COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS

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The Shadow Side of Social Gift-Giving: Miscommunication and Failed Gifts

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A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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> I know what I have given you.
> I do not know what you have received.
> —Porchia (1969)

1. Gifting as *Dilemma*: Gifts Do Not Speak for Themselves

From the day you are born until the day you die, you stand in the midst of gift-giving and gift-receiving dilemmas. Every relationship you will ever have offers the possibility of *communicating* through social objects (transformed by the gifting process). Further, every gift you receive requires that you attempt to decode the intended message of the giver, then challenges you with an added interpersonal burden of appropriate *gift reciprocation*. Unfortunately, gift objects do not speak for themselves. They require decoding.

Today, social gifting behaviors stand at an intriguing scholarly intersection—where the paths of communication, culture, social psychology, philosophy, and marketing meet. While people exchange gifts interpersonally, they are increasingly influenced in their object-choices and gratitude-reactions by mass media marketing. The culture of gift giving and receiving is a rich arena for our academic attention, as people are increasingly reporting stress, disappointment, anxiety, and misunderstandings when they anticipate or participate in social gifting.

As a form of social exchange, gifts both create and re-create relationships. The *idealized* gift, however, requires the union of the right object with the right person at the right time—a challenging social intersection, at best. Berking (1999) argued that gift giving is a primal phenomenon of society through which communities reproduce themselves, while Cheal (1988) claimed that scholars have neglected an opportunity to probe the manner in which gifts organize both intimacy and community between donors and recipients. The

language of gifts is tightly woven into our everyday social interactions. Belk (1979) identified interpersonal communication, in fact, as one of the primary functions of gift giving (together with socialization or social and economic exchange).

Giving gifts functions to establish, define, repair, maintain, or enhance interpersonal relationships, yet has been largely neglected by interpersonal scholars. Consumer scholars Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1993) recognized that gift exchange may be one of the few remaining crucial *social* incidents of significance, testing relational ties on the marketplace. While Komter and Vollegergh (1997) have suggested that gift giving functions as the cement of social relationships, Sherry et al. (1993) maintained that relational gifting may also forge a *painful* juncture between separately-held personal *myths* about givers and receivers. Failed gifts, in fact, can trigger relational trauma. Givers may be reluctant, receivers ungrateful, or occasions poorly-defined. As a result, relational gift-giving and receiving may be accompanied by high levels of anxiety.

Gifts speak volumes about our relational perceptions and expectations, yet gift behaviors have been primarily investigated by marketing scholars. This is surprising, in light of the prominence of interpersonal gift-giving messages throughout the relational lifespan: in families, in friendships, in romances, and between working colleagues. Bloom (1999) points out that we are vulnerable when we pay attention to our gifting histories; to talk about the gifts we give or get requires that we actually talk about ourselves and our relationships.

2. The Communication Culture of Social Gifts

This review considers, at the outset, the communication culture of gifts, with a focus on the intricate pattern of messages between givers and receivers. (No attempt is made in this article to cover intercultural, organizational, esoteric, or charitable gift-giving practices, all gift-giving events worthy of our scholarly attention.) This article focuses on studies that have highlighted "miscommunication" as an outcome of the gifting transaction. In addition, the neglected role of

Figure 1. Model of gift-receivers' psychosocial noises that cloud relational messages intended by gift-givers.

gift receiver is illuminated, in a model that illustrates psychosocial "noises" that interfere with intended gift messages (Figure 1, Sunwolf, in press).

A. Using a Receiver-Centered Model of Relational Gift Communication

This Psychosocial Noise Model of Gift Giving describes receiver-centered variables that explain miscommunication during interpersonal gift giving. A gift-receiver's personal "psychosocial-noise" can cloud or distort the symbolic message(s) that were intended by a gift-giver. Figure 1 illustrates a few of the specific noises through which a gift message is filtered by a receiver: (a) expectations; (b) self- concept; (c) relational perceptions; (d) assumptions; (e) relational goals; (f) gifting history; (g) gender; (h) cultural values; (i) social roles; and (j) attributions.

The emphasis of prior research on giver-centered variables has marginalized the recipient's role during relational gift-exchanges. Representative studies of this giver-focus are summarized in Table 1 on pages 5-8, offering descriptions of the participants of the studies, the variables studied, as well as the findings. At the same time, Table 2 on page 9 offers useful exemplars of some of the receiver-focused studies available to date. Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim (1993) have complained that most gift-exchange research has been, in fact, "giver-centric." Since any giver's decision-making processes, goals, or strategies will vary (depending, in part, on the recipient), we need to expand our knowledge about receiver-centered gifting variables. As Rucker, Balch, Higham, and Schenter (1992) point out, research consistently supports an everyday intuition that not all gifts are successful. However clear any giver may feel about the meaning intended behind a gift-choice—once the gift is offered, a receiver faces the communication challenge of gift-*interpretation*.

Gift receivers may have pre-existing expectations about a gift, together with the

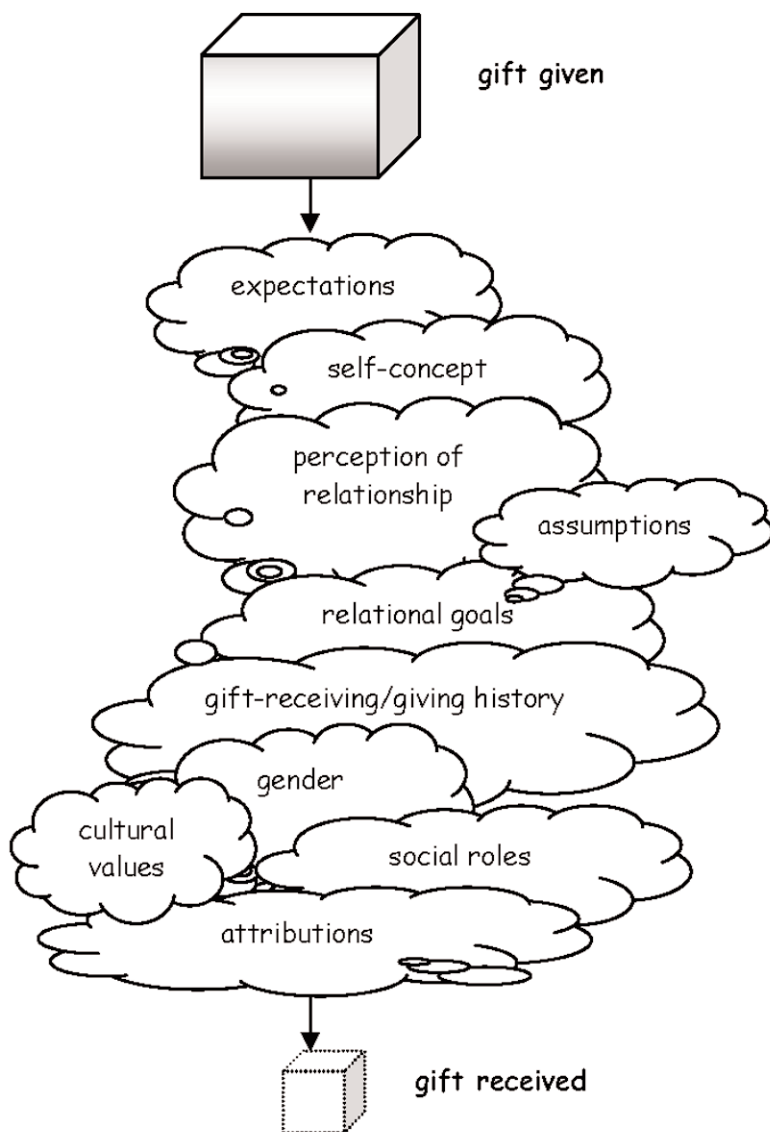| Study	Theory / Model	Participants	Design	Variables	Findings
Waldfogel (2002)		455 college students	Retrospective self-report surveys	Cash/certificates as gifts, giver strategies, unwanted gifts, recipient feedback, holiday gift giving	Cash/certificate gifts were more likely choices of givers to have given unappreciated noncash gifts. Givers believed recipients attach a value surplus to noncash gifts or a negative stigma to cash gifts. Decision to give cash was influenced by giver's perceived ability to choose desired noncash gifts.
Durgee & Sego (2001)		10 male-female couples (married or engaged)	In-depth interviews	Strategies and knowledge used to select gifts that please and surprise their partner	Successful givers (gift created high pleasure, high surprise) used strategies based on core meaning to receiver or receiver orientation to world. Women were more surprised and appreciative. When attempting special gifts, 50% were successful and tended to be indulgent, luxury items. Misses occurred most often for mid-stage marriage couples, hits most often for newlyweds and dating couples.
Webley & Wilson (2001)		110 British college students	Face-to-face survey, stopped as walking on campus	Type of relationship, intimacy, type of gift, social status	Money found generally unacceptable as a gift, no matter what the relationship. For intimate relationships givers spent more on gifts when the receiver was higher status, with intimacy predicting the amount spent on gift.
Wooten (2000)	Social Anxiety Model and Self-Presentation Theory	115 undergraduates and 20 university staff members	Critical incident survey and semi-structured interviews	Occasions, gift selection, motives, gift-history, gift presentation, recipient reaction	Givers become anxious when they are pessimistic about receivers' anticipated reactions to their gifts and when they are highly motivated to elicit specific responses.
Areni, Kiecker, & Palan (1998)		124 college students	Written narratives of past memorable gifts received	Gender, giving v. receiving, memorability of gift	While women have been found more frequent gift-givers than men, here women chose to describe more receiving events, while men described more events as giver. Gifts were "memorable" when unexpected, helped the receiver, coincided with a life-stage change, symbolized a relationship, involved sacrifice or extensive planning, and some quality made the gift perfect for the receiver. Men's narratives emphasized themes of planning, helping others, and sacrifice.

