



# Communication & Social Change

Volume 1, Number 1



## Articles

Editorial - Miguel Ángel Pulido-Rodríguez - 1

Communication Theory and Social Change - Robert T. Craig - 5

Social Construction of Health Risk: Rhetorical Elements in Colombian and U.S. News Coverage of Coca Eradication - Adriana M. Ángel Botero & Austin S. Babrow - 19

Groupthink as Communication Process, not Outcome - Michael W. Kramer & Debbie S. Dougherty - 44

Microfinance, Digital Media and Social Change: A Visual Analysis of Kiva.org - Franklin Nii Amankwah Yartey - 63

## Reviews

La Trilogía Sobre 'Communication Activism': 'Communication for Social Change', 'Media and Performance Activism' y 'Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference' - Sandra Girbés Peco - 89

**hipatia Press**  
[www.hipatiapress.com](http://www.hipatiapress.com)



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://csc.hipatiapress.com>

## **The International Journal of *Communication and Social Change*.**

Miguel Ángel Pulido-Rodríguez<sup>1</sup>

1) Universitat Ramon Llull, Spain.

Date of publication: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Edition period: October 2013 - January 2014

---

**To cite this article:** Pulido-Rodríguez, M.A. (2013). The International Journal of Communication and Social Change. *Communication & Social Change*, 1(1), 1-4 doi: 10.4471/csc.2013.00

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.447/csc.2013.00>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License

.

## **Editorial**

# **The International Journal of *Communication and Social Change***

Miguel Ángel Pulido-Rodríguez  
*Universitat Ramon Lull*

**L**as Ciencias Sociales pueden ser muy útiles en el progreso de las sociedades actuales. Y en ellas, compartiendo espacio con otras disciplinas como el Trabajo Social, la Sociología, la Educación Social, la Economía, etc., el área de Comunicación, también.

Los profesionales que nos dedicamos a la investigación y docencia universitaria observamos como uno de nuestros principales objetivos trabajar en proyectos que generen un impacto social. Que mejoren la vida de las personas con las que convivimos en el Planeta Tierra. Desde la propuesta más local a la más universal. Un impacto social medible, contrastable en las mejoras sociales que infiere. Un impacto útil.

Para potenciarlo hacen falta, al menos, dos cosas básicas que no pueden obviarse: (1) Las publicaciones científicas, de rigor, como lo es *Communication and Social Change*, ya desde hoy, gracias a los artículos que configuran esta primera propuesta y el protocolo seguido para su publicación, y (2) el impacto social de las investigaciones. Cómo se beneficia, o no se beneficia la sociedad de nuestro trabajo, de nuestro compromiso científico. La vocación con la que nace *Communication & Social Change* es la de difundir trabajos que puedan contrastarse y defenderse como aportaciones que, des del ámbito científico, ayudan a mejorar las sociedades para las que han sido pensadas.

Otro factor importante que no nos puede pasar por alto en la editorial del primer número de la revista es el carisma multidisciplinar que la configura. Algo que ya empieza reflejando nuestro comité científico. No son sólo académicos y académicas de un área aislada, sino que también hemos querido contar con autores y autoras provenientes de otros ámbitos como son la Pedagogía crítica, la relaciones internacionales, el diseño de la Interacción Persona Ordenador o los estudios culturales en torno a la comunicación y la informática. El estudio y la práctica de la comunicación trasciende, incluso las Ciencias Sociales, siendo objeto de estudio también por parte de ingenierías que, cada vez más, incorporan equipos multidisciplinarios capaces de poner en diálogo creativo y operativo a profesionales e investigadores provenientes de todos los ámbitos de las ciencias.

Este primer número tiene el privilegio de empezar con uno de los principales autores que escribe sobre Teoría de la Comunicación. Y lo hace especificando su valor como motor del cambio social. Robert T. Craig nos recuerda la vinculación indisoluble entre la teoría y la práctica. Por último inicia también el viaje que en este primer número, y a través de los cuatro artículos, haremos alrededor del mundo. En este caso será Asia el escenario elegido por Craig como espacio en el que se ha empezado a impulsar un espacio propio de teorización de la comunicación desde una perspectiva que, también, lleva al cambio social.

### 3 *C&SC - Communication & Social Change, 1(1)*

El segundo artículo nos lleva al análisis del papel de importantes diarios colombianos y estadounidenses en la configuración del riesgo de salud. Eso dentro del contexto de la "guerra contra las drogas". Un artículo interesante y valiente por el contexto en el que se ubica y las conclusiones a las que llega sobre la construcción, también, de la incerteza y el riesgo social. Adriana M. Ángel y Autin S. Babrow desarrollan un artículo intercontinental (Colombia-Estados Unidos) enraizado en la realidad mediática y la manera de destacar o no los concretos riesgos del glifosato y su repercusión sobre el medio ambiente, la comunidad y la política.

El tercero, presentado por Michael W. Kramer y Debbie S. Dougherty se relaciona directamente con el campo de la psicología social vinculada a la comunicación interpersonal. El "pensamiento de grupo" pasa a ser valorado como un proceso a analizar y se argumenta cómo no siempre lleva, irremisiblemente, al fallo catastrófico que otros autores traídos al debate científico del artículo defienden. Una interesante aportación sobre los procesos de toma de decisiones con ejemplos históricos citados, como son la Bahía de cochinos o la primera Guerra del Golfo, revisados desde los parámetros y fundamentación actuales que presentan los autores.

En el cuarto, y último artículo, de este primer número, Franklin Nii Amankwah Yartey analiza críticamente la representatividad en Internet de prestatarios de una de las más importantes organizaciones de microcrédito. Yartey nos trae una aproximación crítica entre los valores positivos que aportan las tecnologías 2.0 y su importancia en la agilización de procesos que ayudan a salir de la pobreza extrema, junto al grado de autonomía y decisión sobre la propia imagen que tienen las personas que acceden a esos microcréditos. Propuestas concretas afloran en sus conclusiones que deberían ser tenidas muy en cuenta.

Y para cerrar este primer número, Sandra Girbés nos presenta la trilogía sobre activismo comunicacional editada por los profesores Lawrence R. Frey y Kevin M. Carragee. Una obra de tres tomos centrada en reflejar muy diferentes aportaciones de profesorado e investigadores e investigadoras universitarias del área de estudio de la comunicación y miembros organizados de la sociedad civil en la lucha por la justicia social. Algo que, precisamente, queremos que *C&SC* sea capaz de plasmar a lo largo de su historia.

Deseamos que este primer número sirva para iniciar un camino intenso y largo de aportaciones concretas sobre el papel transformador de la comunicación en la sociedad. Para ello, nuestro papel será el de aplicar de la manera más rigurosa posible todos los criterios que permitan hacer de *C&SC*, *Communication and Social Change* una publicación tan profunda en lo científico como comprometida con el cambio social.

Miguel Ángel Pulido-Rodríguez

Universitat Ramon Llull

Facultat d'Educació Social i Treball Social Pere Tarrés

1 de octubre de 2013



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://csc.hipatiapress.com>

## Communication Theory and Social Change

Robert T. Craig<sup>1</sup>

1) University of Colorado Boulder. United States of America

Date of publication: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Edition period: October 2013-January 2014

---

**To cite this article:** Craig, R. T. (2013). Communication Theory and Social Change. *Communication & Social Change*, 1(1), 5-18 doi: 10.4471/csc.2013.01

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.447/csc.2013.01>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# Communication Theory and Social Change

Robert T. Craig  
*University of Colorado Boulder*

*(Received: 15 October 2012 ; Accepted: 26 October 2012 ; Published: 1 October 2013)*

## Abstract

---

Communication theory is not only *about* society; it is also *in* society and contributes to the evolution of the communication practices that constitute society, thereby participating in processes of social change. This theme is illustrated by examining the ideas of *network* and *ritual* to show how each emerged as a practical concept in Western culture long before it was theorized explicitly for scientific purposes, and how each concept has developed in conjunction with profound changes in the communicative constitution of society. Next, it is argued more generally that communication theory and practice interact in the medium of metadiscourse, and that the discourse about communication, on both theoretical and practical levels, also engages critically with other discourses such as traditional authoritarianism and political realism, thus being caught up in social conflicts. In this complex scene of metadiscursive controversy and social conflict, communication theory participates in social change. Finally, it is suggested that this view on the role of communication theory in social change can contribute to recent conversations about the development of Asian communication theory.

---

**Keywords:** communication theory, communicative constitution of society, metadiscourse, theory and practice, social conflict



# Teoría de la Comunicación y Cambio Social

Robert T. Craig

*University of Colorado Boulder*

*(Recibido: 15 de octubre de 2012 ; Aceptado: 26 de octubre de 2012;*

*Publicado: 30 de septiembre de 2013 )*

## Resumen

La Teoría de la Comunicación no se hace únicamente *sobre* la sociedad, sino que también está *en* la sociedad y contribuye a la evolución de las prácticas comunicativas que constituyen la sociedad y es, de esta manera, que participa de los procesos de cambio social. Este tema se ilustra examinando las ideas de *red* y *ritual* para mostrar cómo estas emergieron como concepto práctico en la cultura occidental mucho antes de que fueran teorizados explícitamente con fines científicos, y cómo cada concepto se ha desarrollado en conjunción con cambios profundos en la constitución comunicativa de la sociedad. A continuación, se argumenta de manera más general como la teoría y la práctica de la comunicación interactúan en medio del metadiscurso, y que el discurso sobre comunicación, tanto a nivel teórico como práctico, también se pone en contacto de forma crítica con otros discursos como el autoritarismo tradicional y el realismo político, quedando así atrapado en conflictos sociales. En esta compleja escena de controversia metadiscursiva y de conflicto social, la teoría de la comunicación participa en el cambio social. Finalmente, se sugiere que este punto de vista sobre el rol de la teoría de la comunicación en el cambio social puede contribuir a conversaciones recientes sobre el desarrollo de la teoría de la comunicación asiática.

**Palabras clave:** teoría de la comunicación, constitución comunicativa de la sociedad, metadiscurso, teoría y práctica, conflicto social

2013 Hipatia Press

ISSN: 2014-5462

DOI: 10.4471/csc.2013.01

Hipatia Press  
[www.hipatiapress.com](http://www.hipatiapress.com)



## 7 C&SC –Communication & Social Change, 1(1)

In this paper I reflect on communication theory as an element of social change. I argue that communication theory is more than just a conceptual toolset for explaining or influencing social change. Communication theory has a growing presence in the discourse of contemporary societies. It is not only *about* society; it is also *in* society and contributes to the evolution of the communication practices that constitute society. Insofar as communication theory participates in the constitution of society, the introduction of communication theory potentially *is* social change. It cultivates particular ways of understanding human social existence in terms of communication processes, ways that may challenge traditional cultural understandings and practices.

In the following sections I introduce two examples to illustrate how communication theory can be a conceptual tool for *explaining* society while also existing *within* society and participating in processes of social change. Specifically, I examine the concepts of *network* and *ritual* to show how these ideas originated and continue to evolve in particular cultural traditions in conjunction with profound changes in the communicative constitution of society. Second, I step back to take a broader view of *metadiscourse*—a term defined as discourse about discourse that includes both theoretical and ordinary practical ways of talking about communication. Communication theory engages critically with ordinary ideas and ways of talking about communication, such as network and ritual. The discourse of communication, on both theoretical and practical levels, also engages critically with other discourses such as traditional authoritarianism and political realism. In this complex scene of social conflict and metadiscursive debate, communication theory participates in social change. In a final comment, I suggest how this view on the role of communication theory in social change may contribute to recent conversations about Asian communication theory.

### Network

While the concept of network has had an important role in theories of communication and social change, it also has had a significant role in the evolution of social practices and self-understandings away from traditional and bureaucratic structures of hierarchy and toward the flattened and

connected forms of interaction that Castells (1996) has described as the *network society*.

According to Mattelart (1996, 2000), the word *network* originally related to lace making and had nothing to do with communication. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the term was borrowed as a scientific metaphor to explain the circulation of blood. Soon after, blood circulation was used by French engineers and planners as a metaphor to describe connected channels of transportation and communication such as road and canals, through which the commercial and cultural lifeblood of the nation flowed. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept of network was extended so that it referred not only to connected communication systems but also to the universal bonds of human communication that the growth of communication networks was beginning to make possible. Thus, the concept of network initially evolved in practical and scientific discourses in conjunction with modernist ideas about communication as flow, rationalization, and universal progress. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the model of an electrical network became increasingly central to the network concept, and the idea of network was increasingly associated with decentralized control structures (Eriksson, 2005).

Of course, most of this happened before there was ever an academic field or a scientific body of knowledge explicitly called *communication theory*. A scientific analysis of communication networks developed within the social psychology of groups in the 1930's and took an important place in mass communication theory as the interdisciplinary field of communication research was institutionalized in the 1940's. Early studies of mass communication in political and marketing campaigns led to the famous "two step flow" hypothesis of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). According to this hypothesis, the effects of campaign messages are mediated by networks of interpersonal communication. Campaign messages flow from the mass media to opinion leaders who may choose to pass them on to others within their personal networks of influence. By the 1970's the analysis of communication networks was integral to communication theories in fields ranging from the diffusion of innovations (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971) to organizational communication (Farace, Monge & Russell, 1977). The theory of communication networks has continued to develop and by now has reached a high level of sophistication (e.g., Monge & Contractor, 2003). The

## 9 C&SC –Communication & Social Change, 1(1)

conceptual tools of network analysis by now are being used to study everything from international data flows to online social networks.

Thus, network has become an important scientific concept in communication theory, but it has also become much more than that. Since the 1970's, the network has become an increasingly prevalent social ontology—a fundamental way that institutions and members of society describe the social world and make sense of what is going on (Eriksson, 2005). The network is thought to provide a better alternative to traditional ways of understanding social processes in terms of structure and hierarchy. Traditional and modernist models that picture society as an organism or a machine imply a need for hierarchy and centralized control. The model of society as an open network linked by channels of communication implies a need for flexible, self-organizing communication processes that empower individuals and agencies to form network structures around particular shared interests, activities or problems, for example through online social networks such as Facebook. The explosive development of new information and communication technologies has, of course, enabled such new forms of networked interaction and organization, has promoted and given material form to the network ideal of society, and apparently has been driven by an imperative to bring us ever closer to that ideal model.

It is clear that these developments have involved some interplay between communication theory and social practices. Consider, for example, the communication practice called “networking.” According the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) this term was first used in the 1970's to refer to a process of using social networks for professional or personal advantage. The concept of networking preceded the Internet and was not initially framed in terms of communication technology. Initial uses of the term in the field of family therapy seem more directly related to social psychological theories of interpersonal networks than to developments in technology. The idea of networking became popular in the women's movement as a communication technique for women to advance in business and professional life, a way of compensating for the traditional gender hierarchy and patterns of social interaction that favored men. Thus, the second usage example of “networking” reported by the OED appeared in a magazine called *Working Woman* in 1979, and networking was soon widely touted as a “great new way for women to get ahead” (Welch, 1980). By now, of course, people

everywhere engage in “networking,” and communication technologies such as online social networks have become important ways of doing so. It seems that the practical concept of “networking” that emerged in society in the 1970’s not only derived from earlier theoretical ideas about interpersonal communication networks but also became a stimulus for later social networking practices, technologies and related ideas in communication theory.

From networks of roads and canals in the 16<sup>th</sup> century through online social networks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can see that the concept of network has developed both in theory and in social practice, and that the two lines of development have intertwined through time. Network is a theoretical concept that is useful for explaining society in part because related concepts of network have evolved *within* society as an important element of social change from the earliest stages of modernization through the postmodern network society. The theory of communication networks arises from and contributes to, sustains and is sustained by, the social ontology of networks.

## **Ritual**

Sociocultural theories of communication going back to Durkheim have used the concept of ritual as a way of explaining communication practices in society (Rothenbuhler, 1998). James W. Carey, in his classic essay, “A Cultural Approach to Communication” (reprinted most recently in Carey, 2008) took this line of thinking through a radically reflexive turn. Carey pointed out that communication theory has long been dominated by a *transmission* model based on a metaphor of transportation. In this transmission view, communication is a flow of messages across space from sources to receivers for purposes of influence or control. Carey contrasted the transmission view of communication with an alternative model that he called the *ritual* view, and he argued that the ritual view should have a more prominent place in communication theory and practice than it currently does. The ritual model is based on the metaphor of a sacred ceremony. In a ritual view, communication is a collective performance that is meaningful to the participants and that functions to sustain their community through time. In a ritual view, as Carey said, the act of reading a newspaper is not primarily a

matter of receiving information but is more like participating in a religious ceremony that ritually reaffirms the reader's place in a familiar world.

Transmission and ritual could be thought of as alternative ways of conceptualizing and explaining communication for scientific purposes, but Carey's point in offering this distinction was quite different. He did not regard these models of communication as scientific inventions in the first instance. These ideas had already existed in Western culture long before they were formally theorized for scientific purposes. Both views of communication had religious roots, the ritual view deriving from ancient practices of communal worship and sacrament, the transmission view from practices of communicating the Christian faith to foreign lands, especially in the age of European exploration and colonization that began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. At this point, the history of the transmission model and the explanation of its dominant role in society and later in communication theory converge with the history of communication networks sketched earlier. Networks, after all, are constituted by channels of transmission, and in the age of European imperialism, networks were extended around the world to facilitate the flow of commerce and to bring far-flung colonial provinces under central control. The transmission model evolved along with technological advances in transportation and communication and came to dominate both practical and theoretical thinking about communication, just as the industries spawned by those same technologies assumed a dominant role in the economy. In the specific context of US American history, according to Carey, the ritual view of communication survived in discourses that celebrated the USA as a nation of small, local, face-to-face communities, while the transmission view remained dominant through discourses that celebrated urbanization, large scale industrialization, and the growth of national power. For Carey, it is the need to revitalize public life and to recover a sense of community under conditions of postmodern cultural fragmentation and social change that calls the ritual view to our renewed attention. What we need, for Carey (as I interpret him), is not more information but a democratic public life constituted by more meaningful and inclusive communication rituals and undergirded by a social ontology that understands society more in terms of culture and community than in terms of information and power.

However one may critique Carey's specific interpretations of history (see [Packer and Robertson, 2006](#), for some critiques), there remains a larger point about communication theory, history, and culture that I wish to emphasize here. Communication theory does not arise as a pure scientific invention used to explain society. Rather, communication theory already exists implicitly within cultural practices before it is ever formally written down as theory. Changing ideas about communication have contributed to processes of social change, not only as tools for facilitating change but as essential elements of social change. The intellectual discipline of communication theory only further contributes to this process and makes it more explicit and self-conscious, as we showed earlier with regard to concepts of network and networking.

In a reflexive metatheoretical perspective such as Carey's, even the transmission model of communication is nothing other than a cultural ritual—a way of talking about and practicing communication that expresses and sustains a particular culture in which communication is associated with information flows, power, and influence. This Euro-American cultural concept of communication-as-transmission has spread around the world as an element of the modernizing process in global culture and economy. Carey's analysis implied that that progressive social change in a postmodern world would be promoted by a renewed emphasis on the ritual view in communication theory. Of course it is true that Carey's specific interpretation of the ritual view was rooted in Euro-American history and culture no less than was the transmission view, but his larger, metatheoretical point was that *all* communication theory is inextricably cultural. The idea of communication does not transcend culture but emerged historically in specific cultural traditions, diffused globally as an essential element and agent of modernization, and continues to evolve as it interacts with different cultures. As I have written elsewhere:

The eruption of the communication idea around the world in globalized forms and in culturally adapted localized forms needs to be understood within the general process of economic and cultural globalization with all its attendant puzzles and controversies. The rapid international growth of the academic communication field is bound up in ways we have yet to

### 13 C&SC –Communication & Social Change, 1(1)

understand with the emergence of “communication” as a keyword in global culture.... Understanding this relationship is an urgent research problem at the discipline’s foundation (Craig, 2008b, p. 17).

Carey’s ritual model exemplifies a *cultural turn* in communication theory that responds to this global situation in which communication technologies, industries, professions, and practices are developing rapidly around the world and creating a demand for academic communication studies (Craig, 2008a), and yet it becomes apparent in this process that communication itself is not a relatively culture-free technical field like physics or engineering. Communication and communication theory are deeply cultural, and the growing emphasis on communication almost everywhere in the world represents a significant cultural change that has to be worked out in each society in its own terms. Like the theory of communication networks, then, the cultural turn in communication theory participates in processes of social change in which changing communication concepts and practices are a central element. And it is obvious that these changes were already happening in the world as part of the general modernization/ globalization process long before there was ever a formal discipline of communication theory.

