persons who “can fix anything.” Other authors are envious when they hear of my experience.

In previous editions I’ve had one main research assistant from the Wheaton College community. This time I’ve had four—three of them undergraduate communication majors. Without their care, commitment, competence, and friendship this edition would still be “in press.” Abby Jongeward researched recent developments in all 33 theories. To the extent that this text is “up to date” in the scholarship it reports, much of the credit should go to Abby. She also wrote the first draft of the interpersonal deception theory critique. Andrew Ledbetter, a communication/computer science double major, introduced me to the theoretical developments in new media. His research will continue to bear fruit in future editions. Dawn Lauber, the daughter of one colleague and the wife of another, vetted every phrase in this text. She is a wonderful editor, who like most readers had no background in communication theory, so she kept me from assuming that students would automatically understand the stock phrases that communication professionals take for granted.

Special thanks go to Celeste Elsenheimer, whose organizational skill, attention to detail, cheerfulness and encouragement saw me through the final hectic eight months of manuscript preparation and editing. While maintaining her academic status as an honors student, Celeste performed the tedious work of preparing the index from my scrawled notes and highlighted page proofs. This is a task that no one should do more than once in life, but many students will be thankful that she did it this time round. I was pleased when Celeste recently referred to this edition of *A First Look* as “our book.” It truly is.

Finally, I want to gratefully recognize the continued encouragement, understanding, and loving support of my wife, Jean—not just on this project but throughout 42 years of marriage. Her love, sense of humor, and parallel passion to create art and play glorious music have made it possible for me to throw myself into this project.

Em Griffin

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