Table 1. Chronological Exemplars of Cross-Disciplinary Research on the Giver's Perspective

Study	Theory / Model	Participants	Design	Variables	Findings
McGrath (1995)		64 undergraduates	Projective narratives, quantitative scales	Gender, relational intimacy, formality of occasion	More females framed gift exchange as formal celebratory occasion, and had the most to say about their gifts. Female givers perceived their gift relationships as more intimate than males. Greatest portion of gifts given and received by males were related to romantic relationships, usually with goal of deepening.
Otnes, Ruth, Milbourne, & Burnett (1994)		105 undergraduates for extra credit	Survey, open-ended questions	Men's attitudes towards Valentine's Day gift-giving	Gift giving roles, and corresponding strategies emerged: the pleaser, the provider, the compensator, the socializer, the acknowledger, the avoider.
Sherry, McGrath, & Levy (1993)	Social Exchange Model	83 female gift shoppers from mailing list of two stores	Ethnographic field study, sentence completions, thematic apperception test (narrative fantasy completion)	Negativity and ambivalence in gift-shopping	Gifts precipitate giver fantasies (positive and negative) as well as overt giver action. Gift threatens social ties as well as strengthens them. Gifts create internal stress (social rules of propriety, facework, identity negotiation, insincerity). Resentment from forced involvement was revealed, as well as anxiety concerning unattainable expectations.
Otnes, Lowery, & Kim (1993)	Social Roles Perspective	15 paid adult volunteers	Ethnographic fieldwork, accompanied participants while shopping, interviews.	Giver strategies for easy or difficult gift recipients	Givers described difficult recipients as older or as more distant relatives. Children and same gender friends were described as easiest.
Wolfinbarger & Yale (1993)		Study 1 = 159 undergraduates, marketing majors Study 2 = 225 staff at university	Survey, items on attitude	Giver attitudes toward gift giving	Study 1 = Three motivations for interpersonal gift giving were experiential, obligation, and practicality. Study 2 = Women demonstrated more experiential motivations for giving, with older women more likely to give out of social obligation.
Otnes, Kim, & Lowery (1992)		15 consumers responding to ad, paid participation 1 male, 14 female	Ethnographic field study, interview	Shoppers' gift selection strategies	Most difficult people to shop for were in-laws, followed by fathers, elderly relatives, and step-relatives. Most reasons offered were perceived lack of need, fear of being unappreciated, having different tastes, and unfamiliarity with recipient. Strategies for shopping for difficult people were: same as last time, impulse buying, crafting, pawning off task to another, pleasing self, or creating a joint gift.

Study	Theory/Model	Sample	Method	Variables	Findings
Sherry, McGrath, & Levy (1992)		83 female gift givers	Ethnographic study, with projective analysis (modified thematic apperception test)	Gift disposition, symbolic value of gift	People who return gifts were seen as fussy, difficult, self-centered, perfectionist, and inconsiderate, though some didn't mind even though many were offended. Gifts "I could never return" were categorized by source (relationship) or sentiment (deceased relative, grandchildren, someone who might be hurt).
Gould & Weil (1991)	Bem's Gender Schema Theory	127 psychology undergraduates	Sex Role nventory, Gender scale, magined vignettes, experimental manipulated vignette instruction)	Roles, gender, relationships, decisions, gender perceptions during gift-giving to same and opposite sex	Males increased their scores on femininity subscales and decreased their masculinity scores when thinking about giving a gift to the opposite sex as opposed to the same sex. Females had generally even scores for same-sex or opposite-sex gift giving.
Goodwin, Smith & Spiggle (1990)	Sherry's 3-Stage Model of Gift Giving	90 graduate and undergraduate students (58% male)	Survey, recent gift experience and hypothetical	Voluntary or obligatory motivations, gift giving norms, status of relationship	Obligatory gifts more often given to casual friends, though both obligatory gifts and voluntary were used to express the importance of the relationship and convey feelings. Voluntary givers more likely to expect an emotional response from receivers.
Cheal (1986)	Parsons' Model of American Kinship	573 adults in Canada	Random survey	Social factors that influence gift giving	Factors that structure gift giving were: interaction within relationships, economic resources, and social statuses (marriage, gender, age). One-third of the "valuable" Christmas gifts exchanged were between husbands and wives. 87% of most valuable Christmas gifts went to relatives., though siblings and parents were of lesser importance than children and spouses.
Caplow (1984)		110 randomly selected adults from a midwestern industrial city	Interviews and Survey	Communication and enforcement of unwritten rules about Christmas gift giving	Rules that emerged: Wrapping Rule (gifts must be wrapped), Decoration Rule (room where gifts are distributed should be decorated), Gathering Rule (every person gives and receives gifts), Gift Selection Rule (Gift should demonstrate giver's familiarity with receiver's preferences, be a surprise, be value scaled to value of the relationship), Fitness Rule (multiple rules about appropriateness), Reciprocity Rule (at least one gift should be received from parents, children, spouse).

Study	Theory / Model	Participants	Design	Variables	Findings
Caplow (1982)		110 randomly selected adults from a midwestern industrial city, 4,347 gifts	Survey and interview about all gifts received or given the previous Christmas	Gift type and value, age and gender of givers and receivers, relationship	4 of 5 gifts went to family, 59% of gifts were joint (more than one giver or receiver), women were more active as givers than men (selected more, gave more, did almost all wrapping), married women did not favor their own relatives over husband's, flow of gifts from adults to children was heavily unbalanced (7 times as many gifts to children as received), and residential distance which affects other forms of relational contact had only a minor influence on Christmas gift giving.
Belk (1976)	Balance Theory and Cognitive Consistency Perspective	73 residents of Philadelphia (church, school & civic groups), age 14-65	Questionnaire	Giver and receiver characteristics, situation, giver's liking of recipient, giver's evaluation of gift appeal or of recipient's value of gift, prior gift giving history	Givers' preference for cognitive balance affected gift selection and evaluation by givers. 3/4's of givers were satisfied with gift selection in balanced configurations, only 1/3 satisfied in unbalanced configuration

reality that the gift may or may not be consistent with self-concept or perception of the giver-receiver relationship. As eloquently pointed out in early field work of Appadurai (1986), objects and things take on *social* meaning, which has been confirmed more recently by Doyle (1999) who examined the social meanings of both money and property. As a result, gift donors attach personal meaning-making cognitions to a gift. Receivers are challenged to correctly interpret that meaning, yet they carry independent *assumptions* about gift occasions, the social meaning of objects, and gift intent.