#### **Metadiscourse, Conflict, and Social Change**

My recent thinking has drawn me toward studies of *metadiscourse* as a way of exploring the relevance of communication theory to what is going on in society (Craig, 1999, 2005, 2006). Metadiscourse is self-reflexive discourse, talk about talk, the pragmatic use of language and other semiotic resources to influence meaning and action by commenting on some aspect of a contextual discourse (Craig, 2008c). In linguistics, metadiscourse is often studied to understand the use of specific linguistic devices such as discourse markers and reported speech. Communication theory is interested in a broader range of metadiscourse:

Discourse about discourse-in-general is also meta-discourse. People trading stories about poorly run business meetings or writing newspaper columns about rules of etiquette for the use of



mobile phones in public are engaged in meta-discourse with a relatively broad scope. So are scholars writing academic books and articles about media, discourse, and communication. All of these forms of meta-discourse participate in the ubiquitous social processes through which norms and meanings for communication are continually negotiated. (Craig, 2008c, p. 307)

The key point for our present purposes is that communication theory and ordinary practical talk about communication are both metadiscourse: both are forms of discourse that comment reflexively on something in the communication process, and both have pragmatic functions that influence the production of meaning and the norms of communication in society. Metadiscourse is the common semiotic medium in which theoretical and practical metadiscourse overlap and influence each other—for example, similar or related ideas about media freedom may appear in academic theory and research, journalistic commentary, and everyday talk, all of which contribute to the evolution of media freedom as a cultural and political concept. If communication theory participates in social change, metadiscourse would seem to constitute the primary medium in which that participation occurs.

In light of this theoretical analysis of metadiscourse I have recently been pursuing interpretive discourse analytic studies of arguments about communication in public metadiscourse. For example, I have studied a wide range of international English internet discourse about “dialogue,” noting issues of contention, lines of argument, and embedded assumptions (Craig, 2008d). I have found that arguments about whether certain parties can or should engage in a mutual dialogue often hinge on power relations or moral considerations. Thus, dialogue may be opposed because it may require participants to compromise absolute moral principles or because the power equation between the parties will disadvantage one side or the other.

Although this research is still in early stages, I hope it will begin to shed light on the role of changing concepts and practices of communication in social change. The aspects of communication that are argued about in public are those that are controversial in some way, presumably because they involve underlying social conflicts. For example, debates about the possibility of “dialogue” between Muslim and other groups in some

European countries involve conflicts about multiculturalism and national identity as well as religious differences. Calls to engage in “dialogue” rely on the assumption that differences in society should be addressed through a peaceful communication process rather than in some other way, such as a power struggle among groups. The assumption that communication is the best way to solve social problems reflects the growing influence of what Cameron (2000) has called the “communication culture,” a culture in which the importance of good communication is heavily emphasized. Conflict may arise between advocates of dialogue and religious or cultural conservatives who associate the recent emphasis on “communication” with unacceptable trends toward secularism and moral relativism. Conflict may also arise between advocates of dialogue and political realists or dominant groups who associate the emphasis on “communication” with political weakness in conflict situations better resolved by gaining and use using power, perhaps even by means of force or violence. It is in social conflicts such as these that “communication” comes to have a specific range of meanings in a particular society. The study of metadiscourse is intended to illuminate those meanings, thus making them available for theoretical analysis and critique.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to offer a brief suggestion as to how these thoughts on communication theory and social change might apply to a topic such as “Global Challenges to the Future of Communication: Digital Media and Communication Freedom in Public Discourse,” the theme of the First Indonesian International Conference on Communication to which this paper was first presented in 2010. The suggestion emerges from a reflection on recent discussions about the need to develop “de-westernized” or specifically Asian approaches to communication theory.

Since the 1980’s there has been a movement, primarily led by Asian scholars, to de-westernized communication theory by developing approaches based on Asian cultural traditions (e.g., Miike, 2010; Wang, 2011). This movement is extremely important for the field of communication. The argument I have been making in this paper implies that that the development of Asian approaches to communication theory is not just a matter of bringing Asian traditions of thought more fully into the field, nor is it just a matter of

creating new theories of communication that are more sensitive to Asian cultural patterns, although both of those goals are certainly important. I would like to suggest, in addition, that the development of Asian communication theory involves engaging theory and research with processes of social change in which changing cultural ideas and practices of communication are already implicated. One aspect of this work is to pay careful attention to the *metadiscourse* of a particular society or region, to identify the concepts and assumptions about communication that have currency, and especially to understand how the idea of communication is caught up in conflicts and controversies that swirl around social change movements.

What does this mean for a discussion of “Digital Media and Communication Freedom in Public Discourse” in an Asian or specifically an Indonesian context? Of course, I do not know at all! I know too little about the topic in general and lack the cultural background necessary to say anything of interest about it specifically with regard to Asian or Indonesian societies. Instead, I would invite others, who know much more about these things than I do, to consider questions such as these: What can we learn by examining terms like “digital media” and “communication freedom” in the *metadiscourse* of a particular society, as these and related terms in local languages are used in media, public, and ordinary interpersonal talk, especially with reference to current social conflicts? Do these terms have specific cultural meanings that can be illuminated by an examination of their metadiscursive uses? What larger normative visions or conceptual models of communication do they imply? What are the discourses (traditional, political, economic, etc.) with which they come into conflict, and what does this tell us about the broader processes of social change to which they may be contributing? We have every reason to expect that the academic metadiscourse of communication theory can enrich our thinking about these sorts of questions, thereby contributing to the development of culturally grounded yet globally relevant communication theories and practices.

## References

- Cameron, D. (2000). *Good to talk? Living and working in a communication culture*. London: Sage.
- Carey, J. W. (2008). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society* (Rev. ed.). New York and London: Routledge.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers.
- Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9, 119-161. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2885-1999tb00355.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885-1999tb00355.x)
- Craig, R. T. (2005). How we talk about how we talk: Communication theory in the public interest. *Journal of Communication*, 55, 659-667. doi:[10.1111/j.1460-2466.2005.tb03015.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2005.tb03015.x)
- Craig, R. T. (2006). Communication as a practice. In G. J. Shepherd, J. St. John & T. Striphas (Eds.), *Communication as .... Perspectives on theory* (pp. 38-47). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Craig, R. T. (2008a). Communication as a field and discipline. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Vol. II, pp. 675-688). Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Craig, R. T. (2008b). Communication in the conversation of disciplines. *Russian Journal of Communication*, 1(1), 7-23.
- Craig, R. T. (2008c). Meta-discourse. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of communication* (Vol. VII, pp. 3707-3709). Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Craig, R. T. (2008d). The rhetoric of 'dialogue' in metadiscourse: Possibility-impossibility arguments and critical events. In E. Weigand (Ed.), *Dialogue and rhetoric* (pp. 55-67). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Eriksson, K. (2005). On the ontology of networks. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 2(4), 305-323. doi:[10.1080/14791420500332451](https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420500332451)
- Farace, R. V., Monge, P. R., & Russell, H. (1977). *Communicating and organizing*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. New York: The Free Press.
- Mattelart, A. (1996). *The invention of communication* (S. Emanuel, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Mattelart, A. (2000). *Networking the world, 1794-2000* (L. Carey-Libbrecht & J. A. Cohen, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Miike, Y. (2010). An anatomy of eurocentrism in communication scholarship: The role of asiacentricity in de-westernizing theory and research. *China Media Research*, 6(1), 1-11.
- Monge, P. R., & Contractor, N. S. (2003). *Theories of communication networks*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Networking. (n.d.). *Oxford English dictionary online*. Retrieved from <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00323438>
- Packer, J., & Robertson, C. (Eds.). (2006). *Thinking with James Carey: Essays on communications, transportation, history*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Rogers, E. M., & Shoemaker, F. F. (1971). *Communication of innovations: A cross-cultural approach* (2nd ed.). New York: The Free Press.
- Rothenbuhler, E. W. (1998). *Ritual communication: From everyday conversation to mediated ceremony*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Wang, G. (Ed.). (2011). *De-Westernizing communication research: Altering questions and changing frameworks*. New York: Routledge.
- Welch, M. S. (1980). *Networking: The great new way for women to get ahead* (1st ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

**Robert T. Craig** is professor at the Department of Communication, University of Colorado Boulder, United States of America.

**Contact Address:** Department of Communication. University of Colorado. Hellems 84, 270 UCB. Boulder, CO 803309-0270.  
[robert.craig@colorado.edu](mailto:robert.craig@colorado.edu)

Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://csc.hipatiapress.com>

## **Social Construction of Health Risk: Rhetorical Elements in Colombian and U.S. News Coverage of Coca Eradication**

Adriana M. Ángel Botero <sup>1</sup> & Austin S. Babrow<sup>2</sup>

1) Universidad de Manizales. Colombia.

2) Ohio University. School of Communication Studies. United States of America.

Date of publication: October, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Edition period: October 2013-January 2014

---

**To cite this article:** Ángel Botero, A.M., & Babrow, A. S. (2013). Social Construction of Health Risk: Rhetorical Elements in Colombian and U.S. News Coverage of Coca Eradication. *Communication & Social Change*, 1(1), 19-43 doi:10.4471/csc.2013.02

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.447/csc.2013.02>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# **Social Construction of Health Risk: Rhetorical Elements in Colombian and U.S. News Coverage of Coca Eradication**

Adriana M. Ángel Botero  
*Universidad de Manizales*

Austin Scott Babrow  
*Ohio University*

*(Received: 15 April 2012; Accepted: 27 May 2012; Published: 1 October 2013)*

## **Abstract**

---

This paper examines rhetorical elements related to the social construction of health risk. More specifically, we analyze how prominent Colombian and U.S. newspapers construct the health risks associated with the use of glyphosate in the “war on drugs” in Colombia. Glyphosate, an herbicide that works as a plant growth regulator, is used heavily via aerial spraying to eradicate Colombian coca cultivation: use mandated by *Plan Colombia*. These practices have generated wide ranging cultural and sociopolitical disputes among environmental, health, communal, and political organizations. While our focus is on the controversy related to health issues, our analyses necessarily touch on various environmental, community, and political issues.

---

**Keywords:** risk, social construction, Colombia, glyphosate

# **La Construcción Social de los Riesgos de Salud: Elementos Retóricos en la Cobertura Mediática de la Erradicación de la Coca en Colombia y los Estados Unidos**

Adriana M. Ángel Botero  
*Universidad de Manizales*

Austin Scott Babrow  
*Ohio University*

*(Recibido: 15 de Abril de 2012; Aceptado: 25 de mayo de 2012;  
Publicado: 30 Septiembre 2013)*

## **Resumen**

Este artículo examina los elementos retóricos relacionados con la construcción social del riesgo de la salud. Específicamente, analizamos cómo importantes diarios colombianos y estadounidenses configuran el riesgo de salud asociado con el uso del glifosato en el contexto de la "guerra contra las drogas" en Colombia. El glifosato, un herbicida que funciona como regulador del crecimiento de plantas, es ampliamente usado a través de la fumigación aérea para erradicar cultivos de coca en Colombia según los lineamientos del Plan Colombia. Estas prácticas han generado diversas disputas culturales y sociopolíticas entre organizaciones medioambientales, de salud, comunitarias y políticas. Mientras nuestra atención se centra en la controversia relacionada con los temas de salud, nuestros análisis también aborda diversos temas relacionados con el medio ambiente, la comunidad y la política.

**Palabras clave:** riesgo, construcción social, Colombia, glifosato



**C**lose analysis of public discourse on contemporary risks reveals a wide range of disputes, illuminating the many challenges of the social construction of risk (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990). In this paper, we examine a case in point that has received relatively little attention from health, political, media, or risk communication researchers. We ask: how have major newspapers constructed the health risks associated with the use of glyphosate in the “war on drugs” in Colombia?

Answers to this question will be valuable in several ways. First, they will illuminate rhetorical framing of a controversy generated by multiple agents with diverse arguments and discourses (Raigoso, 2006, 2009). Second, although claims and counterclaims about these risks are ostensibly focused on health, the controversy about the use of glyphosate transcends the material through its political and economic meanings. We wonder if (and if so, how) political and economic considerations are manifested in the discourse on glyphosate health risk. We also ask: how do constructions of glyphosate risk in Colombian newspapers compare to those in U.S. newspapers? Are the stories essentially the same, which might be the case if the science is consistent, and the interests of both nations coincide? Are there differences in the two countries’ news reports, perhaps reflective of diverging interpretations of relevant science or contrasting national interests?

Finally and closely related to the preceding concern, one other reason to be interested in this story is rooted in its irony: the dispersal of a governmentally approved industrial chemical with controversial health effects to combat the agricultural production of a substance deemed a dangerous drug. In this regard, the glyphosate coca-eradication story powerfully illuminates perhaps the most important aspect of the social construction of risk: the judgment that one risk is greater than another. This is an irreducibly interpretive and hence socioculturally inflected moral judgment (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Russell & Babrow, 2011).

### **Realist and Constructionist Approaches to Communicating About Risks**

From the realist standpoint, risk communication is a matter of education. The Public Understanding of Science perspective posits a “deficit model” of the task; risk discourse is challenging because the language of science,

which provides our most accurate rendering of reality, is not always understandable for the public (Blok, Jensen, & Kaltofl, 2008; Burns, O'Connor, & Stockmayer, 2003). In other words, scientists have the authority to speak the truths of material conditions, but lay-people must be trained to comprehend the language of science. The Public Understanding of Science perspective thus gives rise to scientific literacy programs aimed at developing in lay-people the fundamental skills they need to read and interpret scientific contents (Burns et al., 2003). However, the problem of educating the public about risk has persisted despite various scientific literacy programs and more general educational campaigns (see Fischhoff, 1995).

The Public Understanding of Science perspective and the deficit model are challenged not only by limited success in moving popular belief into alignment with expert judgment but also by scientists' inability to achieve consensus about the potential harms in a given area. When several institutions (e.g., scientific, regulatory, public interest) participate in risk discussion, the discourse itself is likely to produce uncertainty (Forss & Samset, 1999) and ignorance (Stocking & Holstein, 2009). Moreover, in recent years there have appeared numerous agents actively involved in disseminating uncertainty across a range of claims about a variety of risks, as well as critics bent on rescuing public discourse from these perhaps misbegotten seeds of doubt (Michaels, 2008; Stocking & Hollstein, 2009).

A great deal of accumulated research indicates that judgments of risk under conditions of uncertainty are susceptible to a variety of social, political, and economic considerations (see Slovic, 2000, 2010). While such findings are taken by psychometrically inclined researchers as evidence for further study of intrapsychological phenomena such as heuristics, they might just as well be understood to reflect the malleability of risk. Indeed, social constructionists argue that "risk is a way—or rather, a set of different ways—of ordering reality" (Dean, 1999, p. 131). While it might be possible to achieve consensus in some risk estimate, it is a mistake to understand consensus as apprehension of actual, material risk. Thus we may believe that material conditions are more or less threatening but understand these conditions to be inextricably intertwined within historically unfolding linguistic, social, cultural, political, and economic discourse (see Beck, 1992; Russell & Babrow, 2011; Strydom, 2002). Because there can be

several discourses on a single risk topic, the most pressing aim is to analyze the contemporary discussion of risk as it takes place in a “public forum” (Strydom, 2002; Under, 1994).

### **Glyphosate and the War on Coca Production**

Given the foregoing considerations, we turn to discourse related to the use of glyphosate in the war on coca production in Colombia. Glyphosate is an herbicide that works as a plant growth regulator. Widely marketed under the trade name Roundup in the U.S., this herbicide is used heavily via aerial spraying to eradicate Colombian coca cultivation: use mandated by *Plan Colombia*, the anti-cocaine strategy established in 1999 between the U.S. and Colombian governments (Veillette, 2005). The use of glyphosate in the “war on drugs” has generated wide ranging cultural and sociopolitical disputes among environmental, health, communal, and political organizations. While our focus is on the controversy related to health issues as constructed by the press, the nature of news reporting became entwined in our analysis with environmental, community, political and economic issues, as detailed below.

It is important to note that there is no consensus on the health effects of glyphosate on the Colombian farmers and villagers when this herbicide is sprayed over the cocaine crops by airplanes and helicopters<sup>1</sup>. According to some ecological and health organizations, glyphosate represents a health risk because of its toxic composition (Red de Desarrollo, 2007). Some studies show, for example, that glyphosate causes intoxication, “arrhythmia, shock, hyperkalemia, and metabolic acidosis, despite supportive care” (Chirn-Bin & Chia-Chu 2009, p. 41; Cox, 1998/2000). Nonetheless, its risks are considered less harmful than other chemical herbicides. It is therefore marketed and used extensively around the world.

“Glyphosate is the seventh most commonly used pesticide in U.S. agriculture, the third most commonly used pesticide on industrial and commercial land, and the second most commonly used home and garden pesticide”<sup>2</sup> (Cox, 1998/2000). In support of this use are scientific studies that find no or only minimal negative consequences for human health (e.g., De Roos et al., 2005). Ironically, India and Taiwanese farmers, caught up in huge debt through the expenses of industrialized (e.g., pesticide intensive)

agricultural practices and crop failures, have been committing suicide by ingesting glyphosate (e.g., Lee, Chen, Chi, Huang, & Tsai, 2000; Heeter, 2005; Talbot et al., 1991). In any case, the Colombian and U.S. governments consider glyphosate harmless for human beings (Rohter, 2000).

The controversy briefly outlined above provides proponents and opponents of using glyphosate for Colombian coca eradication resources to construct health risks in quite different ways. Given this background, we ask, how have major Colombian and U.S. newspapers constructed the health risks associated with the use of glyphosate in the “war on drugs” in Colombia? How do constructions compare across the two countries’ news reports?

### **Studying News Constructions of Glyphosate Risks in the War on Coca Cultivation in Colombia**

#### **Identifying Texts for Analysis**

To answer these questions, we analyzed stories appearing in the most read newspaper in Colombia, *El Tiempo*, and one of the most influential newspapers in the United States of America, the *New York Times*. The comparative analysis is especially interesting because it allows us to examine a potential risk as seen from the standpoint of countries that face complexly intertwined risks (drug abuse, narco-trafficking, glyphosate exposure) and benefits (reduced production of illegal drugs, increased industrial revenues, increased foreign aid).

We identified all articles appearing in both the *El Tiempo* and *New York Times* for the decade from 2000 to 2010. *LexisNexis* database was used to search for *New York Times* articles using the terms “Glyphosate,” “Health,” and “Colombia.” This search identified ten articles (about 35 pages of text); all of them were analyzed. In the case of *El Tiempo* we searched for articles by using a facility on the newspaper website; this identified 353 articles in total. Closer examination of these articles revealed that only 30 of them directly analyzed the effects of glyphosate on human health (others only briefly and indirectly mentioned issues of health related to the use of glyphosate). To remain true to our main interest in the question of how health effects have been constructed, we focused exclusively on the 30

newspaper articles in which the health risk of glyphosate was a nontrivial rather than incidental topic. Nonetheless, as we will explain in the following sections, health risk was rarely conceived as an independent risk in these two prominent news sources.

### **Approach to Analysis**

As only the first author's mother tongue is Spanish, the authors commenced analysis with a series of weekly data sessions in which *New York Times* articles were examined in line-by-line readings for thematic content and rhetorical devices. Following Gee (2010) and Potter (1996), the aim in looking for rhetorical elements was to identify discursive choice-making evident in construction of health arguments; we looked for both manifest/explicit and also implicit linguistic/discursive choices in the formation of these claims and supporting evidence. As this work progressed, the first author also examined articles appearing in *El Tiempo*. The first author brought observations and interpretations from *El Tiempo* to data sessions for comparison with *Times* stories. In this way, common rhetorical moves were identified, and the search for diverging moves proceeded. These methods produced the observations and interpretations presented below. Necessarily, these interpretations are open to challenge. We try to present claims with illustrations in detail sufficient to allow readers to judge the credibility of our assertions.

One other aspect of our approach to analysis must be clear from the start. Following Potter (1996), we adopted the stance of "methodological relativism." In other words, our analytical focus was exclusively rhetorical and interpretive; we have not tried to ascertain the factual accuracy of claims about the health effects of glyphosate use. As Potter has urged, we need not be better scientists than those who study the safety or risks associated with glyphosate use, nor must we be better journalists than those presumably trying to report these "facts." Our aim is solely to understand how journalists construct the relevant facts about glyphosate health risks, all the while being sensitive to the truth that we are ourselves constructing a version of reality.