This model illuminates gift-message *mis*communication. Any gift may match or diverge from a receiver's relational goals (whether the relationship is one of business, family, friendship, or romance). At the same time, each receiver has life experiences both receiving and giving gifts, (some of which may have been with this particular giver); prior experiences will presumably have included both successful and failed gifts. As a result, a gift receiver interprets a gift through a cloud of conscious (or unconscious) gift comparisons, hopes, standards, and values. Figure 1 illustrates the manner in which any gift-message must be filtered through the receiver's socialized gender, cultural values (including organizational, community, religious, or ethnic cultures), and attribution making processes (e.g., personal theories about what causes something to happen). These variables set the social perceptual lenses through which gifts are perceived by receivers. As suggested by the model, ultimately, *it may be that the gift given is never the gift that is received.*

B. The Cultural Theater Where Gift-Giving Is Performed

> We don't see things as they are.
> We see things as we are.
> —Anais Nin

People impart meaning to objects, but we each do this differently. Problems arise when we assume that other people are giving objects the same meaning and value that we are giving them. Humans are Pleistocene-era hunter-gatherers; our brains have not significantly evolved from the brains that were needed to survive many millennia past. One scholar of marketing psychology observed, "Some of us may be surrounded by uncountable amounts of people, wealth, and luxury, but we are all operating as if we were solving problems in the context of small clans and scare resources"

Study	Theory / Model	Participants	Design	Variables	Findings
Ruth, Otnes, & Brunel (1999)	Sherry's Stage Model	8 men, 8 women	In-depth interviews and critical incident surveys (45-90 minutes): recall receiving a gift and experiencing a positive/negative emotion	Recipient's perception of giver/receiver relationship, the gift, the context, emotions	Six relational effects of gift-receipt experiences were found from receiver's perspective: strengthening, affirmation, negligible effect, negative confirmation, weakening, severing.
Horne, Sayre, & Horne (1996)		18 victims of disasters who had lost their homes and possessions	Video-elicitation, survey, interview discussions	Gift receiving by victims of disasters, uncertainty in gift selection by givers	Gifts tended to come from outside kinship networks, represent high uncertainty about what victims wanted, and take the form of cash or certificates. Givers apologized, communicated uncertainty, and felt anxious, while receivers reported feeling gratitude, but also embarrassment, humility, obligation, and humiliation.
Belk & Coon (1993)	Social Exchange Model and Romantic Love Model	110 undergraduate and graduate students	Depth interviews, questionnaires, journals	Heterosexual dating gifts, stages of dating, agapic love	Participants interpreted gifts as symbols of commitment, cues to compatibility, extensions of self. Further, themes of romantic love rather than instrumental act, communicating specialness of receiver, and selfless sacrifice, all supported a love model of gift giving.
Rucker, Balch, Higham, & Schenter (1992)	Young and Wallendorf's "Transition to Disposition" Theme	154 participants (not described)	Interviews about unwanted gifts	Disposition of unwanted gifts, type or value of gift, relationship of giver/receiver	Most unwanted gifts were clothing and decorative household objects (wrong style, color, fit). More failed gifts came from nonfamily. Disposition of unwanted gifts were storage, transfer to another, exchange, and return to giver, though 75% still had an unwanted gift. Some worried that disposal would communicate disrespect to giver
Jacoby, Berning, & Dietvorst (1977)		134 residents of a Midwestern town (ages 20-60)	Questionnaire and interview	Disposition and disposition intention	In a larger study about consumer disposition decisions of products, one of the most frequent reasons offered from keeping products one already had or didn't need was that it was received as a gift.

Table 2. Chronological Exemplars of Cross-Disciplinary Research on the Receiver's Perspective

(Hantula, 2003, p. 758). For all of us, our perceptions of the world are an intriguing intersection between what may be out there and what we individually bring to the process of paying attention to it. We all play roles in the performance of social gift exchanges, but the scripts have been written long ago, as perceptual and neurological codes in our brains (Sunwolf, in press).

While we have all been performing gift comedies, tragedies, and dramas, the researchers most likely to be sitting in the front rows of the Gifting Theater have been scholars from consumer and marketing research. Anthropologists have bought tickets; sociologists and philosophers attend, but the season ticket holders, for decades, have been researchers intrigued with influencing our product buying behaviors. Consumer behaviorists, advertisers, and marketing psychologists are interested in why people buy (and, correspondingly, why they do not buy) various objects. The modern marketing age, in fact—which is now largely situated in both virtual and physical shopping malls—has interested itself with why people buy things they *do not actually need.*

To date, the most valuable attempt to synthesize research about gifts was that of two scholars (Otnes and Beltramini) in 1996, who edited an excellent book that brought together articles by a variety of top consumer researchers. In fact, however, scholars from a variety of disciplines (rarely relational scholars) have taken some useful stabs at gathering specific information about gift givers and their social thinking and object-decision processes. Poe (1977) reported that gifts are used to convey symbolic relational messages, including relationship status, the promise of future interaction, or statements of affection, concern, or domination. Cheal (1987) found that gifts were used as ritual offerings, as a sign of involvement in or connectedness to another person. In offering a gift-object, an early study by Schwartz (1967) discovered that givers were attempting to transmit to receivers the *mental image* the giver carried of the receiver. Consistent with Schwartz's findings, Goodwin, Smith, and Spiggle (1990) reported that giving guns to a male child modeled a preferred gender identity by the giver, while the giving of cigars after a baby is born allows a father to perform masculinity.

The shadow side of the cultural traditions and rules surrounding gift giving, however, indicates the negative feelings that emerge during the transaction. Gift-giving may affect the duration of relationships, as investigated recently by Huang and Yu (2000), who surveyed students about their on-going or dissolved dating relationships and found that when used too frequently or too rarely, gift-giving predicted relational spoilage. Strained relationships have been found to be tied to issues concerning gift-giving obligations. Otnes et al. (1993) reported that some givers pawned off their gift obligations to someone else, while other givers experienced painful psychological reactions to the gift task (feelings that their ability to act freely was impaired). These researchers reported two strategies used for gift giving in negatively-valenced relationships: (a) to pass on a previously-owned item, or (b) to "settle," by selecting a gift that seemed to meet minimal relational requirements.

C. Gift-Brains: The Biological Foundation Behind the Gifting Culture

> The more you learn about the brain's architecture, the more you recognize that what happens in your head is more like an orchestra than a soloist, with dozens of players contributing to the overall mix. —Johnson (2004, p. 6)

> Imagine the brain, that shiny mound of being, that mouse-gray parliament of cells, that dream factory, that petite tyrant inside a ball of bone, that huddle of neurons calling all the plays, that little everywhere, that fickle pleasuredrome, that wrinkled wardrobe of selves stuffed into the skull like too many clothes into a gym bag. —Ackerman (2004, p. 3)

The human mind spins. It is a natural spinner and strongly resists being stopped. *The human mind resists being turned off or even slowed down*. It much prefers spinning from thought to thought, from anxiety to calm, and from topic to topic. The mind's spinning is neither neat, nor is it organized. Ideas emerge fleetingly, only to disappear again, solutions are started but left unfinished, emotions remain unresolved, thoughts are left dangling. This happens, consequently, throughout a social gift exchange (for all of the participants), but we often make no allowance for it. Consequently, subtle messages are missed or received in fragments. What other attributes of our biological brains are affecting the way we make sense of and experience social gift exchanges?