## Analysis

### Alternative Constructions of Health Risk

Articles in both the *New York Times* and *El Tiempo* constructed claims about the health risks associated with glyphosate in several fundamentally different forms. One form linked health risk to the chemical substance in the abstract, out of any specific context of use. A second form constructed risks that arise out of the way that the substance is used. Third, risk was cast in relative terms; glyphosate was compared to other presumably known risks.

The simplest and most sweeping way of formulating the risk was to claim that glyphosate is or is not a risky substance in itself. Because there is disagreement among scientists about the toxicity of glyphosate (see above), there is latitude for differing claims and argumentation about the herbicide's health risks. In other words, journalists and those they interviewed or consulted had to make rhetorical choices (including neutrality) about how to represent the inconsistent scientific literature. Thus it was noteworthy to observe that U.S. and Colombian governmental agents asserted unequivocally that glyphosate, by itself, does not constitute a health risk. For example:

New York Times (NYT)1: "Calling it 'the most studied herbicide in the world,' he [an U.S. Embassy official] said it was proven to be harmless to human and animal life and called the villagers' account [of health problems related to glyphosate use] 'scientifically impossible'" (Rohter, 2000).

NYT2: American officials dispute [farmers'] reports, insisting that numerous tests on glyphosate have demonstrated that the pesticide cannot cause harm to humans or animals" (Forero, 2001a).<sup>3</sup>

El Tiempo (ET)1: "'No scientific study done in countries where glyphosate is applied has shown that it causes severe damage to human health' said an Advisor of the Eradication Program of the United States Embassy"<sup>4</sup> (Glifosato: arma mortal o no, 2001).

In contrast to the general and unequivocal claims that glyphosate is a safe substance, there were no general and unequivocal claims that glyphosate is risky or harmful. On the contrary, claims of risk were more nuanced or

complicated. In some of these cases the focal point of the controversy was not pure glyphosate, but the components added to the herbicide before being used:

NYT3: [Concerns such as] “the mixing of glyphosate with other chemicals without knowing the possible effects, have prompted prominent officials like Eduardo Cifuentes, the Colombian human rights ombudsman, and Carlos Ossa, the nation's general comptroller, to call for a suspension of spraying” (Forero, 2001b).

NYT4: “But spraying opponents accuse the administration of trying to conceal other components, known as surfactants, added for use in Colombia to help the glyphosate to stick to the coca leaves. ‘We don't know what those surfactants are,’ said Dr. Cederstav of Earthjustice” (Marquis, 2002a).

ET2: “Elsa Nivia [director of the Colombian affiliate of the advocacy organization Pesticide Action Network] claims that neither the government nor the agencies that deal with fumigations are interested in conducting a thorough investigation as it has been recently done in Ecuador, where one hundred percent of the tested people living in the border zone showed toxicity after the fumigation done in our country [Colombia]. Moreover, the concentration being used in Colombia is 26 percent glyphosate, even though the amount recommended for agriculture is one percent. And if we add the cosmuflux, the action of the herbicide quadruples” (Glifosato: arma mortal o no, 2001).

The quotes above reveal that this health risk discourse becomes more complex not only in recognizing that glyphosate is at times used in mixtures with other substances that have unknown potential for harm, including some that interact with glyphosate to make it more powerful. Risks are also associated with other aspects of the way that the herbicide is used. These constructions challenge simple claims about the inherent safety or riskiness of the substance in itself. In other words for some agents in some contexts, glyphosate by itself or in the abstract might not be inherently risky; rather, risk arises in the way it is used, which may or may not be hazardous (Herr, 2003). Risk is thus caused by people who do not appropriately employ the herbicide.

In some cases, risk emerges from more dramatic (ab)uses, notably because pilots spread glyphosate at the wrong altitude or at the wrong place:

NYT5: “The children and their teachers were in the schoolyard, they say, playing soccer and basketball and waiting for classes to begin when the crop-duster appeared. At first they waved, but as the plane drew closer and a gray mist began to stream from its wings, alarmed teachers rushed the pupils to their classrooms.... Critics say they frequently receive reports of mistakes and abuses by the planes' Colombian pilots that both the American and Colombian governments choose to ignore.... Critics, like Elsa Nivia, director of the Colombian affiliate of the advocacy organization Pesticide Action Network, see the eradication effort as dangerous and misguided. ‘These pilots don't care if they are fumigating over schools, houses, grazing areas, or sources of water,’ she said in an interview at the group's headquarters in Cali” (Rohter, 2000).

Construction like the preceding locates the risks associated with glyphosate in the way it is (mis)used rather than as inherent in the substance itself.

In contrast to the two preceding formulations of risk, one other way that journalists and their sources word risk claims is in the form of comparisons among different kinds of risks. By comparing the use of glyphosate with other health, environmental, or social risks, agents aim to show either that this herbicide is a minor worry compared with others or that glyphosate is the worst among several hazards. The following are two striking examples of comparisons used to trivialize the risks:

NYT6: “The American government contends that glyphosate is one of the world's safest herbicides – ‘less toxic than common salt, aspirin, caffeine, nicotine and even vitamin A.’” (Semple, & Golden, 2007).

ET3: ‘Detergent for washing the dishes is more dangerous for human health than glyphosate’ said the Justice Minister [of Colombia] Rómulo González before the Senate” (Choque de posiciones, 2001).



In these excerpts, glyphosate is compared to harmless substances to minimize the idea of its potential risk. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the comparisons in effect normalize the threat by likening it to mundane risks.

In short, news stories about health risks associated with glyphosate use in Colombia construct these claims in various forms, from general and unqualified assertions of safety, through various more nuanced formulations of risk that take into account the way the substance is actually used (e.g., in mixtures with unknown substances or misapplications through indiscriminate spraying), to comparisons to other risks, typically to trivialize and normalize the threat. Of course, all of these claims are rooted in physical/material processes (biological, atmospheric, behavioral). As such they fall comfortably within the realm of scientific-technological expertise. But the controversy is also politically, economically, and legalistically charged. Hence, Potter's (1996) discussion of category entitlement and attribution of interest is a useful lens for illuminating these constructions.

### **Category Entitlement and Attribution of Interest**

Potter (1996) demonstrates the significance of credentialing sources in argument-making. His notion of category entitlement refers to the relative expertise or standing one has to make claims about some aspect of the world given one's social position. A given position, such as combat veteran or stock broker, entitles one to others' willingness to believe, depending on the subject area of a claim. Thus, for example, combat veterans and stock brokers have the right to our credulity, although for very different topics.

As noted above, given that glyphosate-related health risks (or safety) surely entail material processes, one would expect news articles dealing with health risks to report on the observations and experiences of those with material experience with the substance, such as those who work at its application, those exposed to application, and scientists who study effects systematically. We have already observed that reports of those directly exposed—the villagers who have been sprayed by errant or irresponsible pilots—are disputed by political sources (NYT1 and 2; also see NYT5). Yet another example of efforts to discredit risk claims on the basis of direct experience (i.e., category entitlement) was the following:

NYT7: “State Department officials say the herbicide being used is not toxic, even when people are directly sprayed. One official who defended the program said he had been inadvertently sprayed with the herbicide in Colombia on 15 occasions and had suffered no adverse effects” (Marquis, 2002a).

However, the evidence of direct experience was also used to challenge the claim of harmlessness, as in the following *El Tiempo* excerpt:

ET4: “The Ecuadorian Vice President, Lenin Moreno, challenged [the Colombian government]: ‘If glyphosate is harmless then fumigate the Nariño Palace.’” (Ayala, 2007).

In late modern discourse on material risks, we most often turn to scientists for authoritative information (see Giddens, 1990; Lupton, 1999). Scientists engaged in independent, systematic study of glyphosate’s effects ought to be the most knowledgeable and least biased or interested sources for knowledge claims. We would expect them to be prominent sources in these news stories, along with recounting of their credentials and hence entitlement to our willingness to believe. However, in all of the analyzed articles, only one scientist is directly identified, along with credentials, and quoted. Talking about the difference between the kind of glyphosate used in Colombia and the Roundup products commercialized in the U.S., a *New York Times* article quoted a scientist who explained that the toxicity of both products is not the same:

NYT8: “‘It’s not the same as what you’re finding on the shelf at the Home Depot,’ said Anna Cederstav, a staff scientist at Earthjustice, an environmental law firm” (Marquis, 2002a).

Aside from the foregoing exception, rather than referencing scientific authorities, both *The New York Times* and *El Tiempo* quote and refer to a large number of political actors. Congressmen, judges, communitarian leaders, ambassadors, presidents, and members of non-governmental organizations and military forces, among other political agents, are referenced in claims about effects of glyphosate on human health. However, whereas journalists do not quote scientists that they have interviewed or

reports of scientific studies they have read, the political sources they quote frequently invoke scientific studies. In most cases, the word *scientific* and references to “research” and “studies” are used as generic terms to create the appearance of an empirical discourse (Potter, 1996); these words are used to add credibility to claims about the material reality or unreality of glyphosate health risks. In other words, science and empirical research are most frequently invoked by political actors, apparently as a way to overcome what might otherwise be seen as their lack of category entitlement to speak with authority on material risk. For example, recall NYT1 and ET1, and consider the following:

ET5: “[Rand Beers, the American Sub-Secretary of Narcotics] cites scientific studies conducted by the World Health Organization according to which glyphosate does not cause cancer, birth defects, genetic mutations or reproduction problems” (*Intensificaremos las fumigaciones*, 2001).

Affirmations like these (also see further examples below) show that both “science” and “scientific” characterizations of information are used to warrant claims about material reality. These moves are made without corroborating evidence anywhere in the articles. Thus it appears that references to “science” are used by political actors as a rhetorical strategy to enhance the credibility of their claims. Ironically, however, these political sources often deviate substantially from the scientific ideal in communicating research findings; in the latter, generally, claims are supposed to be carefully qualified as to their scope and level of available support, particularly when evidence is inconsistent. By contrast, as illustrated in the preceding quotes, political sources in this discourse often assert unequivocally that glyphosate is safe.

In short, “science” is invoked by political actors who might otherwise appear to lack the necessary credentials to pronounce on matters of material risk. However, in addition, the invocation of science might also be a way to preemptively overcome the counterargument that these political actors are untrustworthy sources because of their interest or stake in the outcome of these disputes (what Potter (1996) terms the “attribution of interest”). Political actors who support or oppose the continuing use of glyphosate in Colombia might be biased and hence unworthy of belief. So constructing

source interest or stake—either asserting that a speaker has a stake or inoculating against such claims—become important discursive activities in building up the facticity of accounts (Potter, 1996). For example, the following illustrates the attribution of interest.

ET6: “Gabriel Merchán, the Colombian Director of Narcotics warned: ‘[this campaign against glyphosate] is a drug traffickers’ disinformation strategy to discredit the Colombian program against drugs” (Acabar fumigación, 2001).

Whereas invocations of “science,” “studies,” and “research” are often used to inoculate against charges of interest, the following excerpts construct such evidence more suspiciously; even empirical research is said to be susceptible to interest or bias.

NYT9: “‘There are a lot of studies out there, but the problem is that they come from people who have certain interests,’ said Klaus Nyholm, chief of the United Nations Drug Control Program in Colombia” (Forero, 2001b).

ET7: “[Colombian] scientists and environmental organizations are afraid that the [American] Environmental Protection Agency was forced to base its analysis [of glyphosate] on limited information given by the State Department, which they consider a source full of prejudices” (Gómez, 2002).

Many of the political agents contributing to the social construction of glyphosate’s health risks in these news stories accused others of having personal interests that motivate their opinions about the herbicide. This attribution of interests not only increases the controversy and uncertainty about glyphosate, it also illustrates the challenges of negotiating the meaning of risks in prominent news forums. The analysis of these mechanisms of category entitlements and attribution of interests also displays the entanglement of health risk with politics. The following section will discuss in greater detail the difficulty of disentangling health risk from other dimensions and risks associated with glyphosate.

## Entanglement of Glyphosate Health Risk

As we can see in the previous excerpts from *El Tiempo* and *The New York Times*, news of glyphosate's health risks is often entangled with non-health issues.

Our analysis of the newspaper articles shows that constructions of the nature, scope, and limitations of glyphosate health risk are not only based on nonscientists' characterization of scientific findings, but also by association with political and economic issues. Theoretically, we might imagine a continuum ranging from news stories that adhere strictly to the regulative ideal (or some would say, fantasy) of purely scientific considerations on one end to explicitly politicized (or otherwise explicitly interested) framing of health risks on the other. Between these extremes would be more and less explicitly entangled constructions.

The most explicit form of entanglement shows a direct association between health risk and other ecological, economic, and political risks; the nature or scope of the former is determined by issues related to the latter. Thus, the health problems that glyphosate may cause are directly explained by mentioning economic, political or environmental issues. One of the most representative examples of this kind of entanglement is found in almost all of newspaper articles that analyze the role of Ecuador in the Colombian discussion about the use of glyphosate. The role of Ecuador in the Colombian discussion about this herbicide shows that the use of glyphosate represents a political and diplomatic issue between Colombia, Ecuador, and the United States. In general terms, Ecuador considers glyphosate to be a dangerous herbicide that's use affects the Ecuadorian borderland and therefore the health of its population:

ET8: "The Ecuadorian Vice President, Lenin Moreno, said that there are 1,635 Ecuadorians affected in their health as the result of the 'cocktail' that Colombia uses in its aerial spraying with glyphosate..." (Ayala, 2007).

In the Ecuadorians' claims we can also see the entanglement of health with politics and, therefore, the difficulty of treating glyphosate health risk as an independent and isolated risk:

ET9: “Quito [government] says that glyphosate crosses the borderland because of the wind and affects the health of people, animals, and plantations.” (*Ecuador demandará a Colombia, 2007*).

ET10: “The Ecuadorian Vice-president, Lenin Moreno, had claimed that ‘[the Colombian] President is the leader of an allied country and should behave as such and not just follow the orders that the [American] empire dictates’” (*Ayala, 2007*).

The possible health problems that glyphosate may cause are not supported by medical reasons, but they are defined in relation to diplomatic issues and the politics of the border between Colombia and Ecuador. In the above excerpt we also notice that political alliances are drawn on to comprehend the meaning of glyphosate risk. More generally, all of these excerpts show that economic power is a key element in sorting out the meaning of this risk. Although Ecuador is Colombia’s neighbor and ally, the United States gives Colombia considerable economic support to eradicate cocaine cultivations.

But not all entanglements are as direct as in these previous quotes. Less direct entanglement occurs when, instead of consulting scientists or the scientific literature to assay the health risks, journalists quote politicians. In general, sourcing of scientific information was poor; both journalists and their political sources use general expressions such as, “experts say,” “scientific studies show,” or “scientists have found.” Indeed, most “scientific” information came from politicians, and thus sources with potentially quite mixed motives underlying their participation in the debate on the health issue.

In other cases, the entanglement between health and other risks is even less direct. In many cases, news articles treat glyphosate’s health risks as the main topic, but they also mention other kinds of risks in other paragraphs. Indeed, almost none of articles focused solely on glyphosate’s health risks. For example, when discussing the possibility of suspending the spraying because of citizens’ complaints about the health effects of glyphosate, journalists also refer to the economic aspects of the problem. In other words, these newspaper articles not only mention the health complaints, but some paragraphs later they point out the economic consequences that the suspension of the fumigations might have:

ET11: “An adviser of the International Relations Committee of the Colombian Representatives’ House said that ‘in pure silver [to lose the American cooperation] would mean that, besides losing the U.S. air fleet, there would be no money to buy gas for and maintain police helicopters and to acquire glyphosate’” (Acabar fumigación, 2001).

Thus, what began as a health risk became an economic risk. Several articles revealed how the Colombian government reconfigures the problem by presenting the economic risk as more dangerous than the health hazard. Glyphosate as economic risk goes beyond the fact that the Colombian government receives monetary support from the U.S. Congress within the frame of *Plan Colombia*, but glyphosate is also an economic problem when approached from the standpoint of the ongoing conflict with guerilla forces. In this sense, it is necessary to take into account that some coca-producing regions are controlled by rebels or *paramilitars* who traffic cocaine in order to finance their illegal groups. U.S. financed-aerial destruction of coca crops in Colombia constitutes a way to eliminate the economic resources of these groups. Because of this, suspension of glyphosate spraying is both an economic and a political risk. Glyphosate becomes a weapon of war used by the Colombian government against guerrilla groups. For this reason, articles that discuss the health risks of glyphosate often mention political and economic issues such as Plan Colombia, the amount of money that the United States gives to Colombia, and the diplomatic relations between both countries:

NYT10: “At stake is more than \$300 million in United States assistance, which the Bush administration has earmarked for Colombia as part of a regional Andean counter-drug program. The United States has already allocated \$1.3 billion in mostly military aid under Plan Colombia, which started under President Clinton” (Marquis, 2002b).

Another issue that shows this indirect entanglement between glyphosate health risk and other risks is the problem of legislation. When discussing the impact of glyphosate on human health, newspaper articles sometimes

mention the necessity to legislate about the use of this herbicide. Newspaper articles show the conflicts that emerge when legislation is intended to respond to diverse interests at the same time (interests of the Colombian, U.S., and Ecuadorian government, indigenous communities, farmers, etc.). This conflict emerges, for example, when the indigenous population demands that the law protect them from the aerial spraying of glyphosate in its territory:

NYT11: “Indigenous leaders contend that the government is obligated to consult them before spraying near or on their land and that it never has” (Forero, 2001b).

To which the Colombian Government responds:

ET12: ““The Colombian government cannot be subjected to the approval of indigenous communities to implement the laws concerning the eradication of illicit crops,’ said Colombian judge, Gilberto Reyes Delgado” (Luz verde, 2001).

Once again, these excerpts show that several voices are involved in defining the risks of glyphosate. The dangers extend beyond health and the realm of biological science and involve a variety of voices and dimensions that braid to form a complex weave of biology, economics, sub-national, national, and international politics, and law.

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis was intended to understand constructions of the health risks of using glyphosate in efforts to eradicate coca production in Colombia. We examined all *El Tiempo* and the *New York Times* articles that treated health concerns in a non-incidental fashion in the decade between 2000 and 2010. These stories constructed risk in a variety of ways. The simplest formation was the general and unequivocal claim that glyphosate is safe. More complex and nuanced claims arose when authors or their sources considered the ways that glyphosate is used (e.g., in mixture with other substances, in indiscriminate spraying on villages). In addition, some articles frame the health risks of glyphosate in comparisons to other risks, typically to



trivialize and normalize the threat. All of these constructions are rooted in physical/material processes (biological, atmospheric, behavioral) and thus fall comfortably within the realm of scientific-technological expertise. But the news stories also reveal political, economic, and legal dimensions. Notably, the news stories entangled glyphosate health risks with politics by relying almost exclusively on non-scientific, typically political sources for “authoritative” claims about scientific evidence. Moreover, nearly every article drew more and less explicit connections between glyphosate use and a variety of economic, political, and legal risks and problems.

Somewhat surprisingly, in terms of kinds of sources, rhetorical mechanisms, and presentation of the information there was little meaningful difference between constructions of the glyphosate risks in *El Tiempo* and those in *The New York Times*. The only major difference was the frequency of publication on the topic. Understandably, the Colombian newspaper published articles about glyphosate health risks more frequently. In general, though not with the same frequency, both papers addressed the same kinds of issues. Only the issue of spraying the border area between Colombia and Ecuador was not elaborated in depth by the *New York Times*.

Besides this difference, both newspapers tend to represent the same kinds of agents and reflect the same types of rhetorical mechanisms to construct risk in similar ways. On the surface, this similarity might be taken to suggest that the health risks are either truly minimal or it is in both countries’ interests to minimize whatever might be the health risks.

We can understand the similarity more deeply if we consider the controversy and uncertainty about this herbicide. Both newspapers reported the lack of scientific consensus about the chemical. Thus, although there is no consensus at all regarding glyphosate health risks, there was homogeneity in the way in which the discussion about that risk was presented in prominent Colombian and U.S. newspapers. It appears that the journalistic value of balanced coverage on controversial topics was more influential than national political and economic differences, at least in these two quite prominent papers.

In most cases, the articles presented a set of testimonies taking differing positions with respect to the herbicide. These sources were diverse: U.S. and Colombian government officials, Colombian farmers, spokespersons from different environmental and health organizations, military officials,

physicians, teachers, and lawyers. Because each of these agents presented her or his own opinion on glyphosate, the newspaper texts provided a space for the interchange of what Potter (1996) refers to as defensive and offensive rhetoric. As he explains:

[A] description will work as *offensive rhetoric* in so far as it undermines alternative descriptions. It may be constructed precisely to rework, damage or reframe an alternative description. .  
[A] description may provide *defensive rhetoric* depending on its capacity to resist discounting or undermining. (p. 107)

Although the agents did not directly answer among themselves (because this was not a conversation), the texts constructed by the journalists created a sense of confrontation and therefore staged the dispute (see Beck, 2009). Moreover, the fact that there were contradictory voices with respect to the same phenomenon inescapably confronted readers with uncertainty; readers faced collections of controversial opinions that forced them to take a side in a controversy or to accept uncertainty (at least for the time being).

It is clear that the notion of risk is socially constructed according to a variety of interests and based on specific rhetorical moves. The analysis presented in this paper shows that this construction is highly complex because it involves not only multiple agents from different fields, but also diverse discursive mechanisms that, for example, allow some agents to make categorical and radical claims about glyphosate even though there is no consensus about its effects on human health and even though there were no scientists consulted.

It is also interesting to notice that glyphosate health risk cannot be understood in absolute terms since it is usually constructed in relation to other environmental, economic, and political risks. As we discussed, even though there are different degrees of entanglement, all of them show how relative the idea of health risk is and how it is presented in the frame of other hazards. This entangled nature of glyphosate health risk is also evident in the surprising fact that scientists are barely consulted by the authors of the newspapers articles that we analyzed. Politicians are the agents who refer to the scientific field but often in an indirect and vague form.

Finally, if there is indeed a lack of consensus about glyphosate health risk, if the toxic effects of the substance are debatable, if they depend not

only on basic biological pathways but also patterns of use, if their meanings can only be understood relative to various alternative considerations, then clearly “risk” is best understood and dealt with through a process of public deliberation. According to the most recent literature of sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) and sociology of scientific ignorance (SSI) that we examined at the beginning of this paper, these processes of public deliberation are becoming more and more important in the negotiation of the probable meanings of a certain risk. In news contributions to public deliberation on the risks of glyphosate use in Colombia, we see the confluence of challenges to this process: a multiplicity of agents with their own particular and somehow different interests and priorities. For the U.S. government the priority is to eliminate drug production, the Colombian government seeks to eliminate drug-trafficking as a financial source for illegal groups, the Ecuadorian government opposes any U.S. initiative, indigenous communities oppose any intervention in their territories, environmental groups are worried about the ecological risks of glyphosate, and farmers call for manual eradication that would not endanger their families. The health risks of glyphosate are thus only partially understandable from the standpoint of a disinterested biological science; whatever the risks may be, they are conceivable from a wide range of interests. Discourse on these risks is unlikely to lead to shared understanding unless this diversity of risk construction is taken into account.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Farmers claim that imprecise aerial spraying in the campaign to eradicate coca also fumigates vegetable crops, water supplies, houses, and people (Rohter, 2000, May. 1).

<sup>2</sup> The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (2002) defines a pesticide as “any substance or mixture of substances intended for preventing, destroying or controlling any pest, including vectors of human or animal disease, unwanted species of plants or animals” (p. 6). Glyphosate is, specifically, an herbicide, one form of pesticide.

<sup>3</sup> For an example of a similar claim by a Colombian official, see ET3 below.

<sup>4</sup> All translations were made by the first author, a native of Colombia.

## References

- Acabar fumigación sería devastador: E.U. (2001, August 2). *El Tiempo*, retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-453689>

- Ayala, M. (2007, February 24). Fui duro y poco diplomatico con Uribe. *El Tiempo*. Retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2398119>
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: towards a new modernity*. CA: Sage Publications.
- Beck, U. (2009). *World at risk*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Blok, A., Jensen, M. & Kaltofl, P., (2008). Social identities and risk: Expert and lay imaginations on pesticide use. *Public Understanding of Science*, 17(2), 189-209. doi: 10.1077/0963662506070176
- Burns, T.W., O'Connor, D.J. & Stockmayer, S.M. (2003). Science communication: A contemporary definition. *Public Understanding of Science*, 12(2), 183-202. doi:10.1177/09636625030122004
- Chirn-Bin, C. & Chia-Chu, C. (2009). Refractory cardiopulmonary failure after glyphosate surfactant intoxication: A case report. *Journal of Occupational Medicine & Toxicology*, 4(2), 1-6. doi:10.1186/1745-6673-4-2
- Choque de posiciones por efectos de glifosato. (2001, August 15). *El Tiempo*, retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-462732>
- Cox, C. (1998/2000). Glyphosate factsheet. *Journal of Pesticide Reform*, 108. Retrieved August 21, 2001 from <http://www.mindfully.org/Pesticide/Roundup-Glyphosate-Factsheet-Cox.htm>
- Dean, M. (1999). Risk, calculable and incalculable. In D. Lupton (Ed.), *Risk and sociocultural theory* (pp. 131-159). Cambridge: University Press.
- De Roos, A. J., Blair, A., Rusiecki, J. A., Hoppin, J. A., Svec, M., Dosemeci, M., & ... Alavanja, M. C. (2005). Cancer incidence among glyphosate-exposed pesticide applicators in the agricultural health study. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 113(1), 49-54. doi: 10.1289/ehp.7340
- Douglas, M. & Wildavsky, A. (1982). *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technical and environmental dangers*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ecuador demandará a Colombia ante tribunal de La Haya y otras instancias internacionales. (2007, January 27). *El Tiempo*, retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-3416015>

- Fischhoff, B. (1995). Risk perception and communication unplugged: Twenty years of process. *Risk analysis*, 15(2), 137-145. doi: [10.1111/j.1539-6924.1995.tb00308.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.1995.tb00308.x)
- Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. (2002). *International code of conduct on the distribution and use of pesticides*. Retrieved August 21, 2011 from <http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/AGRICULT/AGP/AGPP/Pesticid/Code/Download/code.pdf>
- Forero, J. (2001a, Jan. 31). No crops spared in Colombia's coca war. *New York Times* [online]. Lexis-Nexis Universe.
- Forero, J. (2001b, Jul. 30). Judge in Colombia halts spraying of drug crops. *New York Times* [online]. Lexis-Nexis Universe.
- Forss, K., & Samset, K. (1999). Square pegs and round holes: Evaluation, uncertainty and risk management. *Evaluation*, 5, 407-422.
- Gee, J.P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. New York: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP.
- Glifosato: arma mortal o no. (2001, August 20). *El Tiempo*, retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-453440>
- Gómez, S. (2002, September 6). Fumigación no es dañina. *El Tiempo*. Retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1367643>
- Herr, B., (2003). Safe exposure? Perceptions of health risks from agricultural chemicals among California farmworkers. In B. Herr & L. Oaks (Eds.), *Risk, culture, and health inequality: Shifting perceptions of danger and blame* (pp. 143-164). Westport: Praeger.
- Intensificaremos las fumigaciones. (2001, September 1). *El Tiempo*. Retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-474648>
- Lee, H.L., Chen, K.W., Chi, C.H., Huang, J.J., & Tsai, L.M. (2000). Clinical presentations and prognostic factors of a glyphosate-surfactant herbicide intoxication: A review of 131 cases. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 7(8), 906-10. doi: [10.1111/j.1532712.2000.tb02069.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532712.2000.tb02069.x)
- Lupton, D. (1999). *Risk*. London: Routledge.

- Luz verde a fumigaciones. (2001, August 7). *El Tiempo*, retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-456851>
- Marquis, M. (2002a, Jul. 11). U.S. law imperils Colombia coca spraying. *New York Times* [online]. *Lexis-Nexis Universe*.
- Marquis, M. (2002b, Sep. 6). Coca spraying poses no risk to Colombians, U.S. declares. *New York Times* [online]. *Lexis-Nexis Universe*
- Michaels, D. (2008). *Doubt is their product: How industry's assault on science threatens your health*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction*. London: Sage.
- Raigoso, C. E. (2006). La Comunicación científica: Una mirada desde los estudios sociales de la ciencia. *Escribanía*, 16, 7-19.
- Raigoso, C. E. (2009). Riesgo, confianza y consumo de medios: No solo un asunto de datos. In S. Daza (Ed.), *Percepciones sobre la ciencia y la tecnología en Bogotá* (pp. 131-148 ) Bogotá: Observatorio Colombiano de Ciencia y Tecnología.
- Red de Desarrollo Sostenible (2007). Las consecuencias reales del glifosato. Retrieved from <http://www.riourbano.org/>
- Rohter, L. (2000, May. 1). To Colombians, drug war is toxic enemy. *New York Times* [online]. *Lexis-Nexis Universe*.
- Russell, L., & Babrow, A. S. (2011). Risk in the making: Narrative, problematic integration and the social construction of "risk." *Communication Theory*, 21, 239-260.
- Heeter, C. (July 26, 2005). Seeds of suicide: India's desperate farmers [Video file]. Retrieved August 21, 2011 from [http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2005/07/seeds\\_of\\_suicid.html](http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2005/07/seeds_of_suicid.html)
- Semple, & Golden, T. (2007, Oct. 8). Afghans pressed by U.S. on plan to spray poppies. *New York Times* [online]. *Lexis-Nexis Universe*.
- Slovic, P. (Ed.). (2000). *The perception of risk*. London: Earthscan.
- Slovic, P. (Ed.). (2010) *The feeling of risk*. London: Earthscan.
- Stocking, S.H., & Holstein, L. (2009). Manufacturing doubt: Journalists' roles and the construction of ignorance in a scientific controversy. *Public Understanding of Science*, 18(1), 23-42. doi: 10.1177/0963662507079373

### 43 C&SC - Communication & Social Change, 1(1)

- Strydom, P. (2002). *Risk, environment and society*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Talbot A.R., Shiaw M.-H., Huang J.-S., Yang S.-F., Goo T.-S., Wang S.-H., Chen, C.-L., & Sanford T.R. (1991). Acute poisoning with a glyphosate-surfactant herbicide (Roundup): A review of 93 cases. *Human & Experimental Toxicology*, 10, 1-8.
- Under, H. (1994). Ambiguous evidence and institutional interpretation: An alternative view of electric and magnetic fields. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 19,165-190.
- Veillette, C. (2005). *Plan Colombia; A progress report*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service-Library of Congress. Retrieved January 13, 2011 from <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32774.pdf>

**Adriana Maria Ángel Botero** is Associate professor at the School of Communication, Universidad de Manizales. Ph. D. in Communication Studies - Ohio University.

**Austin Scott Babrow** is professor at the School of Communication Studies, Ohio University, United States of America.

**Contact Address:** Cra 9 No 19-03. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas. Universidad de Manizales. Manizales-Colombia. Email: [aangel@umanizales.edu.co](mailto:aangel@umanizales.edu.co)

Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://csc.hipatiapress.com>

## Groupthink as Communication Process, not Outcome

Michael W. Kramer<sup>1</sup>, & Debbie S. Dougherty<sup>2</sup>

1) Department of Communication, University of Oklahoma. United States of America

2) Department of Communication, University of Missouri. United States of America.

Date of publication: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Edition period: October 2013-January 2014

---

**To cite this article:** Kramer, M.W., & Dougherty, D. S. (2013). Groupthink as Communication Process, not Outcome. *Communication & Social Change* 1(1), 44-62 doi: 10.4471/csc.2013.03

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/csc.2013.03>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.



# Groupthink as Communication Process, not Outcome

Michael W. Kramer  
*University of Oklahoma*

Debbie S. Dougherty  
*University of Missouri*

*(Received: 24 September 2012; Accepted: 5 November 2012; Published: 30 September 2013)*

## Abstract

---

A bias of groupthink research is that it primarily examines group decisions that are viewed as catastrophic failures, such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco. An alternative approach focuses on groupthink as a faulty communication process rather than defining it by negative outcomes. Taking such an approach, this paper briefly explores some potential examples of decisions that may have involved groupthink communication processes but either had ambiguous outcomes or succeeded in accomplishing their goals. The analysis suggests the need to explore the communication processes that result in groupthink while recognizing that the outcomes may be negative, ambiguous, or even positive.

---

**Keywords:** group communication, groupthink, decision making

# **El Pensamiento de Grupo Como un Proceso de la Comunicación, no un Resultado**

Michael W. Kramer  
*University of Oklahoma*

Debbie S. Dougherty  
*University of Missouri*

*(Recivido: 24 de septiembre de 2012; Aceptado: 5 de Noviembre de 2012;  
Publicado: 30 de septiembre de 2013)*

## **Resumen**

---

Un sesgo de la investigación en pensamiento de grupo, es que principalmente examina las decisiones de un grupo vistas como fallos catastróficos, como el caso del fiasco de la bahía de cochinos. Una aproximación alternativa se centra en acercarse al pensamiento de grupo como un proceso defectuoso más que por sus resultados negativos. Cogiendo esto como una perspectiva, este artículo explora brevemente algunos ejemplos potenciales de decisiones que, proviniendo de procesos de pensamiento de grupo, han tenido resultados ambiguos o, incluso, han tenido éxito en conseguir sus objetivos. El análisis sugiere la necesidad de explorar procesos de comunicación dados en procesos de pensamiento de grupo, reconociendo sus objetivos como negativos, ambiguos o, incluso, positivos.

---

**Palabras clave:** comunicación en grupo, pensamiento de grupo, toma de decisiones

Greek1 and Greek2 were two fraternities at a large university. They were alike in history, tradition, status, and size. Both participate in the annual process of recruiting and selecting new members. When the university adopted a policy strictly forbidding hazing, both insisted that it was their right to initiate recruits in the traditions of their order and that the university was simply anti-Greek. Both secretly continued their hazing rituals for several years and suffered no consequences. There was little difference between what the two did. Then one year a recruit in Greek1 became violently ill during the drinking ritual and was taken by ambulance to the local hospital. As a result, Greek1 was investigated for hazing and suspended from campus recruiting for two years. In Greek2 the recruits illegally drank similar amounts, but no one got ill enough to go to the hospital. As a result, there was no investigation and no suspension.

Viewing these hypothetical scenarios through the typical groupthink framework, researchers would conclude that the decision-making process at Greek1 illustrated groupthink. Members of Greek1 exhibited most of the characteristics of groupthink including high cohesiveness, illusion of invulnerability, collective rationalizing, failure to consider consequences, and a variety of other problems (Street, 1997). While it seems appropriate to conclude that Greek1 demonstrated groupthink, it is equally appropriate to say that groupthink occurred in Greek2 since they used the same decision-making characteristics and enacted the same inappropriate behaviors. Yet it is unlikely that Greek2 would ever be examined for groupthink processes because there was no negative outcome. The outcome differences were not indicative of better decision making in Greek2. The outcome differences were probably a matter of luck.

Typically, groupthink is considered a possibility only when the outcomes are disastrous in line with the tradition of the early work by Janis (1972). The defining characteristic of most groupthink research is that it results “in extremely defective decision-making performance by the group” (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998, p. 106) or more pointedly one might conclude that “groupthink is the primary cause of fiasco in the modern world” (Peterson et al., 1998, p. 273). Even one of the scholars who clearly states that groupthink does not always result in bad decisions then proceeds to focus on typical negative outcome when she analyzes the Bay of Pigs military fiasco (Flippen, 1999). The focus of most research on groupthink then is to find

examples of poor decision-making outcomes and work backwards to find evidence of groupthink processes in a retrospective sense-making process (Fuller & Aldag, 1998). Other scholars attempt to create groupthink processes, such as high cohesion, in a lab to produce negative outcomes. However, few experimental studies document “the hallmark of groupthink: the low quality, defective decisions” (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998, p. 110). Overall, research has generally failed to consider that the communication processes that characterize groupthink can result in disastrous, ambiguous, or even positive outcomes. Exploring these possibilities seems warranted given that organizational decisions, effective or ineffective, can be the result of almost random processes (e.g. garbage can model, Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972) and there is evidence that suggests that groupthink processes are not strongly associated with ineffective decisions (Peterson et al., 1998).

This manuscript explores the notion that groupthink should be defined more by the communication process rather than by the outcome. After briefly reviewing the characteristics of groupthink, it examines two examples, Operation Desert Storm and the enactment of teamwork at ISE (Barker, 1993), that illustrate characteristics of groupthink even though the outcomes may not be considered negative. Then, it briefly examines the practices of terrorist groups to demonstrate that the outcomes related to groupthink process may be evaluated as positive, negative, or ambiguous depending on the perspective taken.

## **The Groupthink Model**

Since extensive reviews of groupthink exist elsewhere (e.g., Esser, 1998; Street, 1997), what follows is a brief summary of major conceptual components. The ground-breaking work on groupthink conducted by Janis (1971, 1972, 1982) identifies the major characteristics of groupthink. Groupthink involves high cohesiveness and concurrence-seeking that interferes with critical thinking. It results in a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. In selecting his examples of groupthink, Janis (1982) selected ones that exhibited seven major defects in decision-making: 1) Discussions were limited to few alternative courses of action; 2) Groups did not survey the objectives to be fulfilled or the values implicit in the choices; 3) Groups failed to reexamine the initially-preferred

action for non-obvious risks or drawbacks; 4) Groups failed to consider possible benefits of alternatives initially rejected by the majority; 5) Groups made little or no attempt to consult experts; 6) Groups demonstrated selection bias by attending to information supportive of their views and disregarding that which did not; and 7) Groups spent little time deliberating about their decision and had no contingency plans for unforeseen obstacles.

Street (1997) presents a comprehensive model of groupthink that included much of the research conducted beyond Janis's initial work. Antecedent conditions include cohesiveness—a necessary but insufficient condition; structural faults, such as group isolation; and a proactive situational context, such as stress from an external threat. These antecedent conditions lead to concurrence-seeking tendencies. The resulting symptoms include an overestimation of the group, such as an illusion of invulnerability and a sense of group morality; close-mindedness, including collective rationalization and stereotyping of outgroup members; and pressure toward uniformity, such as self-censorship and an illusion of unanimity. Decision-making defects include incomplete survey of alternatives, objectives, or information, a failure to examine preferred or rejected choices, and a failure to have a contingency plan.

A variety of research has confirmed many of these characteristics although the results typically only support parts of the groupthink model. For example, in initial experimental studies in the laboratory, Courtright (1978) found evidence of the importance of the presence or absence of disagreement in discriminating between non-groupthink and groupthink groups. In additional experimental studies, Cline (1990) developed a method for observing and analyzing the illusion of unanimity in groups. She followed this up with a case study using the Watergate break-in and cover-up transcripts to demonstrate the importance of the same construct (Cline, 1994). Flippen (1999) explored the personal goals for participating in the group as part of the antecedent conditions for groupthink processes.

The mixed findings on groupthink variables can perhaps be explained by the lack of research questioning the final box in Street's (1997) model which is labeled "poor decision outcomes." Most groupthink scholarship, including the work of Janis, attributes ill-fated decision to poor decision-making processes like groupthink and positive outcomes to sound or rational decision-making processes (Choi & Kim, 1999). Most of the typical

groupthink examples are consistent with this notion. Many of these poor outcomes are the result of faulty decision making in high profile political decisions and the research consists largely of retrospective case studies (with the exception of a few laboratory studies). Some of the more frequently mentioned examples come from the initial work of Janis (1982) such as the Bay of Pigs, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and the Cuban missile crisis. Janis (1982) and Cline (1994) discuss the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up as groupthink. Although some scholars have argued that the Challenger disaster was the result of faulty decision-making other than groupthink (Hirokawa, Gouran, & Martz, 1988), it and the Columbia disasters are often mentioned as groupthink examples—primarily because the outcomes were disastrous. During discussions of groupthink in college classrooms, undergraduates frequently add cult examples such as David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Texas as examples of groupthink marked by disastrous outcomes.

Although disastrous outcomes draw attention to possible groupthink, it seems likely that groupthink processes occur far more frequently than the few examples that are reported in the media. Some disastrous outcomes likely receive little attention due to how uneventful they are, such as when small business owners enact groupthink and go out of business as a result. There is also evidence that groupthink processes do not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. In exploring decisions in a business setting, Choi and Kim (1999) found that groupthink factors had both positive and negative relationships to performance after a crisis, but other factors such as use of internal and external resources and the quality of implementation were more significant predictors of the outcomes. Similarly, in a reanalysis of historical cases Janis used, Kramer (1998) did not find strong relationships between various components in the model and claims of groupthink. Thus, it seems likely that many groups use a groupthink process, but the outcomes are positive or at least ambiguous enough that no discussion of the faulty decision-making process ever occurs. To examine this premise, two examples, one from the headlines and one from a research article illustrate the possibility of a groupthink process followed by either positive or ambiguous outcomes.