Scientists have been paying more attention, of late, to a **mosaic** view of the human mind. Psychologist Robert Ornstein (1986) argues that any one person has many minds that account for the many different moods,

decisions, attitudes, and strange choices each of us experiences:

> The cortex was the last part of the brain to evolve. In the cortex decisions are made, schemes are hatched, language is heard, music is written, mathematics is created. The cortex is like a quilt that covers the rest of the brain, folded so that it can fit within the small human head. (p. 49)

We tend to think of people in simple dichotomies: as emotional or rational, as conscientious or lazy, as honorable or dishonest, as moody or centered, all either/or frames. The answer may be that most of us are, in fact, both sides of such dichotomies. Allowing for a mosaic view of our biological brains makes room for understanding the multitude of frames of mind through which each of us, situation by situation, processes and makes sense of the gifts we give (and get). There are many lobes stimulated in a person's brain by a new fact or experience, and, consequently, more than one place where the new information is mentally stored. We each experience gift failures, attempt to interpret unexpected gift objects, and stress during gift decision making in spite of our best efforts, in part, because our minds operate differently, even under similar circumstances.

When we attempt a gift-choosing or gift-interpreting task in our social lives, we may have many minds scrambling for attention—depending upon our mood, recent experiences, expectations, and dispositional inclinations at any point in time. We are many.

It is the crowd inside a person's mind that is judging a gift: the person's sad self, tired self, upbeat self, critical self, empathic self, curious self, attentive self, apathetic self, self-in-pain—though these selves will not all be present at the same time. We impose a *desire* for consistency on other people, but in learning that they, like us, cannot be consistent while performing their role in the gifting task across time and across relationships, we will reduce our anxiety when our expectations are not met.

> There's a "crowd" in every person's mind, consequently there may be a substantial crowd attempting to choose (or interpret) any gift object.

> I am large, there is a multitude within.
> —Walt Whitman

Drawing upon, in turn, a receiver-centered model of gift communication, an understanding of the cultural contexts in which our gift practices occur, and, finally, an acknowledgement that any gift message is received (and bent) by biological brains, what do we know about failed gifts and the miscommunication of intended gift messages?

3. Gift-Giving: It May Not Be the Thought That Counts

> At its finest, the true gift is incandescent. It is the token or treasure that lights up the other person, that clarifies a friendship, that remains a luminous memory long after the gift itself may have dematerialized.
> —Jacobsen (1985, p. 213)

> I thought if I got him something he didn't like, it would reflect on me. It shouldn't have mattered, it should have been the thought that counted, but it wasn't exactly like that in this relationship.
> —Female college student (Wooten, 2000, p. 87)

As noted above, the most valuable attempt to date to synthesize gift giving research has arguably been the

edited book of Otnes and Beltramini (1996). Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1993) were the first scholars to describe "the dark side of the gift," highlighting for marketers issues that may block or taint gift purchases.

Several models of the gift-giving transaction have also been offered, including Rucker, Balch, Higham, and Schenter's (1992) three-stage model; Banks' (1975) early four-stage model of purchase, interaction, consumption, and communication; Belk and Coon's (1993) romantic love model; and an integrative model of consumer gift search strategies offered by Otnes and Woodruff (1991). The most-cited model in consumer marketing research, however, is Sherry's (1983) gift-giving spiral, although its usefulness to relational schol-

ars is somewhat limited by its complexity (more than 90 variables and concepts portrayed).

Some negative gift emotions may emerge based upon the particular relationship in which the gift-giving occurs. Gift-givers perceive some receivers as just plain difficult. Roles that givers adopt appear to influence the relational strategies givers have for selecting gifts, further varying by perceptions of recipient ("difficult" or "easy"), as first recognized in the research of Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim (1993) who studied difficult gift recipients, as perceived by givers. They reported that gift givers characterize other people as "easy" or "difficult" to shop for, in part stemming from some aspect of the relationship (givers express one or more social roles to recipients through gift exchange). Komter and Vallebergh (1997) found gift giving both produced and was motivated by different emotions within different social relations (e.g., giving to children produced more affection, while giving to extended kin produced more obligation), while Caplow (1982) found flow of gifts between adults and children was heavily unbalanced throughout the lifespan (seven times as many gifts to children as received in return), with complex social rules embedded in a community's Christmas giving. At the same time, givers rely upon receivers to help them out: when gift cues are missing, the shadow side of giving is darker. Givers were found to express greatest frustration when they had acquired few cues from recipients as to what type of gift might be acceptable (Otnes et al., 1993). Similarly, Wooten (2000) investigated antecedents to gift tasks and found that when givers had pre-gifting information that led them to believe their gift choices would not be successful, anxiety predictably increased. Prior gift criticisms also became significant negative cues to consider in future gift-choosing tasks.

The perceived mandatory nature of gift-giving situations triggers negative emotions for some. Motivations of givers are affected by the notion of "owing" someone a gift. Wolfinbarger and Yale (1993) concluded that interpersonal gift giving is driven by three primary motivations: experiential, obligation, and practicality. Sherry (1983) found gift-giving motivations range from altruistic (which maximize receiver's satisfaction) to agonistic (which maximize giver's satisfaction). A later study found darkside motivations of givers, who described the burden of giving (too time-consuming, too expensive, an obligation that never ends, Sherry et al., 1993). Extending darkside gift goals, Webley and Wilson (2001) pointed out that a gift can intentionally transmit obligation, make receivers feel inferior, display unequal status or wealth, and become vehicles to perform social power. Larsen and Watson (2001) argue that gifts given at formal (obligatory) occasions will be less valued by receivers than spontaneous gifts. Otnes et al. (1993) reported that some givers interpret some situations as mandatory gift-exchanges, thus have no sense of voluntariness about that process (e.g., socially-mandated). Further, the formality of a gift occasion can trigger giver anxiety. Wooten (2000) reported that the formality influence occurs in two ways: (a) strict rules connected with formal occasion spark fear of rule violations, and (b) formality signals the importance of the occasion and the necessity for gift success. Wooten reported one respondent who was anxious about a parental 25th wedding anniversary, while another was afraid of choosing an inadequate gift for a formal baby shower. Formal occasion such as Christmas trigger elaborate gift-giving rules that are unspoken, yet that must be socially communicated; Caplow (1984) discovered that without enforcement agents and with little indignation against violators, high participation in complex relational Christmas gift rules predominated in one community.

Wooten (2000) found that the number of people present when a gift was opened triggered gifting anxiety (and potential miscommunication) for both givers and receivers, as people reported painful gift comparisons and anticipated public judgments. Investigating Christmas gift-giving, Caplow (1984) found an unwritten community-wide rule that all gifts must be wrapped before being presented, with a subsidiary rule requiring wrapping be appropriate, emblematic, and that wrapped gifts be displayed before the opening (frequently for many days). Social rules both control and trigger gift stress for many.

4. Gift-Receiving: *"It's just what I wanted!"* [Not.]

A. "You shouldn't have, really."

In a recent study about the stresses of gift receiving, students poured out their frustrations as receivers of gifts (Sunwolf, in press). The stimulus was in the form of a stem question: "The hardest thing about receiving a gift from someone else is:"
  • "Reacting the way they intended me to."

- "Acting happy and thankful, even."
- "Making sure they know I like it."
- "Showing your feelings"
- "Making them feel as good about giving it as I am about receiving it."
- "Making sure my reactions were what they were looking for."
- "Not knowing how they want you to react when opening it."
- "Showing enough gratitude."
- "How to walk away from receiving. What to say? Thank you, for the hundredth time?"