## Groupthink as “Successful” in Operation Desert Storm

By most criteria, Operation Desert Storm, the first war in Iraq in 1991, under President George Bush Sr. was a success. The American people supported the effort and supported the troops during the war, with few exceptions. The stated goal of the military operation was accomplished; the Iraqi troops of Saddam Hussein were driven out of Kuwait in a military rout (*Excerpts from briefing by Schwarzkopf in Saudi Arabia, 1991, 1B*). President Bush achieved his highest approval ratings from the American people in the months after the war, although that approval did not last until the next election cycle. Despite the success of this endeavor, there is evidence to suggest that the decision makers succumbed to groupthink processes.

The evidence of groupthink by the decision-makers involved in Operation Desert Storm is fairly limited, but makes a rather compelling case. After the Iraqi troops had been routed from Kuwait, the decision was made to suspend their pursuit into Iraq and not to remove Saddam Hussein from office. Published reports regarding this decision suggest pressure toward uniformity—particularly in the form of the illusion of unanimity. General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the allied troops in Desert Storm reported the following conversation with Colin Power regarding when to end the war:

“So here’s what I propose,” I said. “I want the Air Force to keep bombing those convoys backed up at the Euphrates where the bridges are blown. I want to continue the ground attack tomorrow, drive to the sea, and totally destroy everything in our path. That’s the way I wrote the plan for Desert Storm, and in one more day we’ll be done.” I paused: “Do you realize if we stop tomorrow night, the ground campaign will have lasted five days? How does that sound to you: the ‘Five-Day War’?” (*Schwarzkopf & Petre, 1992, p. 471*)

A short period of time later, Powell called Schwarzkopf and told him they wanted to end the war at 9:00 P.M. instead of waiting for the next day. Schwarzkopf responded “I don’t have any problem with it” (*Schwarzkopf & Petre, 1992, p. 470*). While Schwarzkopf offers a number of reasons for his sudden change of heart, additional sources suggest that he did indeed have a problem with discontinuing the pursuit of the Iraqi troops. In a national

television interview approximately four weeks after the ceasefire, Schwarzkopf stated:

Frankly, my recommendation had been, you know, to continue to march. I mean, we had them in a rout and could have continued to wreak great destruction on them. We could have completely closed the doors and made it in fact a battle of annihilation. . . . There were obviously a lot of people who escaped who wouldn't have escaped if the decision hadn't been made to stop where we were at that time. (as cited in [Record, 1993, p. 125](#)).

After publicly stating his disagreement with the decision to end the war, Schwarzkopf quickly recanted a few days later after being criticized for his remarks by President Bush:

Schwarzkopf said he had apologized for his "poor choice of words" in questioning Bush's judgment about calling a ceasefire. . . . Schwarzkopf said in a brief meeting with reporters: "I agreed 100 percent with the decision. I thought it was a correct decision then, and I think it's a correct decision now." ([Schwarzkopf Apologizes: Bush Accepts, 1991, 1A](#))

Based on his private memoirs and television interview, Schwarzkopf clearly had a problem with ending the war as soon as it was ended. By saying that he had "no problem with it" when he spoke to Colin Powell and by stating he was 100 percent in agreement with the decision later, he supported an appearance of unanimity. Schwarzkopf appeared to have been pressured to state agreement with the group decision when he did not in fact agree at all. The fact that he was pressured to publicly support the decision four weeks after the decision was made provides strong evidence of pressure for unanimity within the decision-making group. There may have been others who privately disagreed with the decision, but remained silent due to the pressure from above to conform. This suggests that other characteristics of groupthink may also have been present as well.

It is true that in retrospect, some pundits have argued that the decision not to chase down the Iraqi troops and remove Saddam Hussein from authority at that time was a bad decision. It can even be argued that it had disastrous effects both on the Iraqi minorities who were brutally attacked by Hussein's



regime after the war and on the United States embroiled in the second war in Iraq beginning in 2003. Nonetheless, it certainly was not the opinion at the time that either the war or the decision to stop after liberating Kuwait was a mistake.

Interestingly, claims that the decision makers in this successful campaign practiced groupthink have not been heard, although such claims are frequently heard in the cases of failed military interventions such as the Bay of Pigs or the Vietnam War. Despite evidence of groupthink at the decision-making level, Operation Desert Storm is rarely, if ever, mentioned as a possible example of groupthink. This omission appears to be due to the bias of starting with disastrous outcomes and looking back for evidence of groupthink rather than examining group processes first and then considering that groupthink processes may dramatically increase the probability of negative outcomes, but may still result in positive outcomes in some instances despite faulty decision making.

### **Groupthink and Ambiguous Outcomes in Concertive Control**

A second published example suggests that groupthink processes can lead to ambiguous outcomes. In his article, Barker (1993) describes the process by which an organization changed from a hierarchical management philosophy to one based on teamwork. On the basis of his analysis, he concludes that the team members eventually developed a system of concertive control in which they monitored each other and imposed more stringent regulations on themselves than management did prior to the change in philosophy. Barker's analysis is valuable, but he does not examine whether the teams in his study participated in groupthink processes. Perhaps this omission is due to outcomes being rather ambiguous depending on how the assessment of success is conceptualized for the organization and the group.

Although it is not possible on the basis of the article's content to determine whether all the characteristics of groupthink were evident in this group, as Moorhead, Neck, and West (1998) suggest in their analysis, there seems to be strong evidence in Barker's article of a number of characteristics of groupthink, including high cohesion, poor decision-making norms, and strong leadership by senior team members. Further analysis reveals that there is evidence of some of the antecedent conditions, concurrence-seeking,

groupthink symptoms, and decision-making defects. An assessment of whether the decisions were poor depends on who defines success.

Barker (1993) provides ample evidence of the antecedent conditions for groupthink. There was strong group cohesiveness as team members supported each other. Structural faults existed; the team was insulated from other teams and over time accepted a homogenous set of values. The situational context provided stress as evidenced by external threats due to downturns in product demand resulting in layoffs and from the need to meet production deadlines or lose jobs. This stress led to a strong demand for concurrence seeking in the form of consensus decision making.

Symptoms of groupthink were less obvious than the antecedent conditions, but they certainly existed. There was obvious pressure toward uniformity. Group members who had conflicts with demands to meet production goals had to negotiate alternative times to provide apparently unpaid overtime. There was an illusion of unanimity as a number of members privately voiced discontent with the team but practiced self-censorship by accepting the decisions of the team without protest. Close-mindedness and mind guard were apparent when the old timers of the group met to decide the fate of a newcomer who was not buying into their values sufficiently.

Decision-making defects were also apparent. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this was the team's decision to place an attendance board in the break room. The team placed a board listing who was late and absent each day in full view of all team members and anyone else who happened to visit the room. Had management ever suggested such a policy, the team members would undoubtedly have protested it and worked to change this embarrassing and inappropriate treatment. That they adopted it themselves suggests that the team did a less than thorough examination of their objectives and of alternatives. There is little evidence that they examined the positive and negative effects of this preferred choice.

Despite meeting the major characteristics of groupthink, the decision outcomes were quite ambiguous. It is easy to argue that the team was largely successful. They continued to meet productivity and quality standards. However, team morale was low and the concertive control that resulted from the decision-making process was more confining and oppressive than the management and bureaucratic control that existed prior to the change to

teamwork. Given the bias toward beginning with disastrous outcomes in looking for groupthink, it is not surprising that situations with ambiguous decision outcomes like this are rarely examined from a groupthink perspective. On careful analysis, these teams appeared to exhibit groupthink processes, but without the obvious disastrous outcomes typically assumed necessary.

### **Terrorist Groups “Succeed” Using Groupthink**

With the limited access to decision making within terrorist groups, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive analysis of their groupthink characteristics. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence of the antecedent conditions, concurrence seeking, symptoms of groupthink, and decision-making defects. The assessment of whether decisions resulted in poor outcomes depends on the perspective taken. Rather than discussing terrorist groups in general, this analysis focuses on the processes apparent in the Al Qaeda terrorist group that led to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Towers and other targets.

Antecedent conditions of groupthink were apparent in the Al Qaeda leadership. According to the 9/11 Commission Report (2004), Al Qaeda leadership consisted of a tight-knit group of individuals who were insulated from most of modern civilization. This group resided in remote areas of Afghanistan, surrounded by like-minded individuals—most of whom were trained and indoctrinated by Osama Bin Ladin. The Commission reports that Bin Ladin hand picked the individuals who would carry out the attacks—individuals who were the most rabid and committed of extremists.

Interestingly according to the 9/11 Commission Report, there was not consensus at the leadership level as to whether or not Al Qaeda should carry out the attacks against the United States. Bin Ladin believed the mission was of fundamental importance while others believed that Al Qaeda needed to either attack Jews or finish the ongoing war in Afghanistan. It is apparent that this dissent was ignored by the Al Qaeda leadership, suggesting that groupthink processes may have been at play. While we do not have the details available to make a definitive case that this group engaged in groupthink, there is some evidence to support this contention. First, as previously mentioned, the group was highly isolated. Second, the group

believed that it held the moral high ground. At one point Bin Ladin claimed that the United States was the worst civilization in the history of the world and that the U.S. would continue to be the enemy until it became an Islamic State (9/11 Commission, 2004). These and similar statements by members of the Al Qaeda leadership suggest that the group was close-minded. Specifically the members rationalized violence against civilian targets by stereotyping U.S. citizens within a narrow cultural identity.

Not only does it seem likely that the Al Qaeda central leadership group used groupthink processes, it is also likely that the cell groups that carried out the actual attacks were engaged in groupthink. Specifically, evidence suggests that the antecedent conditions for groupthink existed in these cells. These cell groups were insulated, living in secret within the United States for some time, with very little contact with even the larger Al Qaeda network. The primary contact was with Mohamed Atta, the tactical leader of the operation (9/11 Commission Report, 2004). The groups were homogeneous in values, representing a militant sect of Islam. They were also largely homogeneous in ethnic background, comprised primarily of radical Islamic Arabs.

In addition to antecedent conditions, many of the symptoms of groupthink were also apparent. Group members overestimated the group: They saw it as impossible to fail with Allah on their side and they believed in the morality of their actions calling it a jihad, a holy war. Close-mindedness was evident in the way that the group stereotyped and demonized outgroup members (primarily the United States) and collectively rationalized attacking non-military personnel because the jihad was against the entire culture, not just the leadership or military. Without additional insider information, it is difficult to determine the degree of pressure toward uniformity present in the group although the existence of training camps suggests that indoctrination and pressure to uniformity were present. Clearly there was uniformity as individuals enacted the same actions, but whether this was due to pressure on dissenters, self-censorship, mind guards, or an illusion of unanimity is unclear. It appears that there was unanimity.

Certainly from a Western perspective, Al Qaeda decision makers exhibited decision-making defects. Westerners would no doubt argue that the terrorists failed to consider alternatives that would influence the United States in a more positive manner and failed to consider if killing innocent

people was consistent with their objectives. The terrorists failed to consider the possible negative consequences of their decision to attack. In the process of continuing to demonize an entire culture, they selected information that kept their anger toward the United States peaked.

Although it is relatively easy to make the argument that Al Qaeda used groupthink processes, it is more difficult to determine whether their decision resulted in poor outcomes since meanings assigned to the 9-11 events diverge significantly across cultures (Dougherty, Mobley, & Smith, 2010). From the terrorists' perspective, their actions were highly successful. Unlike the previous attempt at bombing the World Trade Towers, this time the terrorists completely destroyed their primary target and caused serious damage to the Pentagon. The exact target of the fourth plane may never be known. The attacks were the most disruptive terrorist events in history costing thousands of lives, billions of dollars in damaged and destroyed property, and billions of dollars in lost economic activity and increased security efforts. For example, the cost of national security in the form of defense, homeland security, and international affairs rose by almost 200 billion dollars between fiscal years 2001 and 2004 (9/11 Commission, 2004). The fear of further attacks continues to cost billions of dollars and disrupts activities throughout the world. In addition to the fiscal costs of the attack, the emotional and personal toll taken on the American people is even larger and cannot be assessed in any dollar terms. Although our Western perspective may have difficulty seeing these as positive outcomes, these were largely the goals of the decision makers of the operation.

It is also possible to view the outcomes negatively, even from the terrorists' perspective. In much the same way that the attacks on Pearl Harbor awakened "the sleeping giant," the United States, which ultimately led to the demise of the Japanese empire, the September 11 attacks unleashed a fury against Al Qaeda that continues to this day and eventually led to the death of its leader Osama bin Laden. Their base of operation in Afghanistan was disrupted and although they continue to operate, it is not possible to determine how effective they are in comparison to their strength prior to the attacks. Since it is impossible to predict the final outcome at this time, it is possible that the outcome will be ambiguous with the Al Qaeda decision makers having gained significant short-term outcomes, but decreased the likelihood of achieving their long-term goals.

In sum, the decision makers of Al Qaeda appear to have exhibited most of the groupthink processes. Whether these resulted in poor decision outcomes depends largely on the perspective taken in evaluating the outcomes. The groupthink processes led to significant short-term accomplishments from the group's perspective, although their success in achieving long-term goals is unclear.

## **Discussion**

One of the biases that has prevailed in the groupthink literature is an assumption that because groupthink is an ineffective decision-making process, it necessarily results in negative or disastrous outcomes. This bias is evident in the way that nearly all typical examples of groupthink begin with negative, even catastrophic outcomes, whether it was the Bay of Pigs, the Vietnam War, or the Challenger and Columbia explosions, and then work back to retrospectively examine the faulty decision-making processes. Like the original work by Janis (1972), such retrospective case studies of negative outcomes are the predominant examples of groupthink.

Although it is likely that using groupthink decision processes increase the chances of poor decisions and negative outcomes and likewise, that using critical thinking decision-making processes increase the probability of good quality decisions and positive outcomes, these increased probabilities do not automatically lead to the corresponding outcomes. For example, the same groupthink processes that led to the Challenger disaster probably occurred on the July 1985 space shuttle flight on which the o-rings came dangerously close to failing due to cold temperatures, but did not fail (Hirokawa et al., 1988). The difference in outcomes was not related to differences in decision-making processes but almost random, unpredictable factors.

By examining other decision-making groups that seem to fit the groupthink decision-making model, this analysis suggests that while groupthink always involves poor decision-making processes, it can lead to negative outcomes, ambiguous outcomes, or even successful outcomes. This is consistent with the findings that groupthink processes have inconsistent relationships to outcomes and that other factors like implementation and use of resources or even luck may be more important factors (Choi & Kim, 1999; Peterson et al., 1998). Of course, an important consideration is that the

evaluation of the outcome depends on whose perception of success is accepted. The historical examples of Operation Desert Storm and the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, as well as an analysis of decision making by the team members in Barker's (1993) article, suggest that groups can fall prey to groupthink processes, make decisions that are poor at least from some perspectives, and still largely achieve their goals. This suggests a need to further consider the groupthink model.

A focus on groupthink processes instead of outcomes would open up the field of research significantly and at the same time address the limitations of previous research based on retrospective and historic accounts of decision making or studies conducted in laboratory settings. So, for example, instead of examining situations where disastrous outcomes have already occurred, researchers could focus on research settings where groupthink is likely to occur. In such settings researchers could explore whether cohesion based on personal attractiveness or based on task pride and commitment has differential impact on group outcomes (McCauley, 1998) or whether the political goals or self-interests of leaders are more significant factors in producing the negative outcome (Kramer, 1998). A wide range of community groups from environmental groups, to animal rights groups, to religious organizations seem to be fertile grounds for observing groupthink processes in action. It would also seem that the more extreme the group is in its beliefs, the more likely groupthink processes would occur regardless of the outcomes.

A focus on the groupthink processes instead of the outcomes will place the study of groupthink more squarely on communication processes and group dynamics instead of primarily on sociological or psychological variables. It is through communication and group dynamics that group members insulate themselves and develop homogenous values. It is through communication and group dynamics that group members create real or imagined external threats and stereotype outgroup members. It is through communication and group dynamics that group members create a sense of group morality and invulnerability.

Given that it is through communication and group dynamics that groupthink processes occur, it is not surprising that solutions to groupthink involve communication as well. Janis (1982) recommends a number of ways of avoiding groupthink, although he sees dangers in each of them. He

recommends assigning a critical evaluator or a devil's advocate. The leader should remain impartial, not stating preferences, at least initially. Separate groups should discuss issues to see if both come to the same conclusion. Group members should discuss decisions with people outside the group for feedback. Outside experts should be consulted. Group members should survey the environment and construct alternative scenarios to consider. A second meeting should be held to reconsider decisions. Each of these involves an effort at changing the group dynamics and communication to avoid groupthink processes. However, research needs to examine how to effectively use each in practice. For example, it would be easy to assign a devil's advocate but then simply treat that input as token critical thinking with the result being no actual change in decision-making. Conversely, the group can value the devil's advocate so strongly that the group becomes paralyzed and unable to take action for fear of groupthink.

Groupthink processes lead to decisions that are not based on the type of rational, logical decision making that is expected, although rarely achieved, in groups (e.g., Dewey, 1910). Most of the primary examples of groupthink suggest that these failures in decision-making processes lead to negative and disastrous outcomes. The present analysis suggests that groupthink processes are ineffective. As such they increase the probability of negative outcomes, but groupthink can also lead to ambiguous or positive outcomes. Examining the communication processes involved rather than focusing on the negative outcomes will increase the understanding of effective and ineffective decision making.

## References

- Barker, J.R. (1993). Tightening the iron cage: Concertive control in self-managing teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38, 408-437.  
[doi:10.2307/2393374](https://doi.org/10.2307/2393374)
- Cline, R. J. W. (1990). Detecting groupthink: Methods for observing the illusion of unanimity. *Communication Quarterly*, 38, 112-126.  
[doi:10.1080/01463379009369748](https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379009369748)
- Cline, R. J. W. (1994). Groupthink and the Watergate cover-up: The illusion of unanimity. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *Group communication in context:*



- Studies of natural groups* (pp. 199-223). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Choi, J. N., & Kim, M. U. (1999). The organizational application of groupthink and its limitations in organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84, 297-306. doi:10.1037//0021-9010.84.2.297
- Cohen, M. D., March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (1972). A garbage can model of organizational choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17(1), 1-25. doi:10.2307/2392088
- The 9/11 Commission (2004). The 9/11 Commission report: Final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, authorized edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Courtright, J. A. (1978). A laboratory investigation of groupthink. *Communication Monographs*, 45(3), 229-246. doi:10.1080/03637757809375968
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. Boston, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Dougherty, D. S., Mobley, S. K., & Smith, S. E. (2010). Language convergence and meaning divergence: A theory of intercultural communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 3, 164-186. doi: 10.1080/03637750802378799
- Esser, J. K. (1998). Alive and well after 25 years: A review of groupthink research. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 116-141. doi:10.1006/obhd.1998.2758
- Excerpts from briefing by Schwarzkopf in Saudi Arabia. (1991, February 28). St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1B.
- Flippen, A. R. (1999). Understanding groupthink from a self-regulatory perspective. *Small Group Research*, 30, 139-165. doi:10.1177/104649649903000201
- Fuller, S. R., & Aldag, R. J. (1998). Organizational Tonypandy: Lesson from a quarter century of the groupthink phenomenon. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 163-184. doi:10.1177/104649649903000201
- Hirokawa, R. Y. Gouran, D. S., & Martz, A. E. (1988). Understanding the sources of faulty group decision making: A lesson from the Challenger disaster. *Small Group Research*, 19, 411-433. doi:10.1177/104649648801900401
- Janis, I. L. (1971). Groupthink. *Psychology Today*, 44-76.

- Janis, I. L. (1972). *Victims of groupthink: A psychological study of foreign-policy decision and fiascoes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Janis, I. L. (1982). *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kramer, R. M. (1998). Revisiting the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam decisions 25 years later: How well has the groupthink hypothesis stood the test of time. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 236-271. doi:10.1006/obhd.1998.2762
- McCauley, C. (1998). Group dynamics in Janis's theory of groupthink: Backward and forward. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 142-162. doi: 10.1006/obhd.1998.2759
- Morehead, G., Neck, C. P., & West, M. S. (1998). The tendency toward defective decision making in self-managed teams: The relevance of groupthink for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 327-351. doi: 10.1006/obhd.1998.2765
- Peterson, R. S., Owens, P. D., Tetlock, P. E., Fan, E. T., & Martorana, P. (1998). Group dynamics in top management teams: Groupthink, vigilance, and alternative models of organizational failure and success. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 272-305. doi:10.1006/obhd.1998.2763
- Record, J. (1993). *Hollow victory: A contrary view of the Gulf War*. Washington: Brassey's (US), Inc.
- Schwarzkopf apologizes; Bush accepts. (1991, March 30). St. Louis Post-Dispatch, p. 1A.
- Schwarzkopf, H. N., & Petre, P. (1992). *It doesn't take a hero*. New York: Bantam.
- Street, M. D. (1997). Groupthink: An examination of theoretical issues, implications, and future research suggestions. *Small Group Research*, 28, 72-93. doi: 10.1177/1046496497281003
- Tetlock, P.E., Peterson, R.S., McGuire, C., Chang, S., & Feld, P. (1992). Assessing political group dynamic: A test of the groupthink model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 403-425. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.63.3.403
- Turner, M. E., & Pratkanis, A. R. (1998). Twenty-five years of groupthink theory and research. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 105-115. doi: 10.1006/obhd.1998.2756

**Michael W. Kramer** is Chair and professor of Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma, United States of America.

**Debbie S. Dougherty** is Associate professor at the Department of Communication of the University of Missouri, United States of America.

**Contact Address:** University of Oklahoma. Burton Hall, 610 Elm Street. Norman, OK 73019. Email: mkramer@ou.edu.



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://csc.hipatiapress.com>

## **Microfinance, Digital Media and Social Change: A Visual Analysis of Kiva.org**

Franklin Nii Amankwah Yartey<sup>1</sup>

1) University of Dubuque. United States of America

Date of publication: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Edition period: October 2013 - January 2014

---

**To cite this article:** Yartey, F.N. (2013). Microfinance, Digital Media and Social Change: a Visual Analysis of kiva.org. *Communication & Social Change*, 1(1), 63-89 doi: 10.4471/csc.2013.04

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.447/csc.2013.04>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# Microfinance, Digital Media and Social Change: a Visual Analysis of Kiva.org

Franklin Nii Amankwah Yartey  
*University of Dubuque*

*(Received: 11 July 2013; Accepted: 2 August 2013; Published: 30 September 2013)*

## Abstract

Using theoretical frameworks from Appadurai, (1990); Nakamura, (2008); and Gajjala and Birzescu, (2010), this study employs visual analysis to examine the communication processes used in acquiring loans for people of low socio-economic status in developing countries. Images and narratives on online microfinance site, kiva.org, were examined in this study. The results suggest that though online microfinance through web 2.0 communication technologies is helping the poor, by providing people who otherwise would not have access to loan products with financial services, many of the so-called “poorest of the poor” do not have direct access to global communication tools used to represent them on sites such as kiva. This study suggests that the representation of borrowers from developing countries is riddled with representational issues.

**Keywords:** Kiva, microfinance, globalization, digital media, social change

# Micro-créditos, Medios Digitales y Cambio Social: Un Análisis Visual de Kiva.org

Franklin Nii Amankwah Yartey  
*University of Dubuque*

*(Recibido: 11 de julio de 2013; Aceptado: 2 de agosto de  
2013; Publicado: 30 de septiembre de 2013)*

## Resumen

---

Utilizando los marcos teóricos que ofrecen Appadurai (1990); Nakamura (2008); y Gajjala y Birzescu (2010), este estudio emplea el análisis visual para examinar los procesos comunicativos utilizados en la adquisición de créditos por parte de personas de países en desarrollo con un estatus socio-económico bajo. Imágenes y narraciones del sitio online sobre micro- créditos, kiva.org, han sido examinados en este estudio. Los resultados sugieren que aunque las tecnologías web 2.0 están ayudando a las personas pobres ofreciéndoles un acceso a servicios de préstamo que de otra manera no habría sido posible, muchos de los también llamados 'los más pobres entre los pobres' no tienen acceso directo a las herramientas de comunicación global que se utilizan para representarles a ellos y ellas en espacios web como kiva.org. Este estudio sugiere que la representación de prestatarios de los países en vías de desarrollo está minada de problemas en cuanto a su representatividad.

---

**Palabras clave:** Kiva, microcrédito, globalización, medios digitales, cambio social

Abena Tawiah cooks banku [a Ghanaian delicacy made from fermented corn dough, often served with hot soup] for sale in Jukwa. She is married and blessed with four wonderful children. Her husband is a mason. She assists her husband in taking care of the home. Her loan will be used to buy more bags of maize for the making of the banku and other source ingredients. She hopes to use new earnings from her business to save to build a house ([kiva.org](http://kiva.org): Abena Tawiah, 2010)

**F**igure 1 of Abena was taken as she serves patrons. The image shows Abena in the middle, grinning with pride as she prepares food for her customers.



*Figure 1: Abena Tawiah preparing banku for her costumers. Retrieved from: [http://www.kiva.org/lend/189441?\\_tpos=19&\\_tpg=2](http://www.kiva.org/lend/189441?_tpos=19&_tpg=2)*

The narrative above is from [kiva.org](http://kiva.org), a microfinance lending site that facilitates loans to help the poor like Abena Tawiah. The description implies that due to her loan, Abena made progress with her business. The Internet and web 2.0 technologies have revolutionized global lending. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) worldwide can now raise money via the Internet and instantly make these funds available to entrepreneurs like Abena in

developing countries. Kiva.org is a peer-to-peer lending microfinance institution that provides loan services to entrepreneurs in third world countries and other parts of the world. Kiva invites loans from ordinary citizens of the Global North on its website, which are then accessed by their nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners in various countries. These funds are given to qualified entrepreneurs who are described as the poorest of the poor by Kiva. This paper critically examines Kiva's website through the lens of transnational and globalization theories. It explores the communication processes of microfinance through web 2.0 media technologies.

This study examines not only how microfinance, through digital media, is bringing social change to developing countries, but also some of the issues associated with empowering the poor through digital technologies. The implicit and explicit representational choices made by Kiva of its borrowers on their website impacts how audiences frame these borrowers, underscoring the limitations and the paradox of empowering the underprivileged through web 2.0 online technologies. My analysis of Kiva's representational practices is not an attempt to disrepute its mission or devalue viable outcomes in empowering the poor, but rather to problematize and complicate the discursive practices of empowering the poor through web 2.0 communication technologies. The paper starts by laying the foundation for popular elucidations of microfinance and how it has evolved to include global online lending as a tool for empowering the poor. This work is situated as a case study of Kiva.org, presented by one who has been immersed on Kiva's website for the past four years.

### **Literature Review**

For the past 60 years, humankind has been trying to find solutions to poverty in the developing world (Holcombe, 1995). Scholars and microenterprise development practitioners have been exploring ways to bring poverty relief and empowerment to millions of people worldwide. Microfinance has provided some essential solutions to poverty and empowerment in developing countries. It has also brought about positive social change to many communities globally. Microfinance has taken on a transnational trajectory (Ohanyan, 2007), and millions of people worldwide designated as the "poorest of the poor" have benefitted from microfinance products provided by MFIs locally and internationally. Nobel Peace Prize winner, Mohammad Yunus, is credited for the microfinance movement, which began in the villages of Bangladesh in the 1970s (Holcombe, 1995) through the



Grameen Bank. Following is a discussion of microfinance models, transnational lending in light of web 2.0 communication technologies, Kiva.org, and the communication issues associated with transnational lending.

### **Microfinance Models**

Grameen Bank, founded by Mohammad Yunus, used landlessness as criteria to identify poverty in society and to determine loan eligibility. Many microfinance institutions (MFI) worldwide currently follow the Grameen Bank model. This model was created with the assumption that the poor already have the skills but lack the necessary capital to start a viable business enterprise. Mohammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank filled this gap in the lives of rural poor, some of who were also landless. The Grameen model is based on small-scale rural credit that utilizes methods of group lending.

For example, a group of four to six women will come together and approach Grameen Bank for a loan. The women go through a series of processes (Holcombe, 1995). They must first enroll in Grameen's continuous training program, in which they learn the rules and regulations for Grameen loan recipients. Entrenched in the program are the Sixteen Decisions developed by Grameen that the women have to learn and be tested on before being accepted as members. Among these rules are: (1) Adhering to principles of Grameen Bank, which are Unity, Courage and Hard Work; (2) Agreeing to bring prosperity to their families; (3) Agreeing not to live in run-down houses but rather repairing and constructing new houses to live in; (4) Agreeing not to take any dowry in their sons' weddings or give away dowry in their daughters' weddings, and also not to practice child marriage; (5) agreeing not to inflict social injustice on anyone. These are part of the sixteen decisions that the women have to promise to abide by; they cannot become members of Grameen Bank and receive loans if they do not promise to follow the sixteen rules (Holcombe, 1995).

Once the program is complete, a loan is given out to one person in the group. It is the responsibility of all members to make sure that the loan is paid back in a timely fashion. Five percent of each loan granted goes to a *loan fund*, a reserve that members fall back on in emergency situations. Once the first loan has been fully paid back, the next member is automatically eligible for a loan, and the process continues till everyone in the group has received a loan. The group leader is normally the last person to receive a loan.

The Grameen model is thus group-based; it relies on pre-existing skills of applicants. The goal of Grameen is to provide needed capital for women to engage in visible and viable microenterprises to help sustain their families and most importantly, to bring about empowerment through land ownership. The loan also provides an opportunity for women to make the sixteen decisions a reality by sending their children to school and engaging in various self-help activities (Holcombe, 1995). The Grameen Bank requires weekly payments instead of annual payments, which ensure low default rates (Holcombe, 1995).

There are a few other microfinance models being followed around the world. Some of these are peer group lending (Berenbach & Guzman, 1994; Ito, 2003), also referred to as the solidarity group model of lending, and the Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). These remain the dominant models used globally.

There are, however, numerous private local *savings collectors* who visit markets collecting money from traders. An example of this can be found in the West African country Ghana, where Susu money collectors visit market places and homes, collecting savings. Money collectors are mostly men who collect money from traders with the intention of paying them a lump sum while retaining a day's worth of collections for their services after a period of time (Williams, 2006). There is also a variant of this in the Caribbean where participants throw a hand of weekly or fortnightly wages to other members of the Susu team, each receiving a full hand of all participants' monies on a rotating basis. This is similar to the ROSCA model described below.

The ROSCA model has existed for generations, a group of people who know each other come together and contribute money to a common pool of resources. Group members are required to make regular contributions to the *pot* of money, and following the rotating cycle, the *pot* is then given to one member of the group. At the end of three months, the recipient can then use the money for what s/he wants, either to buy more produce to sell at the market, or more raw materials for a business. The contributions must, however, go on until all group members have received their lump sum of money, which means the group must ensure that all members remain in the group even if they have received their money (Ito, 2003).

Next is the solidarity-lending framework, which was modeled after Grameen Bank. It involves three to ten micro-entrepreneurs who come together to secure microcredit services, including training and organizational structuring (Berenbach & Guzman, 1994). The group as a unit pledges that they will pay back money loaned to them. If they fail to pay back a loan, it

automatically affects disbursement of future loans: a microfinance institution may refuse to provide future loans to groups that default.

### **Description of Site (Kiva.org)**

Kiva was established in 2005 with a mission to help reduce poverty globally. The organization is informed by three rationales: (1) People are by nature generous, and will help others if given the opportunity to do so in a transparent, accountable way; (2) The poor are highly motivated and can be very successful when given an opportunity; (3) By connecting people, we can create relationships beyond financial transactions and build a global community expressing support and encouragement of one another (kiva.org). These beliefs remain what the organization strives to achieve through its lending platform. As of 2005 Kiva has facilitated over 400 million dollars in loans. Kiva is made up of a community of lenders and borrowers. Lenders come from diverse countries including but not limited to Belgium, the United States, Australia, Germany, Spain, and England. Borrowers also come from various countries including Ghana, Zambia, and Sierra Leone. Lenders are given the option to lend to either a male or female loan applicant, or to a person or group under a specific industry. For example, one can lend to individuals or groups in Agriculture, Arts, Construction, Education, Housing, Food, or Transportation sectors, depending on the interests of lenders. The use of web 2.0 social plug-ins such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook is evident on kiva.org. Various technologies are used to share information between lenders and borrowers. The United States has one of the largest Internet users (Ha, 2007), second to China. Kiva.org receives millions of dollars from lenders in the United States and around the world. A loan is given out to a prospective entrepreneur every 17 seconds, 3,333 new lenders joined Kiva during the week that this section of the paper was written, and over one million dollars of loans were given out in the same week (Kiva homepage). As a digital social space on the World Wide Web, Kiva.org provides different levels of interactivity for its users. According to Kiva there are over 400 Kiva fellows worldwide who serve as links between local NGOs and Kiva. Kiva fellows perform translation services and translate borrowers' stories to English before they are uploaded to kiva.org. These translation services have representational issues.

During the translation process inevitable filtering processes take place because the means of media production are placed in the hands of a few who have access to technologies (Nakamura, 2008). Kiva fellows and lenders represent those that have direct access to technologies. From the 1960s to the

1980s, social movements had a different focus; today social movements are more dedicated to identity formation online (Atkinson, 2008; Best, 2005; Huesca, 2001; Stengrim, 2005; Owens & Palmer, 2003; Pickard, 2006). Citizens of the transnational public sphere as seen on kiva.org are encouraged to get online and give to the poor in developing countries; they are enticed through different interactive features available on kiva.org—visuals, text and pictures that add to subtle immediacies the internet provides to its users. These are all unveiled in the processes of gazing at profile pictures, reading short biographies of prospective borrowers, filling out forms, and watching short video reports on kiva.org. These processes make up characteristics of new social movements—people are actively engaged with others online by reading profiles of prospective borrowers and directly lending money to them with a click of a mouse. With a click, they may change the lives of people they have never met. These are some of the features of new social movements as reflected in online lending.

### **Transnational Lending**

The rise of transnational inter-organizational networks has revolutionized global lending, which has also led to an innovative response to global problems like poverty (Ohanyan, 2007). A rural farmer in Namibia is able to borrow money to buy seeds for his/her farm from local MFIs and international lending organizations like Kiva. The Internet has evolved into the near perfect marketing tool for many organizations worldwide. Kiva uses the Internet to bring prospective borrowers and lenders together for social and financial exchanges. For example, Abena the banku seller in Ghana, could expand her business by physically going to one of the local Kiva non-governmental microfinance partner organizations in Ghana. She narrates her story to this organization—her story may consist of who she is, why she needs the money, when she needs the money, and what she will do with it. A Kiva fellow (Kiva fellows are volunteers, primarily college graduates from the United States) then takes a picture of Abena and types out her story, ensuring that all important key phrases that will interest lenders in giving her a loan (e.g. family, education, why she needs the loan, etc.) are included in the description. The Kiva fellow then uploads Abena's picture and biography on kiva.org. Citizens from the United States, Britain, Germany and many other Western nations visit kiva.org, where they browse various profiles of prospective borrowers and lend to those that match their personal requirements for lending. An amount as low as \$25 dollars can then be loaned to a prospective borrower with a click from a computer or a

smartphone. Borrowers are required to pay back the money; however, the lender has the option to withdraw the money when it is paid back or continue to re-lend the money to someone else in need. It is thus a continuous cycle of lending that goes on as long as there are people who need money and those who can lend.

The system of global lending is not a simple process, but rather a complex exchange of goods and services globally (Abe, 2009; Allison, 2009; Appadurai, 1990; Cetina & Preda, 2007; Dempsey, 2009). It involves simple and convoluted systems of communication between international lending organizations and local microfinance organizations (Dempsey, 2009). There are rules, regulations, and assessment procedures established by various international lenders (Buckley, 1997; Gallardo, Ouattara, Randhawa & Steel, 2005; Hulme, 2000; Park & Ren, 2001; Mosley & Hulme, 1998; Rozas, 2009; Hudon, 2008). Many MFIs worldwide are constantly exploring ways to survive and become self-sustaining. The literature available suggests that donor demands are high, and MFIs are asked by donors to broaden their outreach and serve the more economically disadvantaged in society (Steel, Randhawa, Ouattara & Gallardo, 2005). Microfinance over the last 20 years has become a tool for poverty alleviation globally, with NGO partners worldwide helping to bring economic relief to the poor in developing countries. The next section discusses how some of these MFIs are assessed.

### **Assessing Microfinance Institutions**

Steel, Randhawa, Ouattara & Gallardo, (2005) asserted that in countries like Ghana and Tanzania, though microfinance institutions are registered legally, there is no supervision or regulation of these institutions. Thus standards for MFIs are not similar to other banking institutions. This does not mean donors or international partners do not have requirements for these NGOs. Kiva, for example, severed relationships with some of its NGO partners in Ghana: the Kraban Support Foundation (KSF) was shut down when Kiva discovered irregularities in the application of Kiva's policies ([kiva.org](http://kiva.org): KSF, 2011). Kiva assesses its field partners on their re-payment rates. Obtaining loans from donors requires transparency and a good financial structure coupled with good credit rating (Nieto, 2005). Sites like *Ravelry* are reputation-based economies, where users rate each other based on their contributions (Humphreys, 2009). The online status system on Kiva displays ratings for Kiva borrowers and institutions. Lenders review borrower and institution ratings before they lend money. In Mexico, ACCION

international network charges borrowers very high interest rates, which has enabled it to receive high ratings (Hudon, 2008). The best practices of microfinance (Srinivas, 2011) indicate that recipients of donor money must strive to manage finances efficiently, encourage transparency, serve the poor, and adopt good reporting standards. For most MFIs following donor demands can be a daunting task, since they need to find ways to sustain themselves in a competitive market environment.

### **Meeting Donor Demands/Issues**

Some local MFIs are struggling to sustain themselves. Aboagye (2009) identifies that issues facing microfinance institutions include inadequate loan recovery, incompetence on the part of some MFI management, disbursement of unauthorized funds, fraud, embezzlement, neglect by board members and directors, shady accounting procedures, and failure in submitting prudential returns. Ghana's Western Region MFI's had the highest operating costs (Aboagye, 2009). Regulatory authorities and MFI institutions in Ghana lack appropriate technical expertise to regulate MFI institutions (Gallardo, Ouattara, Randhawa, & Steel 2005). According to Gallardo, Ouattara, Randhawa, and Steel (2005), this leads to strict requirements imposed on MFIs. Roy and Wheeler's (2006) survey of micro-finance institutions in Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Togo also revealed that the lack of training, market knowledge, and limited access to capital impedes the growth of the micro-enterprise sector in urban French West-Africa. Budget limitations can also influence the scope of a microfinance institution's outreach (Kotir & Obeng-Odoom, 2009). Buckley's (1997) study of Ghanaian MFIs suggested that in Ghana, a third of respondents identified loans from relatives and friends as major sources of funding when they set up businesses (Mayoux, 2001). According to Ohanyan (2007), the "network-based operation of NGOs" (p. 5) can be an advantage and disadvantage because network structure can erode state sovereignty by taking over some of the functions of the state. For example, certain services, such as banking, are considered the responsibility of the state. Yet it can also be an advantage because networks become support structures for states that have come out of turmoil and are in need of some form of credibility in the international arena. States that need recognition or image repair normally will associate themselves with an international NGO (Ohanyan, 2007). Several African countries are affiliated with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other international agencies. The notion of the network state is reiterated by Ohanyan (2007) as an innovation that helps to strengthen the "global

administrative capacity of the nation state” (p. 13). Essentially, what occurs is instead of one single state governing its people, a network of transnational and international organizations and NGOs all contribute to “global governance” (Ohanyan, 2007, p. 13). The notion of global governance could also be related to the transnational public sphere (Bell, 2007; Conway & Singh, 2009; Cetina & Preda, 2007; Nash, 2007), or Fraser’s idea that the world is a social forum where communicative circuits, economies, and governance overflow boundaries of nations and states (Conway & Singh, 2009). An overflow occurs because a common means of communication is used and Kittler (2009) conceptualized this process as the use of a “universal medium of binary numbers” (p. 24) to transmit and store sounds, images, text, ideas and ideologies worldwide.