Such comments make the even the most hardened scholar want to give these students, at the start of their life-long journeys of relational gift-exchanges, a healing hug! Students further made it clear that they do not know how to cope with their own gift disappointments, as receivers. For these students, examples of *"The hardest thing about receiving a gift from someone else"* were:

- "The fear I will not like the gift."
- "Expressing, when I don't like it."
- "When it is horrendous or unwanted."
- "Feeling the gift is not nearly as good or thoughtful as the one I gave."
- "I never know if I'm going to like it. It's hard for me to put up a front."

Every gift given creates two social obligations for the receiver: Gift Gratitude and Gift Debt (Sunwolf, in press). Both parties to the gift transaction know that while these two relational obligations can be ignored by a receiver, such a choice is likely to be accompanied by a relational cost.

It can be painful to perform unfelt gratitude. There is evidence from these data to support the conclusion that receiving gifts from others frequently represents painful social dilemmas for recipients, including the dilemma of social deception, the dilemma of reciprocity, and the dilemma of effort versus expectation. Some givers appear equally burdened. Extending a finding by Wooten (2000), who described gift "perfectionism" as the propensity of some givers to set extremely high standards for themselves (i.e., one of Wooten's female respondents admitted, "It's very rare for me to like the gift that I'm giving. Unless I've found the perfect gift . . . then I'd rather not give a gift at all."), a 25-year old female in this study was adamant, "No gift is better than a bad gift."

The principle of psychological reciprocity may trigger a cycle of felt mutual indebtedness, from which it is difficult for some to escape. As Huang and Yu (2000) point out, when *reciprocal gift tasks* are not performed according to one party's expectations, anxiety is created for both giver and recipient, which becomes a source of disappointment in the relationship. In addition, the dilemma of effort versus expectation emerged for both givers and recipients. If the giving task appeared effortless, recipients may judge a lack of thoughtfulness and relational caring; at the same time, if the gift selection task was thoughtful, complex, and burdensome, giver-resentment may result, no matter what gratitude is offered.

Little research to date has focused on a receiver's experience during the gifting interaction—even though we recognize that the task of decoding a relational gift message may be a challenging one. Receivers describe the burden of gauging the motivation of the donor and calibrating their own responses accordingly, as reported in the research of Sherry et al. (1993). Yet, it is the receiver's *interpretation* of the gift-object that will trigger symbolic transformation of an object. Too often people report giving (or receiving) "wrong" gifts. Gift receivers report transforming an inexpensive trinket into a symbol of deepening friendship in Ruth et al. (1999), while Sherry et al., (1993) found that the "wrong" gift was judged by those who received it to be impersonal, thoughtless, lack caring, or inappropriate, and yet be long-remembered.

One variable that may affect miscommunication during relational gift-giving is gender. Gender has been found to impact the relational interpretation givers and receivers place on gift giving, as evidenced by the work of McGrath (1995) who found females perceived gift exchange relationships as significantly more intimate than males. Caplow (1982, 1984) reported that married women were largely responsible for Christmas gift giving but did not favor their own relatives over their husbands' kin. As Sherry and McGrath (1989) point out, women have consistently been found to be predominant in gift-purchase efforts (consistent with gendered socialization, where the female task is the work of kinship and relational connection). Otnes and McGrath's (2001) finding that men use the "grab and go" strategy for Valentine's Day shopping may also explain the reduced stress men feel as givers for this occasion.

B. Now What? The Burden of Gift Disposition

Gift disposition has been overlooked in prior research, which has typically focused on purchase (a consumer marketing approach). In fact, however, receivers control the ultimate disposition of an object—whether the gift is rejected, kept (used or not used), dis-

played, returned, or recycled (Sunwolf, in press). In an age when we are being encouraged to simplify and declutter our lives, many find themselves storing, displaying, and agonizing about mountains of received gifts. The shadow side of social gifting includes gift disposition, whether the object was never appreciated or whether the glow has diminished over time.

Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst (1977) confirmed in an early study of consumer behavior that people rationalize keeping objects they do not need, do not use, or already have because the object was received as a gift. Rucker, Balch, Highma, and Scenter (1992) found one essential phase of the gift exchange process to be "reformulation," which included giving the gift to someone else, returning it to the retailer, or rejecting it at initial presentation. Rucker, et al. found clothing was the most often reported "failed" gift, followed by decorative household items. They reported that failed gifts, in general, were more likely to have been given by non-family, as opposed to either nuclear or extended family.

For receivers of unwanted gifts, is turnabout fair play? Sherry, et al. (1992) report a "turnabout" rule for gifts received: participants described how paybacks for an unwelcome gift were woven into the gift's disposition, which they viewed as a type of negative relational balancing. Unhappy receivers seem to be faced with internal conflict and emotional stress and use elaborate *return rituals* to displace their negative feelings towards gift givers. Continued movement of an unwanted gift may take the form of either passing it to another person of equal status, as was reported by Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf (1988), which they concluded might function to purge the recipient of hurt. Reciprocation decisions by receivers may be distorted by misperceptions of the value of the gift received, as illustrated in the study of Rucker, Leckliter, Kivel, Dinkel, Freitas, Wynes, and Prato (1991). Relying upon opposite-sex romantic pairs, they found that values of gifts from their partners were consistently overestimated by females, and that males were more likely to rely upon price as the basis for judging equity in the exchange, while females were more prone to consider whether the recipient liked the gift.

5. Unwrapping the Moral Dilemmas of Gifting

I ♡ having people open up gifts from me. I take pride in spending a lot of thought and time into "the perfect gift."
> —19-year old female student
> (Sunwolf, in press)

I overthink it. I don't like to give gifts without meaning. This causes a lot of problems. No gift ever seems perfect.
> —19-year old female student
> (Sunwolf, in press)

The variables that make substantial contributions to social gift stress involve moral values and dilemmas. Illuminating the questions that burden our well-intended gift attempts reveals certain myths thriving in the shadows of interpersonal gift exchanges.

A. Is there ever a Perfect Gift?

Answer: Maybe not. A gift object may be perfect when you made it or acquired it, but no longer perfect at the moment of giving. These are multivariable waters. The search for the perfect gift may be doomed and better resisted than indulged.

Previous studies have consistently reported that pressures to meet elusive and exacting standards causes anxiety (i.e., Wooten, 2000, describing one student who shared the emotional burdens of gift-seeking for a friend who wanted the best of everything). As a result of traumas associated with either giving or receiving *imperfect* gifts, research to date suggests that many people may be afflicted with active cases of "gifthate" (Sunwolf, in press). One 21-year old male student's reaction exemplifies gifthate and the distasteful burden he feels when anticipating gift exchange: "Gifts are the epitome of capitalism. The idea that you have to buy in relationships keeps our economy going."

B. Is it Better to Give or Receive?

It is easier to receive than give for me. I usually don't know what to get people and I also don't like to see negative reactions when I give gifts.
> —20-year old female (Sunwolf, in press)

Giving is so much more important than receiving. It might sound cliché, but I feel that if someone put any thought into it that it is obviously special to them, and then to me!

—(age unknown) male student
(Sunwolf, in press)

Answer: It all depends. The difficult balance between self and other and between genuineness and artificiality is magnified for receivers who feel they must manage the feelings of everyone else in the gift exchange. As gift-receivers, they experience role strain, which contributes to gifthate. Cheal (1987) first applied dialectics to the issues in gift exchange, describing the contradictory social matrix of intimacy and independence that is challenged during gifting. One 18-year old female respondent managed to crowd a paragraph of feelings about her role as gift receiver into a tiny space, with small careful printing:

> Christmas. I have to open each gift from extended family members in front of them. The entire situation is flawed. I will undoubtedly like one gift better than the other and will appreciate one the most. But because every giver is watching, I must equally show interest and like in all of the gifts. As a result, the people who gave the best gift won't ever know how much I appreciate it, because to them their gift is no different than any of the others.

Wolfinbarger and Yale (1993) found that one of the three motivations of interpersonal gift giving was obligation, yet gift receivers dread receiving those gifts. One 21-year old female receiver described the reality that "obliged" gifts don't fool anyone, and may burden receivers, "The worst thing about giving gifts is doing it only out of obligation. Being on the receiving end of this is awful. I would rather not receive anything."

If it is painful to perform unfelt gratitude, the answer lies in digging deeper and experiencing gratitude. In short, the gift message was not the object.

C. Is Gift Competition a Winable Sport?

Answer: No. When gifts are opened to an audience or when multiple givers are present, comparison across gifts is facilitated. Givers who anticipate this situational component may worry about their gifts being good enough to elicit desired reactions, as well as being good enough in light of other gifts received. Gift giving may morph for some givers to *competitive-gifting* or "gifting-to-win," with atten-

dant stresses that accompany winning, losing, or being publicly ranked.

Sometimes we give a gift that seems to make someone happier, and we hold that success out as regularly achievable in our gift competitions. We even compete with our own prior (perceived) successes. Objects may make people genuinely happier, but not necessarily in the long run. *However, having a desired object always leaves people free to want something else.*

Adorno (1974) suggested 30 years ago that people had begun forgetting how to give presents:

> Even private giving of presents has degenerated to a social function exercised with rational bad grace, careful adherence to the prescribed budget, skeptical appraisal of the other and the least possible effort. Real giving had its joy in imagining the joy of the receiver. It means choosing, expending time, going out of one's way, thinking of the other as a subject: the opposite of distraction. Just this, hardly anyone is now able to do. (p. 42)

Today, our relational gifts are largely economic purchases. This is a moral dilemma for givers. Tom Beaudoin (2003), a Religious Studies professor at Santa Clara University, has suggested that one of the most challenging areas of integrating spirituality with economic decisions is enveloped in gift purchases. In *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are With What We Buy,* Beaudoin suggests that we should morally consider the human cost of gift objects (third world laborers, environmental destruction, toxic waste). Beaudoin (2004) persuasively argues that we can integrate our gift practices with our conscious choices about how to live, considering the gift chain (those who make, purchase, receive, and dispose of our gifts):

> Framing our holiday gift practices as opportunities for affirmatives of dignity, as occasions for practicing thankfulness for the gifts that we are, helps make the holidays a spiritual exercise. Not to sound too pious, but this may require a new commitment to prayer or meditation in order to help us consent to a new perspective on our gift practices. (p. 12)

The moral dilemma for receivers, on the other hand, may lie in wanting what we have. Our desire for objects may taint the relational messages people are trying to share with us in gifts. Miller (1995) is a cognitive psychologist who engages in a lively moral debate that encourages us to reflect on the effects our

possessions may have on us. Failed gifts can be the product of our struggle with our continual yearning for things. The suffering of gift receivers has been under-explored, but is embedded in moral questions, which help us *re*define our personal gift practices.

It should always come from the heart, and if they laugh at you or don't appreciate it—it is their heart that is small, not yours.

—16-year old female student
(Sunwolf, in press)

6. New Lenses for Looking at an Old Event: Rewrapping Gift Scholarship

Larsen and Watson (2001) concluded that the type of gift given is always a reflection of the type of relationship and that as relationships become more intimate, gifts become more expressive. Nominal gift giving, in fact, may constitute little more than the ritual exchange (and subsequent disposal) of merchandise. Relational gift giving at its best, however, is not a prerequisite to a close relationship, but one of its symptoms.

Here, several questions are urged that are worthy of our consideration as teaching-scholars: (a) In what ways can we include gift giving in the content of college courses on relationships in ways that help our students redefine their gift practices? (b) Can our personal research agendas in mass media, film, journalism, rhetoric, or interpersonal scholarship be enriched to include gift messages and relational outcomes? and (c) What theories that explain the processes of social gift giving and receiving in relationships can be developed or imported to add to our understanding of this fundamental communication event?

I recently explored the intriguing intersection between several communication perspectives and concepts from our sister social sciences and offered Decisional Regret Theory to explain and describe painful decision-making (Sunwolf, 2006). Decisional Regret Theory suggests that when we are faced with salient personal decisions, we begin to anticipate choice-regret, which makes us anxious. We attempt to reduce that anxiety by telling ourselves, then sharing with others, counterfactual stories about the possible consequences of our choice (what-if and if-only stories). This counterfactual-storythinking is useful for explaining the painful process of gift choosing and gift interpretation. Recent explorations of a "science of happiness" have suggested that new understandings of our brain's hard wiring show we are often wrong about what will, in fact, bring us (or others) happiness (Layard, 2005; Nettle, 2005). These happiness studies offer new explanations about why some people are happy and others are not that have rich application for explaining failed gift messages.

Studies that illuminate the shadow side issues of relational gift giving, in particular, offer an opportunity for communication scholars who adopt an applied focus to their research: interpersonal skills, scripts, interventions, and proscriptions can be proposed and tested that may suggest tools to reduce gift stress and offer a more rewarding place for social gifting in all relationships. As recently as 1999, Ruth et al. asserted that no study had examined exactly how gifts can affect relationships, or what aspects of the gift exchange contribute to relational realignments. Bloom (1999) has predicted that traumatic relational gift giving will not change without more direct relational communication—not about the gift, but about who we are to each other. Which, in itself, might be a terrific gift.

Appendix: The Gift of Story

The Gifts of Wali Dad

A Tale of India and Pakistan

retold by Aaron Shepard

[Aaron Shepard is an award-winning author, folklorist, and musician, who generously shares with the public much of his work on his webcite: www.aaronshep.com. This story was previously published as a beautifully illustrated children's book under the same title by Antheneum (1995) and is printed here with permission (a gift from the author who holds the copyright). This is a retelling of "Story of Wali Dâd the Simple-hearted," found in Andrew Lang's 1904 written collection of oral folktales: *Brown Fairy Book*. The tale was given to Lang by a Major Campbell—a British army officer stationed in India's Punjab—who heard it from "an Indian." Since the Punjab was later split between India and Pakistan, this version's author, Aaron Shepard, thought it best to attribute the tale to both countries. The dominant influences of the story

are Islamic and Zoroastrian rather than Hindu. The *paisa* is the smallest Indian coin. *Peris* are an import from Persian mythology. Originally considered evil, their image changed gradually to benevolent beings akin to fairies or angels. It is said they feed only on the odor of perfume.]

In a mud hut far from town lived an old grass-cutter named Wali Dad. Every morning, Wali Dad cut and bundled tall, wild grass. Every afternoon, he sold it as fodder in the marketplace. Each day, he earned 30 paisa. Ten of the small coins went for food. Ten went for clothes and other needs. And ten he saved in a clay pot under his bed. In this manner Wali Dad lived happily for many years.

One evening, Wali Dad dragged out the pot to see how much money it held. He was amazed to find that his coins had filled it to the brim. "What am I to do with all this money?" he said to himself. "I need nothing more than I have." Wali Dad thought and thought. At last he had an idea.

The next day, Wali Dad loaded the money into a sack and carried it to a jeweler in the marketplace. He exchanged all his coins for a lovely gold bracelet. Then Wali Dad visited the home of a traveling merchant. "Tell me," said Wali Dad, "in all the world, who is the noblest lady?"

"Without doubt," said the merchant, "it is the young queen of Khaistan. I often visit her palace, just three days' journey to the east." "Do me a kindness," said Wali Dad. "The next time you pass that way, give her this little bracelet, with my compliments." The merchant was astonished, but he agreed to do what the ragged grass-cutter asked.

Soon after, the merchant found himself at the palace of the queen of Khaistan. He presented the bracelet to her as a gift from Wali Dad. "How lovely!" she said, admiring the bracelet. "Your friend must accept a gift in return. My servants will load a camel with the finest silks." When the merchant arrived back home, he brought the silks to the hut of Wali Dad.