### **Method**

A visual analysis was adopted for this study; the method entails examining and critiquing the meaning of visuals and text used in a visual culture (Nakamura, 2002; 2008; 2009). Images and text become artifacts that are analyzed for significance (Mirzoeff, 2009). A visual analysis was used because it provides the appropriate tools for deconstructing gender, racial and ethnic identity in digitally suggestive online practices (Nakamura, 2008). The objective was to critically examine visuals and text on Kiva’s website to determine how borrowers are represented on Kiva. A total of 24 images and narratives of borrowers from Kiva’s website were randomly selected using the “*Region*” selector on Kiva.org. Borrowers were from different countries in Africa. Out of the 24 borrower images and narratives, 12 were individual borrower images and 12 were group borrower images. Group and individual borrowers’ pictures were retrieved separately in Kiva’s database. To critically examine visuals selected, questions such as, “How are borrowers represented in these images?” “How are the images similar or different?” “What do these images communicate to audiences?” were asked. A profile picture of a Kiva lender was also analyzed and compared to borrower profiles. What follows is an analysis and discussion of a few profiles examined.

### **Analysis & Discussion**

The transnational public sphere and the free flow of information through various global network structures is what Ohanyan (2007) conceptualized as the network state, the notion that nation states are not solely self-governing.



Due to transnational network structures that include local and international NGOs, international organizations, and other organizational networks, citizens in various nation states are provided services such as banking from local and international MFIs. Transnational microfinance socio-financial networks like Kiva are responding to global problems, such as poverty. Under normal circumstances, nation states are responsible for their own citizens, for implementing social policies, and providing banking and saving services. However, NGOs have taken over some of these responsibilities through services rendered to citizens globally. Given the global-scale financial crisis, socio-financial networks like kiva.org play a critical role in helping bring about social change by providing economic relief to millions of people worldwide. There is a transnational level of participation in socio-financial networks like kiva.

The post-Westphalian nature of today's public sphere allows for this open participation of nation states in the transnational web of microfinance (Nash, 2007). Kiva.org is one of the many transnational public spheres where donors and borrowers connect in a discursive space to participate in social and financial transactions. The concept of *transnational public sphere* as it relates to online microfinance can be theorized as a tangible virtual space where people congregate to develop online socio-financial relationships, share goodwill through microfinance, and establish connections that have potential of lasting a lifetime. The transnational public sphere is also a stage for performance; it is a public space where potential donors from the Global North provide financial relief to the poor in the Global South. It is a space where individuals and groups in Third World countries exhibit their eligibility for loans through various communication strategies. Images of prospective borrowers like Abena (See Figure 1) are displayed on kiva.org for lenders to peruse and select.

Scholars are exploring ways to theorize these complicated processes of global microfinance, various mass media processes, and the issues associated with this new phenomenon (Fork-Kintz, 2007; Gajjala & Birzescu, 2010; Keating, Rasmussen, & Rishi, 2010; Moodie, 2013; Nadesan, 2010; Sharma, 2008). There has been ongoing debate on whether transnational global processes pose serious challenges and threats to nation states around the globe (Asante, 2006; Parameswaran, 2008). The issues are, however, not black and white, but complex to theorize, given the constant changes and disjointed interactions between “ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 301). According to Appadurai, the flow of money, information, images, ideas, and ideologies, which form the nucleus of global cultural flows, travels through



dissimilar paths. Though scholars such as Appadurai (1990) and Fork-Klintz (2007) have suggested that it is difficult to theorize such complex transnational global processes, this study attempts to theorize the processes of global microfinance by re-visiting Appadurai's 1990 work to help understand today's transnational communication and the global, economic, and social processes that are taking place in complex network structures in the public sphere. The study thus represents an extension of Appadurai's *scapes* to include digital media through online microfinance.

### **Technoscapes & Finanscapes**

Appadurai's *technoscapes* can be conceptualized as a technological public sphere that exists in cyberspace. This space consists of computers linked together by the fabric of the Internet with various inter-nodal connections that link up local microfinance institutions to Kiva.org in a sophisticated communication network. The *technoscapes* are web 2.0 technological tools for lenders who help bring social change by improving the lives of the poor through *finanscapes*. Finanscapes theoretically are paths that financial transactions flow to and from globally. The transfer of money through digital mediums like kiva.org to developing countries follows paths created by finanscapes and technoscapes. Muir (2008) argued that Appadurai ignored cultural forces that are introduced into new societies that become assimilated, localized and reproduced for consumption by locals. Muir (2008) however, builds on Appadurai's theoretical framework. There is an evolving playing field with regards to globalization and the various processes that go along with this phenomenon. It is apparent that cultural economic flows dither between *multiscapes* and that there is not a seamless flow to this phenomenon.

This paper argues that there are two realities to the arguments brought forth by Appadurai and Muir. First in light of present transnational globalization trends, cultural economies flounder; secondly, cultural economies also move seamlessly between *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *finanscapes*, *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*. Thus, there is a degree of disconnectedness and connectedness between the *scapes* as theorized by Appadurai. Microfinance with its flow of money from the Global North to the Global South and vice-versa is a smooth and fragmented process. High interest rates are placed on loans before they are given out to prospective borrowers; borrowers like Abena have to go through specific vetting processes before receiving a loan. These communication processes are part of what Appadurai theorized as unbroken processes. However, this study argues that these processes can be uneven as well. The disjunctures of which

Appadurai theorizes, therefore, do not exist “within a dying paradigm” (Muir, 2008, p. 62) as Muir suggests, but rather within a complex and ever evolving paradigm.

### **Communicative Functions of Online Microfinance**

The globalization of transnationalized microfinance services presents an interesting paradox. Kiva.org’s website can be described as an interactive, transnational, communicative space, where donors and borrowers virtually convene to fulfill mutually benefiting agendas. However, it is also a space where images of Third World bodies are consumed and negotiated by the Global North. For the borrower, receiving loans is crucial to survival, and for the lender there is the satisfaction of giving money to the poor. There is also a procurement of virtue facilitated through the commodification of the Third World borrower. Several communicative processes contribute to commodification of the borrower on kiva.org.

According to Gajjala, Birzescu and Yartey (2011), there is a linear flow of information consisting of a “three-layered mediation of the representation of the borrowers” (p. 226). The first layer entails selecting a prospective borrower who is deemed qualified for a loan by a local NGO. Abena Tawiah approaches a local NGO and shares a narrative with a local NGO partner. She tells her story to the NGO partner, which may include why she needs a loan, when she needs the money, and how she is going to use the loan. A Kiva fellow then writes up a description of what Abena narrated, which is the second layer of representation. This layer requires an understanding and interpretation of what Abena narrated, and the ability to recreate a literal form of this narration with words that will adequately sell and culturally match Abena, her needs and goals to potential lenders (Bob, 2005). The third layer of representation comes from the web 2.0 technologies that are used by Kiva fellows to upload Abena’s profile. These internet tools serve as filters that ultimately shape the final representation of Abena to global audiences. However, borrowers like Abena may not have access to these tools of representation, given the issues associated with the technological divide (Nakamura, 2008; Sooknanan, Melkote, & Skinner, 2002) and that not everyone has access to producing media discourses. These are some of the inadequacies of the public sphere that Fraser discusses (Bell, 2007), so what is missing in the final representation of Abena on Kiva? Are audiences being given accurate information? Is Abena able to directly participate in this communication process? What is edited or left out in the final representation of Abena? Why is it left out? Kiva uses highly scripted messages about

borrowers that raise many issues of representation pertaining to the need to commodify borrowers to lenders.



*Figure 2: Mmassa Group. Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/573942>.*



*Figure 3: Mahodo Group. Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/575876>*

Figures 2 and 3 show prospective borrowers from Zimbabwe and Benin. These images have similar visual cues. Figure 2 presents three men and a woman and Figure 3 shows three female borrowers. There are similarities between Figures 2 and 3. In each of these images we see one person's hand raised. This may be disconcerting to the viewer and also the short narratives beneath these images do not explain why these borrowers have their hands raised. The narrative provided by Kiva describing Figure 2 reads:

Greetings from Zimbabwe! This is 38 year-old Robert from Masvingo. He is married with four children, three of whom are attending school. Robert providing services as a photographer. The business has been in operation for 15 years. He says the main challenge he faces is that of stiff competition from other photographers. Robert has requested a loan of \$600 to buy an additional camera and cartridges. He says the extra income generated as a result of this loan will allow him to improve his family's welfare. In the future Robert plans to complete the shop he is building at a local business centre. (Mmassa Group, 2013)

This narrative describes Robert a 38-year-old family man seeking a loan to grow his business. Robert is not clearly identified in the picture. One is left to wonder if Robert is the gentleman on the left and why he has his hand raised. A Kiva representative explained that they ask group members to raise their hands so prospective lenders will know which borrower is being featured (Yancey, 2012). Robert was therefore asked to raise his hand to be identified by lenders. Asking borrowers to raise their hands, though Kiva is a well-meaning organization is problematic. By default these individuals are not being afforded dignified descriptions by being distinctly identified. Thus the visual arrangements in Figures 2 and 3 are demeaning and disempowering representations of these borrowers.

The next narrative associated with the group in Figure 3 describes Denise, a prospective borrower seeking a loan.

MAHODO is a group of three persons who are friends living in the same district. The group's representative, Denise, is the one in the photo with her hand raised. She is 38 years old and has had little schooling. She is married to a merchant named Boniface. The couple have five children, not all in school, but all in their care. Denise lives with her husband and children. She

and her husband jointly ensure that household expenses are covered. To do so, she has been selling food (polenta served with fish sauce) and lagoon sand in her region for about twenty years. She gets her supplies from a market in Benin. With the goal of bolstering her business and satisfying customers demand, Denise joined with the other members of the group Mahodo to requesting a sixth loan from ALIDé. The previous loans were indeed paid back. (Mahodo Group, 2013)

Similar to Robert in Figure 2, Denise has children and she is seeking a loan to grow her business. She also has her hand raised. Though it may be convenient to identify a borrower by a raised hand, this is not the norm in photography; these individuals in front of the camera lens by default are being depicted as inferior, because they can be controlled. Lenders are thus provided an opportunity to gaze at the controlled bodies of Robert, Denise, and the other group members in Figures 2 and 3 who appear to willingly engage with the camera lens. These borrowers are huddled together, perhaps an attempt by the photographer to capture all members in the camera frame. Their hands hang loosely by their sides in submission to the photographer, with the exception of Robert and Denise who have their hands raised. Lidchi (1999) argued that “photography combines voyeurism and control, because visual images are taken by the powerful of the powerless; the subjects of the photograph are transformed into objects by virtue of being shot” (p. 90). Subjects represented in Figures 2 and 3 thus are framed as not only bodies of knowledge but also “fetishistic objects, docile and visible bodies” (Lidchi, 1999, p. 90). Africans, according to Lidchi, were photographed when they were most susceptible or in need as Figures 2 and 3 connote.

Figures 4 and 5 also present an interesting paradox given the fact that these are representations of single borrowers and not groups. Yet their hands are raised in these images. Though users and prospective lenders will clearly know who is being described in Figures 4 and 5, Antoine (see Figure 4) and Sonagon (see Figure 5) represented in these images also have their hands raised. This is not just confusing, but also undignified depictions of these men. These images resurrect old Victorian narratives that suggest that Africans are helpless, subservient, and like children, they can be controlled.



*Figure 4: Antoine's raised hand. Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/578061>.*



*Figure 5: Sonagon's raised hand.. Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/578055>*



Figure 6 shows borrower Araba, described as not having formal education yet who has managed to establish a thriving business.



*Figure 6: Araba smoking fish. Retrieved July 1st, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/576497>*

Araba is grilling fresh fish and she seems somewhat content with her business. The fish smoking in the background connote productivity and communicate to prospective lenders the industry of this woman. This image presents a post-colonial counter discourse where the African is portrayed as involved in her own empowerment. Like Abena Tawiah in Figure 1 who is fully engaged at her workplace, Araba also seems to be engaged in her own empowerment. Juxtaposing the images of Araba and Abena to the groups in Figures 2 and 3, the borrowers in Figures 2 and 3 seem to be waiting for the Western lender to hand them money.

Figure 7 shows Cecelia submitting to the Camera lens; she however, does not make eye contact, her eyes were captured shut. Figure 7 is without context. Western Lenders are thus forced to direct their gaze to the features of this woman. Her body is thus displayed for Western lenders to digitally scrutinize and consume. Her eyes are shut and viewers are not able to fully visually connect with this borrower. However, with just a click of a mouse,

lenders are able to send money to Cecelia. Kiva lender Jennifer in Figure 8 below explains why she lends to the poor like Cecelia.



*Figure 7.* Cecelia with eyes closed. Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/575748>

Figure 8 shows Jennifer from New Jersey in the United States holding up a wine glass in a contemplative mood. She seems to be living a comfortable life and from her narrative, we learn that though her contribution may be small she feels she is really making a difference in the lives of the poor globally; she is impacting positive social change.



*Figure 8.* Kiva lender Jennifer holds up a wine glass:  
Retrieved July 1, 2013 from  
<http://www.kiva.org/lender/jennifer7900>



If my small loan helps someone realize their goals and dreams quicker, I am more than happy to help. My offering may be small and might seem like a drop in the bucket, but even loose change eventually adds up in the bottom of your purse! (Kiva Lender Jennifer, 2013)

Juxtaposing Jennifer's image to Cecelia's in Figure 7, one can discern the stark representational differences. Individuals like Jennifer are cultivating the new form of identity that Best, (2005); Huesca, (2001); Stengrim, (2005) and others theorized about.

This new form of identity formation is a strand of transnational identity that radiates goodwill, understanding, and a passion for helping the poorest of the poor in disadvantaged communities around the world. Through these new financial networks and social movements, lenders like Jennifer are able to remotely help others in developing countries. The process of virtually transferring money to another country to be used by a prospective borrower has replaced being physically present while helping someone. The Internet has brought some of us closer through the various networks that also serve as hubs of information (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Socialcam, Vine) that allow us to engage through building of relationships with people locally and globally. The World Wide Web enhances the connections that philanthropists like Jennifer initiate. Lenders like Jennifer are able to read the profiles of prospective borrowers and instantly lend to them. The instantaneous transfer of money through the finanscapes has been theorized as seamless processes (Appadurai, 1990).

## Conclusion

By teasing out the communication processes, visual cues, and image arrangements, which are products of representation, this essay demonstrates the need for a theory of global communication processes through online microfinance. Though there is considerable research on global communication, this study contributes to communication theory by unpacking tensions of representation and empowerment through online microfinance. Web 2.0 digital technologies and its complex tools make it possible for borrowers living in developing countries to receive loans. These processes of lending are uneven; they are processes that dither between multiscales before reaching their final destinations. This paper

argues that though the communication process of transferring money to borrowers may appear to be seamless, the discursive process in documenting and representing the *other* is riddled with multifaceted issues. Online lending through web 2.0 technologies has added a new dimension to global lending, providing people who otherwise would not have had access to loan products with the support needed to improve their lives. Organizations like the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh have paved the way for social change and empowerment of the poor through microfinance. Technology has complicated and introduced new challenges to global lending. Communication scholars need to continue to explore new ways in theorizing global processes such as the flow of money, communication, and images in cyberspace. There is no doubt that organizations like Kiva are well meaning and strive to bring economic relief to the poor. However, the discursive practices of empowering the poor are riddled with issues of representation that may not be apparent to these organizations. Borrowers such as Abena and Araba seem to experience change in their lives through online microfinance; however, many like them do not have direct access to the global communication tools used to represent them. This paper critically examined Kiva's website through the lens of transnational and globalization theories. It explored the communication processes of microfinance through web 2.0 media technologies. The implicit and explicit choices made by Kiva in the representation of borrowers impact how audiences frame these borrowers, highlighting the limitations and paradoxes of empowering the poor through digital technologies. Some of the representations of borrowers on kiva.org are not only disempowering, but also create unintentional subliminal assertions of superiority of the Global North over the Global South.

### Aknowledgement

The author would like to thank Dr. Radhika Gajjala & Dr. Ewart Skinner, both of Bowling Green State University, Ohio, for their valuable feedback during the development of the paper. He also conveys his gratitude to the reviewers of C&SC and faculty of the 2011 National Communication Association (NCA) Doctoral Honors seminar for their comments and feedback.

### References

- Abe, K. (2009). The myth of media interactivity: Technology, communications and surveillance in Japan. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26, 73-88. doi: [10.1177/0263276409103119](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409103119)

- Aboagye, Q. Q. A. (2009). A baseline study of Ghanaian microfinance institutions. *Journal of African Business*, 10, 163-181.
- Allison, A. (2009). The cool brand, affective activism and Japanese Youth. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26, 89-111. doi: 10.1177/0263276409103118
- Antoine. Retrieved July 1, 2013, from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/578061>
- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7 (2), 295-310. doi: 10.1177/026327690007002017
- Araba. Retrieved July 1, 2013, from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/576497>
- Asante, K. M. (2006). The rhetoric of globalization: The Europeanisation of human ideas. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 1(2), 152-148. doi: 10.2167/md054.0
- Atkinson, D. J. (2008). Towards a model of interactivity in alternative media: A multilevel analysis of audiences and producers in a new social movement network. *Mass Communication & Society*, 11(3), 227-247. doi:10.1080/15205430801919705
- Bell, V. (2007). The potential of an ‘unfolding constellation’: Imagining Fraser’s transnational public sphere. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24 (4) 1-5. doi: 10.1177/0263276407083018
- Best, K. (2005). Rethinking the globalization movement: Toward a cultural theory of contemporary democracy and communication. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 2, 214-237.
- Berenbach, S., & Guzman, D. (1994). The solidarity group experience worldwide. In Maria, O., & Elisabeth, R. (Eds.), *The new world of microenterprise finance* (pp. 119-139). Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Bob, C. (2005) *The marketing of rebellion: Insurgents, media and international activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Buckley, G. (1997). Microfinance in Africa: Is it either the problem or the solution? *World Development*, 25, 1081-1093.
- Cecelia. Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/575748>
- Cetina, K. K., & Preda, A. (2007). The temporalization of financial markets: From network to flow. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24, 116-138. doi: 10.1177/0263276407084700
- Conway, J., & Singh, J. (2009). Is the world social forum a transnational public sphere?: Nancy Fraser, critical theory and the containment

of radical possibility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(5) 61-84.

doi: 10.1177/0263276409106350

- Dempsey, E. S. (2009). NGOs, communicative labor, and the work of grassroots representation. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 6(4), 328-345. doi:10.1080/14791420903348625
- Fork-Kintz, L. J. (2007). "Revisiting media theory in the era of transnational media corporations." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 93<sup>rd</sup> annual convention, TBA, Chicago, IL. Retrieved March 31 from [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p192261\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p192261_index.html)
- Gajjala, R., Birzescu, A. and Yartey, F. (2011). Marketing Empowerment? Commodifying the "Other" through Online Microfinance. In Chopra R. & Gajjala R., (Eds.) *Global media, cultures, and identities* (pp. 217-230). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gajjala, R. & Birzescu, A. (2010). Voicing and placement in online networks. In M. Levina, and G. Kien (Eds.) *Post-global network and everyday life* (pp. 73-92). New York: Peter Lang.
- Gallardo, J., Ouattara, K., Randhawa, B., & Steel, F. W. (2005). Comparative review of microfinance regulatory framework issues in Benin, Ghana, and Tanzania. Retrieved January 14<sup>th</sup> 2010 from: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=743924](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=743924)
- Ha, L. (2007). The United States: The largest broadband market in the world. In L. S. Ha & R. J. Ganahl III, *Webcasting worldwide: Business models of an emerging global medium* (pp. 49-68). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Holcombe, H. S., Speth, G. J. (1995). Managing to empower: The Grameen bank's experience of poverty alleviation. London, Zed Books.
- Huesca, R. (2001). Conceptual contributions of new social movements to development communication research. *Communication Theory*, 11(4), 415-433. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2001.tb00251.x
- Hudon, M. (2008). Norms and values of the various microfinance institutions. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 35, 35-48. doi:10.1108/03068290810843828
- Hulme, D. (2000). Impact assessment methodologies for microfinance: Theory, experience and better practice. *World Development*, 28(1), 79-98.
- Humphreys, S. (2009). *The economies within an online social network market. A case study of Ravelry*. In ANZCA 09 annual conference: Communication creativity and global citizenship, 8-10 July 2009, QUT Brisbane.