"Oh, no!" said the grass-cutter. "This is worse than before! What am I to do with such finery?" "Perhaps," said the merchant, "you could give it to someone else." Wali Dad thought for a moment. "Tell me," he said, "in all the world, who is the noblest man?"

"That is simple," said the merchant. "It is the young king of Nekabad. His palace, too, I often visit, just three days' journey to the west."

"Then do me another kindness," begged Wali Dad. "On your next trip there, give him these silks, with my compliments." The merchant was amused, but he agreed. On his next journey, he presented the silks to the king of Nekabad. "A splendid gift!" said the king, admiring the silks. "In return, your friend must have 12 of my finest horses." So the merchant brought the king's horses to Wali Dad.

"This grows worse and worse!" declared the old man. "What could I do with 12 horses?" But after a moment Wali Dad said, "I know who should have such a gift. I beg you, keep two horses for yourself, and take the rest to the queen of Khaistan!" The merchant thought this was very funny, but he consented. On his next visit to the queen's palace, he gave her the horses.

Now the queen was perplexed. She whispered to her prime minister, "Why does this Wali Dad persist in sending gifts? I have never even heard of him!" The prime minister said, "Why don't you discourage him? Send him a gift so rich, he can never hope to match it."

So in return for the ten horses from Wali Dad, the queen sent back 20 mules loaded with silver.

When the merchant and mules arrived back at the hut, Wali Dad groaned. "What have I done to deserve this? Friend, spare an old man! Keep two mules and their silver for yourself, and take the rest to the king of Nekabad!" The merchant was getting uneasy, but he could not refuse such a generous offer. So not long after, he found himself presenting the silver-laden mules to the king of Nekabad.

The king, too, was perplexed and asked his prime minister for advice. "Perhaps this Wali Dad seeks to prove himself your better," said the prime minister. "Why not send him a gift he can never surpass?" So the king sent back 20 camels with golden anklets, 20 horses with golden bridles and stirrups, 20 elephants with golden seats mounted on their backs, and 20 liveried servants to care for them all.

When the merchant guided the servants and animals to Wali Dad's hut, the grass-cutter was beside himself. "Will bad fortune never end? Please, do not stop for a minute! Keep for yourself two of each animal, and take the rest to the queen of Khaistan!"

"How can I go to her again?" protested the merchant. But Wali Dad pleaded so hard, the merchant consented to go just once more. This time, the queen was stunned by the magnificence of Wali Dad's gift. She turned again to her prime minister. "Clearly," said the prime minister, "the man wishes to marry you. Since his gifts are so fine, perhaps you should meet him!"

So the queen ordered a great caravan made ready, with countless horses, camels, and elephants. With the trembling merchant as guide, she and her court set out to visit the great Wali Dad. On the third day, the caravan made camp, and the queen sent the merchant ahead to tell Wali Dad of her coming. When Wali Dad heard the merchant's news, his head sank to his hands. "Oh, no!" he moaned. "Now I will be paid for all my foolishness. I have brought shame on myself, on you, and on the queen. What are we to do?" "I fear we can do nothing!" said the merchant, and he headed back to the caravan.

The next morning, Wali Dad rose before dawn. "Good-bye, old hut," he said. "I will never see you again." The old grass-cutter started down the road. But he had not gone far when he heard a voice. "Where are you going, Wali Dad?"

He turned and saw two radiant ladies. He knew at once they were peris from Paradise. Wali Dad sank to his knees and cried, "I am a stupid old man. Let me go my way. I cannot face my shame!" "No shame can come to such as you," said one of the peris. "Though your clothes are poor, in your heart you are a king."

The peri touched him on the shoulder. To his amazement, he saw his rags turn to fine clothes. A jeweled turban sat on his head. The rusty sickle at his waist was now a gleaming scimitar. "Return, Wali Dad," said the other peri. "All is as it should be."

Wali Dad looked behind him. Where his hut had stood, a splendid palace sparkled in the rising sun. In shock, he turned to the peris, but they had vanished. Wali Dad hurried back along the road. As he entered the palace, the guards gave a salute. Servants bowed to him, then rushed here and there, preparing for the visitors. Wali Dad wandered through countless rooms, gaping at riches beyond his imagining. Suddenly, three servants ran up.

"A caravan from the east!" announced the first.

"No," said the second, "a caravan from the west!"

"No," said the third, "caravans from both east and west!"

The bewildered Wali Dad rushed outside to see two caravans halt before the palace. Coming from the east was a queen in a jeweled litter. Coming from the west was a king on a fine horse. Wali Dad hurried to the queen. "My dear Wali Dad, we meet at last," said the queen of Khaistan. "But who is that magnificent king?"

"I believe it is the king of Nekabad, Your Majesty," said Wali Dad. "Please excuse me for a moment." He rushed over to the king. "My dear Wali Dad, I had to meet the giver of such fine gifts," said the king of Nekabad. "But who is that splendid queen?"

"The queen of Khaistan, Your Majesty," said Wali Dad with a smile. "Please come and meet her." And so the king of Nekabad met the queen of Khaistan, and the two fell instantly in love. A few days later their marriage took place in the palace of Wali Dad. And the celebration went on for many days. At last Wali Dad had said good-bye to all his guests.

The very next morning, he rose before dawn, crept quietly from the palace, and started down the road. But he had not gone far when he heard a voice. "Where are you going, Wali Dad?" He turned and saw the two peris. Again he sank to his knees. "Did I not tell you I am a stupid old man? I should be glad for what I have received, but . . . ." "Say no more," said the other peri. "You shall have your heart's desire." And she touched him again.

So Wali Dad became once more a grass-cutter, living happily in his hut for the rest of his days. And though he often thought warmly of his friends the king and queen, he was careful never to send them another gift.

Editor's Afterword

Although we often think of gift exchange as a joyful occasion, Professor Sunwolf reveals a "shadow side" in the various examples discussed in the works she has reviewed. Some of the outcomes are humorous, as in the Punjabi story, "The Gifts of Wali Dad," related by Aaron Shepard and quoted by Sunwolf, in which a poor woodcutter innocently starts a series of gift exchanges that escalates until it can only be brought to a satisfactory conclusion by divine intervention and a royal marriage. Most of the "shadows" in the stories stem from motivations or interpretations present in the minds of either the giver or receiver of the gift, which are not shared by the other. They may differ so completely from the understandings and affects aroused in the other party by the transaction that, as some of the authors point out, a gift intended

by the giver as a compliment is taken as a dire insult by the receiver.

Gift exchanges seem to be a cultural universal and a serious dimension of social living, manifested in some form by all human societies. In some societies, such as that of the Trobriand Islanders studied by Bronislaw Malinowski, and described in his book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London, 1922), gift giving ritual has become such a central theme that it seems to define the whole culture. The dilemmas and miscommunications that accompany such exchanges also appear to be present in all cultures. If interpretations of these interactions can vary among people of the same cultural backgrounds they certainly can be expected to influence intercultural relations to an even greater degree; although such relations, as Sunwolf notes, are outside the scope of this paper. Furthermore, they extend to non-material "gifts" and favors as well.

In her study of Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston, 1946), written to help American military planners try to understand Japanese strategy and tactics in the Second World War, anthropologist Ruth Benedict highlighted the way favors done for one might, in fact, arouse so strong a sense of obligation that they are resented rather than valued. The unpaid "debt" is felt to be a heavy burden insistently demanding repayment by the one who received the favor. This sense of obligation or debt might have been more pronounced in traditional Japanese culture than in some other cultures, or even in Japanese culture as it has changed since the Second World War. Nevertheless, it is present in some form in every culture, and, in addition to dysfunctions, it may have a positive function in the interweaving of human relationships and obligations with their accompanying tensions that make society possible and enduring.