- Ito, S. (2003). Microfinance and social capital: Does social capital help create good practice? *Development in Practice*, 13(4), 322-332.
- Keating, C., Rasmussen, C., & Rishi, P. (2010). The rationality of empowerment: Microcredit, accumulation by dispossession, and the gendered economy. *Feminists Theorize International Political Economy Special Issue*, 36 (1), 153-176.
- Kittler, F. (2009). Towards an ontology of media. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26, 23-31.
- Kiva (2010). Abena Tawiah. Retrieved March 29 from [http://www.kiva.org/lend/189441?\\_tpos=19&\\_tpg=2](http://www.kiva.org/lend/189441?_tpos=19&_tpg=2)
- Kiva Lender Jenifer (2013). Retrieved July 4, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lender/jennifer7900>
- Kiva. Org. KSF. Retrieved August 1, 2011 from [http://www.kiva.org/partners/19?\\_redirect=true&page=about&action=aboutPartner&id=19](http://www.kiva.org/partners/19?_redirect=true&page=about&action=aboutPartner&id=19)
- Kotir, H. J., Obeng-Odoom, F. (2009). Microfinance and rural household development: A Ghanaian perspective. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 25(1), 85-105. doi: 10.1177/0169796X0902500104
- Lidchi, H. (1999) Finding the right image: British development NGOs and the regulation of imagery. In: T Skelton and T Allen (Eds.) *Culture and Global Change* (pp. 87–101). London: Routledge.
- Mahodo Group, (2013). Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/575876>
- Mayoux, L. (2001). Tackling the Down side: Social capital, women’s empowerment and micro-finance in Cameroon. *Development and Change*, 32(3), 421-450. doi: 10.1111/1467-7660.00212
- Mirzoeff, N. (2009). *An introduction to visual culture*. New York, Routledge.
- Mmassa Group. (2013). Retrieved July 1, 2013 from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/573942>
- Moodie, M. (2013). Microfinance and the Gender of Risk: The Case of Kiva.org. *Signs*, 38(2), 279-302. doi:10.1086/667448
- Mosley, P., & Hulme, D. (1998). Microenterprise finance: Is there a conflict between growth and poverty alleviation? *World Development*, 26(5), 784-790.
- Muir, D. (2008). The pinball and the machine: Global cultural homogeneity and the commodity form. *Theory in Action*, 1(3), 53-68. doi:10.3798/tia.1937-0237.08013
- Nakamura, L. (2002). *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. New York: Routledge.

- Nakamura, L. (2008). *Digitizing Race: Visual cultures of the internet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nakamura, L. (2009). Don't hate the player, hate the game: The racialization of labor in world of warcraft. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26 (2), 128-144. doi:10.1080/15295030902860252
- Nadesan, H. M. (2010). Enterprising narratives and the global financialization of microlending. *Women & Language*, 33(2), 9-30.
- Nash, K. (2007). Transnationalizing the public sphere: Critique and critical possibilities. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(4), 53-57. doi: 10.1177/0263276407080093
- Nieto, G. B. (2005). Private funding of microcredit schemes: Much ado about nothing? *Development in Practice*, 15, 490-501. doi:10.1080/09614520500076027
- Ohanyan, A. (2007). Transnational NGO-Donor networks and the politics of sovereignty: The case of the microfinance sector in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. Paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, Chicago.
- Owens, L., Palmer, K. L. (2003). Making the news: Anarchist counter-public relations on the World Wide Web. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20(4), 335-361. doi:10.1080/0739318032000142007
- Park, A., Ren, C. (2001). Microfinance with Chinese characteristics. *World Development*, 29(1), 39-62. doi:10.1016/S0305-750X(00)00087-5
- Pickard, W. V. (2006). Assessing the radical democracy of indymedia: Discursive, technical, and institutional constructions. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 23(1), 19-38. doi:10.1080/07393180600570691
- Parameswaran, R. (2008). The other sides of globalization. *Communication, Culture, and Postcolonial Critique*, 1, 116-125. doi:10.1111/j.1753-9137.2007.00012.x
- Roy, M. A., & Wheeler, D. (2006). A survey of micro-enterprise in urban West Africa: drivers shaping the sector. *Development in Practice*, 16(5), 452-464. doi: 10.1080/09614520600792432
- Rozas, D. (2009). Throwing in the towel: Lessons from MFI liquidations. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from: [http://www.microfinancegateway.org/gm/document-1.9.38716/Throwing%20in%20the%20Towel\\_%20%20Lessons%20from%20MFI%20Liquidations.pdf](http://www.microfinancegateway.org/gm/document-1.9.38716/Throwing%20in%20the%20Towel_%20%20Lessons%20from%20MFI%20Liquidations.pdf)

- Sharma, A. (2008). *Logics of empowerment: Development, gender, and governance in neoliberal India*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Sonagon. Retrieved July 1, 2013, from <http://www.kiva.org/lend/578055>
- Sooknanan, P., Melkote, R. S., Skinner, E. C. (2002). Diffusion of an educational innovation in Trinidad and Tobago: The role of teacher attitudes and perceptions toward computers in the classroom. *The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 64(6), 557-571. doi: 10.1177/17480485020640060301
- Srinivas, H. Donor guidelines for microfinance international best practice. Retrieved March 17, 2011, from <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/inspire/donor-guidelines.html>
- Steel, W.F., Randhawa, B., Ouattara, K., & Gallardo, J. (2005). *Comparative Review Of Microfinance Regulatory Framework Issues In Benin, Ghana, And Tanzania*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Stengrim, A. L. (2005). Negotiating postmodern democracy, political activism, and knowledge production: Indymedia's grassroots and e-savvy answer to media oligopoly. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 2(4), 281-304. doi:10.1080/14791420500332527
- Williams, S. (2006). Ghana Susu collectors connect with formal banking. *New Africa*, 74.
- Yancey, C. (2012). Question about borrower profiles. Retrieved January 19, 2012, from <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/build-kiva>

**Franklin Nii Amankwah Yartey** is assistant professor. University of Dubuque, Iowa. United States of America.

**Contact Address:** University of Dubuque. 2000 University Avenue. Dubuque, IA 52001. United States of America. Email: [fyartey@dbq.edu](mailto:fyartey@dbq.edu)



**Hipatia Press**  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://csc.hipatiapress.com>

## **La Trilogía Sobre ‘Communication Activism’: ‘Communication for Social Change’, ‘Media and Performance Activism’ y ‘Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference’**

Sandra Girbés Peco<sup>1 2</sup>

1) Universidad de Barcelona. Spain.

2) The Civil Rights Project – Proyecto Derechos Civiles. Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. UCLA. United States of America

Date of publication: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

---

**To cite this article:** Girbés, S. (2013). La Trilogía sobre ‘Communication Activism’: ‘Communication for Social Change’, ‘Media and Performance Activism’ y ‘Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference’. *C&SC – Communication & Social Change*, 1(1) 90-98. doi: 10.4471/csc.2013.05

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.447/csc.2013.05>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.



# Review

Frey, L.R. & Carragee, K.M. (Eds). (2007). *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc. ISBN: 1-57273-697-6

Frey, L.R. & Carragee, K.M. (Eds). (2007). *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc. ISBN: 1-57273-699-2

Frey, L.R. & Carragee, K.M. (Eds). (2012). *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference*. New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc. ISBN: 1-61289-062-3

Nos encontramos ante una *review* particular ya que parte de la cita de una trilogía. La obra seleccionada, ‘Communication Activism’, está relacionada con el sentido y objetivo principal de la publicación que la alberga: reflejar intensamente todas las aportaciones que, desde el ámbito científico, trabajan por un cambio fundamentado en la búsqueda de una justicia social universal.

La primera pregunta a responder después de tal afirmación sería ¿y qué entendemos por justicia social? Algunas de las mejores respuestas que se pueden dar desde nuestro ámbito las encontramos en cada uno de los capítulos de estos tres volúmenes brillantemente editados e introducidos por los profesores Lawrence R. Frey y Kevin M. Carragee pero, con especial detalle, en la introducción al conjunto de la obra del 2007 -los dos primeros tomos- y la revisada para el 2012 -tercer y último volumen- (Frey & Carragee, 2007, p.1; 2012, p.1). Toda una enciclopedia sobre el activismo que se explicita en los medios de comunicación humanos.

El primer tomo lo encontramos dividido en dos secciones: “I - Promoting public dialogue, debate and discussion” y “II - Communication Consulting for Social Change”. La primera, nos acerca a experiencias sobre la promoción de la democracia deliberativa a través del diálogo. Por ejemplo, los movimientos de base que luchan por la verdad, la justicia y la solidaridad desde el ámbito de la comunicación (Jovanovic et al., 2007, p.67); el diálogo público como promotor de procesos de investigación-

acción fundamentado en el activismo comunicacional (Adams et al., 2007, p. 109); la asesoría en derechos civiles a través del diálogo en ámbitos como la salud (Orbe, 2007, p. 133); el empoderamiento de voces marginadas para el liderazgo y el activismo mediante una liga urbana de debate (Shields & Preston, 2007, p. 157) y la comunicación basada en la esperanza por parte del activismo anti bélico (Hartnett, 2007, p. 195).

En la segunda parte, se aborda aquella consultoría en temas de comunicación que no se limita a estar al servicio de las grandes corporaciones. En seis capítulos diferentes se nos muestra, cómo la consultoría en temas de comunicación contribuye tanto al conocimiento académico como a la mejora de los asuntos públicos. Si bien esta opción no es la más ejercida por los profesionales de la educación y la comunicación, el libro nos muestra de manera detallada seis maneras de combinar investigación académica y compromiso social. En primer lugar, se ilustra la utilización del activismo comunicativo y la consultoría en la gestión de la dialéctica en un centro de recuperación de personas que han sufrido algún tipo de acoso o agresión sexual (Crabtree & Ford, 2007, p. 249). En los cinco apartados siguientes se suceden temas como: la generación de espacios conversacionales colaborativos entre abogados y jueces sobre la pena de muerte (Sunwolf, 2007, p. 287); la facilitación del consenso en un grupo que tiene en común el activismo antiglobalizador (Palmer, 2007, p. 325); la investigación-acción participativa como herramienta para mejorar la salud de mujeres lesbianas (Campo & Frazer, 2007, p.355); la comunicación en campañas anti-tabaco (Esrock, et al., 2007, p. 385) y, como cierre de este primer tomo, un estudio de caso sobre el rol del consultor organizacional visto como activista (Ritchie, 2007, p. 411).

El segundo tomo, sigue una estructura idéntica y organiza el contenido en dos grandes bloques: "*I - Managing Media*" y "*II - Performing Social Change*". El primer bloque nos ofrece un intenso análisis a través de 7 capítulos. En ellos encontramos diversas perspectivas del marco planteado: las prácticas periodísticas en una prisión de mujeres y cómo estas llevan a incrementar la reflexividad investigadora y la confrontación de dilemas dialécticos que ayudan a superar un ambiente restrictivo como el de la prisión (Novek & Sanford, 2007, p. 67); el periodismo cívico visto como una opción de servicio sin fisuras a la comunidad (Christian, 2007, p. 97); la concepción del aprendizaje y la generación del cambio en un proyecto de

prevención de la violencia a través de la alfabetización mediática (Cooks & Scharrer, 2007, p. 129); la posibilidad de establecer una relación entre el mundo académico y el movimiento LGTB desde un marco de investigación 'multimetodológico' (Cagle, 2007, p. 155); el uso del documental audiovisual para la promoción de la justicia (McHale, 2007, p. 195); una aproximación al "*micro radio movement*" y su lucha por incorporar al espectro mediático el centenar de pequeñas emisoras independientes asociadas a este movimiento (Coopman, 2007, p. 223) y, para cerrar este apartado, un caso de estudio sobre cómo una comunidad se enfrenta a algunos de los retos que plantea la brecha digital (Herman & Eterna, 2007, p. 255).

En la segunda parte, además de las aportaciones de los dos editores – contribuciones de muy recomendable lectura tanto por sus palabras como por las numerosas referencias que sustentan su argumentación– nos encontramos ante una breve e interesante selección de tres capítulos que muestran diferentes experiencias donde convergen arte y activismo comunicacional. La primera experiencia nos muestra cómo el folk participativo se convierte en un catalizador en la reforma social de la India rural (Harter et al., 2007, p.285) y la segunda aborda cómo una práctica próxima al *teatro fórum* puede constituirse como una herramienta en la educación entre iguales para la prevención del acoso sexual (Rich & Rodríguez, 2007, p. 315). En tercer lugar, la sección y el tomo finalizan con la exposición de una etnografía implementada con la intención de recabar historias que sirvan para combatir la violencia doméstica (Cunningham & Curry, 2007, p. 345).

El tercer y último volumen presenta 10 capítulos que, en este caso, constituyen un bloque común. El objetivo es abordar cómo la sociedad civil (miembros activos de la comunidad, ciudadanos y ciudadanas comprometidas y no comprometidas con la comunidad) y la comunidad científica (investigadores/as, docentes universitarios/as, estudiantes de doctorado y estudiantes en general) son capaces de trabajar de manera conjunta pese a las profundas diferencias que, a veces, les separan. Se muestra cómo estas diferencias no son insalvables y se profundiza en los puentes de colaboración establecidos con el objetivo común de trabajar por una sociedad más justa desde el activismo de la comunicación que parte del compromiso y de la investigación universitaria. El primero capítulo muestra

cómo la generación de puentes de comunicación en un largo conflicto como el chipriota, posibilitaron el paso de la tragedia al diálogo (Broome et al., 2012, p. 69). Los ocho capítulos siguientes abordan temáticas como la negociación dialéctica en el movimiento contra el tráfico de esclavos y esclavas sexuales a lo largo de 10 años de investigación (Carey, 2012, p. 105); una estrategia de intervención para la superación o reducción de las secuelas del genocidio a través de una propuesta de teatro social (Welker, 2012, p. 139); la manera de investigar desde abajo, partiendo de la base hacia la comunidad científica, mediante narrativas que permiten superar la violencia doméstica (Ryan & Jeffreys, 2012, p.179); las reivindicaciones por una alimentación de calidad (Drake, 2012, p. 223); la lucha comunicativa por evitar la ejecución de la pena de muerte dictaminada sobre Kenneth Foster (Asenas, et al. 2012, p. 263); el paso del racismo en un cuartel de bomberos mayoritariamente blanco y con un discurso poco integrador hacia una comunidad diversa y multicultural (Groscurth, 2012, p. 291); la activación del compromiso ético a través de la comunicación en el ámbito de los negocios (May, 2012, p. 325) o el empoderamiento comunicativo de personas pobres para el autoempleo y la superación de la pobreza (Papa et al., 2012, p. 367). Finalmente, esta obra aporta una investigación participativa llevada a cabo por la comunidad Ramah Navajo y la universidad de Nuevo México en la que se aborda la problemática del abuso de drogas entre las personas jóvenes (Belone et al., 2012, p. 401).

Por lo tanto, la lectura de esta amplia trilogía se recomienda especialmente a aquellas personas de la comunidad científica internacional que al igual que los autores y autoras de esta obra contemplan la comunicación como un lugar privilegiado desde el que contribuir a la transformación social.

### Referencias

- Adams, C., Berquist, C., Dillon, R., & Galanes, G. (2007). Public Dialogue as Communication Activism: Lessons learned from Engaging in Community-Based Action Research. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 109-132). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

- Asenas, J., McCann, B. J., Feyh, K., & Cloud, D. (2012). Saving Kenneth Foster: Speaking *with* Others in the Belly of the Beast of Capital Punishment. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (263-290). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Belone, L., Oetzel, J. G., Wallerstein, N., Tafoya, G., Rae, R., Rafelito, A., Kelhoyouma, L., Burbank, I., Finster, C., Henio-Charley, J., Maria, P.G., Lee, J.M., & Thomas, A. (2012). Using Participatory Research to Address Substance Abuse in an American-Indian Community. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (401-432). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Broome, B., Anastasiou, H., Hajipavlov, M., & Kanol, B. (2012). Opening Communication Pathways in Protracted Conflict: From Tragedy to Dialogue in Cyprus. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (69-104). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Cagle, V. M. (2007). Academia Meets LGBTQ Activism. The Challenges Incurred in Utilizing Multimethodological Research. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 155-194). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Campo, S. & Frazer, M. S. (2007). "I'm Glad You Feel Comfortable Enough to Tell Me That": Participatory Action Research for Better Healthcare for Women who Partner with Women. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 355-384). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Carey, C. (2012). Negotiating Dialectical Tensions in Communication Activism: A Decade of Working in Countertrafficking Field. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (105-138). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Christian, S. E. (2007). A Marriage of Like Minds and Collective Action: Civic Journalism in a Service-Learning Framework. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and*

- Performance Activism* (pp. 97-128). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Cooks, L., & Scharrer, E. (2007). Communicating Advocacy: Learning and Change in the Media Literacy and Violence Prevention Project. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 97-128). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Coopman, T. (2007). Spectrum Wars: Bridging Factionalism in the Fight for Free Radio. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 223-254). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Crabtree, R. D. & Ford, L. A. (2007). Community Activist and Communication Consultant: Managing the Dialectics of Outsider-Within Status at a Sexual Assault Recovery Services Center. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 249-286). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Cunningham, D., & Curry, E. A. (2007). Narrative as Communication Activism: Research Relationships in Social Justice Projects. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 345-370). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Drake, J. L. (2012). Food Fights: Reclaiming Public Relations and Reframing a Runaway Food System through a Grassroots Movement. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (223-262). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.)
- Esrock, S. L., Hart, J. L., & Leichty, G. (2007). Smoking Out the Opposition: The Rhetoric of Reaction and the Kentucky Cigarette Excise Tax Campaign. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 385-410). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (2007). Introduction: Communication Activism as Engaged Scholarship. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 1-66). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

- Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (2012). Introduction: Communication Activism for Social Justice. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (pp. 1-68). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Groscurth, C. (2012). Disrupting Whiteness at a Firehouse: Promoting Organizational Change through Relational Praxis. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (291-324). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Herman, A. P. & Etterna, J. S. (2007). A Community Confronts the Digital Divide: A Case Study of Social Capital Formation Through Communication Activism. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 255-284). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Harter, L., Sharma, D., Pant, S., Singhal, A., Sharma, Y. (2007). Catalyzing Social Reform Through Participatory Folk Performances in Rural India. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 285-314). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Hartnett, S. J. (2007). "You are Fit for Something Better": Communicating Hope in Antiwar Activism. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 195-248). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Jovanovic, S., Steger, C., Symonds, S. & Nelson, D. (2007). *Promoting Deliberative Democracy Through Dialogue: Communication Contributions to a Grassroots Movement for Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation*. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 67-108). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- May, S. K. (2012). Activating Ethical Engagement through Communication in Organizations: Negotiating Ethical Tensions and Practices in a Business Ethics initiative. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (325-366). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- McHale, J. (2007). Unreasonable Doubt: Using Video Documentary to Promote Justice. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.),

- Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 195-222). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Novek, E., & Sanford, R. (2007). At the Checkpoint: Journalistic Practices, Researcher Reflexivity, and Dialectical Dilemmas in a Women's Prison. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 67-96). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Orbe, M.P. (2007). Assessing the Civil Rights Health of Communities: Engaged Scholarship Through Dialogue. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 133-156). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Palmer, D. L. (2007) Facilitating Consensus in an Antiglobalization Affinity Group. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 325-354). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Papa, W. H., Papa, M. J.; & Buerkel, R. A. (2012). Organizing for Social Change: Communicative Empowerment for Small Business Development and Job Training for People Who are Poor. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (367-400). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Rich, M. D., & Rodríguez, J. I. (2007). A Proactive Performance Approach to Peer Education: The Efficacy of a Sexual Assault Intervention Program. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Media and Performance Activism* (pp. 315-344). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Ritchie, L. (2007). The Organizational Consultant as Activist. a Case Study of a Nonprofit Organization. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 411-440). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Ryan, C., & Jeffreys, K. (2012). Challenging Domestic Violence: Trickle-Up Theorizing About Participation and Power in Communication Activism. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (179-222). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.



- Shields, D. C. & Preston, C. T. (2007). The Urban Debate League Rhetorical Vision: Empowering Marginalized Voices for Leadership and Activism. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 157-194). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Sunwolf. (2007). Facilitating Death Talk: Creating Collaborative Courtroom Conversations About the Death Penalty Between Attorneys and Jurors. In Frey, L. R. & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (pp. 287-324). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Welker, L. (2012). Staging Sudanese Refugee Narratives and the Legacy of Genocide: A Performance-Based Intervention Strategy. In Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.), *Communication Activism: Struggling for Social Justice Amidst Difference* (139-178). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.