Sociologically-speaking, internal tension and conflict at a controlled level are necessary elements for the normal functioning of any society. Even though they may be bothersome they contribute to society in various ways, not the least of which is to provide a certain stimulus by creating small problems that require thought and innovation for their solution, thereby helping the society avoid a slide into stagnation. If allowed to grow and cause serious problems, of course, they would be dysfunctional, but controllable problems and perplexities perform positive functions for society in general, so their presence in gift-exchange behavior is not surprising. Sunwolf quotes Wolfinbarger and Yale

(1993) on the resentment some of their informants express toward "obliged" gifts, suggesting the universality of this phenomenon.

Gift-giving always has had a role in religion. " Sacrifice" is a common element, but it may be variously interpreted, ranging from blood sacrifices–even human sacrifices–in some religions to self-sacrificing personal commitment–religious vows or equivalent lifestyles that emphasize unselfish service to others–in the major contemporary world religions. The forms may differ, but the core principle in religious sacrifice involves giving something valuable to God or the gods. The giver is deprived of the free use of the gift, which is yielded to the deity who receives it. Benefits to the giver may not be either immediate or obvious, but some return always seems to be at least implicit in the relationship established by the sacrifice. One anticipated benefit might be the establishment of an intimate relationship between the giver and the divine receiver, such as the reciprocal gift of personal salvation.

Marriage in most or all cultures is accompanied by gift-giving, sometimes lavish gift-giving. Various meanings and functions can be attached to this exchange of material gifts, although they most often are intended to contribute to the permanence of the marital union. But marriage vows have usually been treated as religious, at least in Western religions, such as Judaism and Christianity. They bring God into the mutual exchange of gift-giving–mutual self-giving–of husband and wife. This also promotes the permanence of the union since, with God involved, its violation would amount to sacrilege. Not only is a personal relationship established between the woman and man, but they also give themselves to God and commit themselves in total dedication to the upbringing of the children who result from their union.

These examples indicate how deeply the various forms of gift giving penetrate into and influence all social institutions and all levels of society. As Professor Sunwolf has suggested, above, social gift giving and receiving is a "fundamental communication event" whose complex ramifications merit much more research attention than they have thus far received.

— W. E. Biernatzki, S.J.
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Book Reviews

Danesi, Marcel. *Understanding Media Semiotics.* London: Arnold Publishers, 2002. Pp. 288. ISBN 0-340-80884-5 (pb.) $18.99 (Also available through Oxford University Press in the United States, $35.00)

This book provides a comprehensive basic framework with which to understand semiotics: the study of signs and their uses in representation. It flows well and is written at the introductory level. The author proceeds from a historical perspective to modern application of semiotic theory in subjects such as e-books, the Internet, and media convergence. Designed as a text, the book uses italics and bolding to highlight important points within each chapter and also includes a glossary as well as tables and figures where appropriate to enhance understanding.

The paradox of mediation is perhaps the underlying theme for the book: "The same culture that is capable of producing a work of inestimable cinematic art, such as *Amadeus*, is also capable of producing American TV wrestling matches…," (p. 201). Danesi introduces media and their historical development, while inseparably tying media to culture. Interestingly, the author does not use the term *culture*; instead he refers to "*signifying order* so as to highlight the fact that it constitutes a network of meaning structures," (p. 26). In short, Danesi takes the reader far beyond the Shannon and Weaver model of communication into a deeper understanding of meaning and attempts to improve the reader's linear as well as critical thinking skills.

Danesi covers primary ideas and techniques of semiotic method and analysis, including signs, symbols, indexes, icons, referents, codes, texts, narratives, myth, metaphor, and the like. He expresses that well-known semioticians such as Barthes and Baudrillard "have unintentionally 'politicized' semiotics far too much, rendering it little more than a convenient tool of social critics," (p. 33). This book, then, would seem to be the author's attempt to de-politicize semiotics. As such, he clearly attempts to explain the study, rather than offer his opinion. Danesi discusses semiotics in various media: print, audio, film, television, and computer, as well as the genre of advertising. Examples are primarily from the 1970s, 1980s

and 1990s—which may or may not be relevant to traditional college students. The final chapter offers the author's personal reflection on the intertwined nature of media and culture.

At just over 200 pages in paperback, *Understanding Media Semiotics* is an ideal introductory text.

—Sharee L. Broussard, MS APR
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Giles, David. *Media Psychology*. Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003. Pp. x, 324. ISBN 0-8058-4048-6 (hb.) $69.95; 0-8058-4049-4 (pb.) $32.50.

The publisher's description of the book on the back cover of the paperback edition says that its purpose is "to examine the many influences of 21st century media on people who encounter an ever-increasing variety of forms of mass communication: news, sports, soap operas, reality TV with audience participation, and the influence of the Internet." The author's investigation is said to focus on "the various genres in the media that raise the issues of sex, violence, advertising, and audience activity and asks what light psychology can shed on the popularity of these genres and the response of their audiences."

Giles, who teaches at Coventry University, in England, cites two stimuli that prompted him to write the book. One was his attendance at a party where he suddenly had the realization that among the mostly professional people in the crowd "the topic of the conversation had almost exclusively concerned media" (p. 1). The other stimulus was his need for a textbook on media psychology for undergraduates that would avoid two extremes: on the one hand the assumption that the students had "a lot of background knowledge about media history that psychology undergraduates rarely possess," or that either "failed to go beyond the basic 'effects' paradigm" or failed to place media "in a social and cultural context," or, on the other hand, blandly dismissed "psychology as at best a relic of behaviorism, at worst as fascist propaganda!" (p. ix).

Part I, "Media Psychology in Context," reviews the nature and need for media psychology as well as theoretical issues in media research and the research methods used in media psychology. The four chapters of Part II, "Psychological Effects and Influences of Media," explore four areas in which awareness of media effects is especially important: violence, the prosocial effects of media, pornography and erotica, and advertising. Part III is concerned with developmental issues, with chapters on young children and television and on media and adolescence. Part IV consists of two chapters, "Representations of Social Groups" and "The Psychology of the Media Audience," two of the major areas of concern for media psychology. The four chapters of Part V deal with individual genres: news and current affairs, sport, audience participation and reality TV, and soaps. Finally, looking into "The Future of Media Psychology," Part VI first views the Internet, in Chapter 16, then addresses the interaction between the media and psychology, with emphasis on "how the media . . . represents psychology in particular and academic research in general, and the ways in which psychologists can best present themselves and their discipline in the media" (p. 273).

The author is quite willing to question various stereotypes of media and media use that too often are taken for granted, even by some researchers. For example, he complains that "research on the psychology of advertising has been handicapped by its concentration on the effects of 30-second television commercials as being representative of the effects of all advertising" (p. 128). That view sees only "the tip of the advertising iceberg" as new forms of market penetration vastly broaden the scope of the ways advertising actually affects society.

Similarly, research on children and television might "benefit from less concern with protecting children's 'innocence' and instead studying the child as an active meaning-maker of cultural material who does not necessarily take the material's fantastical nature at face value" (p. 146). Giles also says that the fact that "research on adolescents' uses of media has been patchy to say the least" may, in fact, be a good thing, since being understood by parents is worse than being misunderstood by them, and "is part of youths' rallying cry." Understanding by parents can simply stimulate adolescents to "even more extreme forms of rebellion" (p. 162).

Many aspects of media use by modern audiences have no equivalents in traditional situations, even an apparent parallel such as the reading of novels in the 19th century. Contemporary media users

> interact with a huge cast of real and imaginary figures in a media environment in which fantasy and reality continually overlap and invite all

manner of irrational responses. The realism of contemporary soaps has no historical parallel and it is meaningless to search for one. In studying our responses to such phenomena, media psychology has the potential to take psychology itself into new territory. (p. 201)

The book closes with a 25 page section of references and with both author and subject indexes.

—W. E. Biernatzki, S.J.
General Editor, *Communication Research Trends*

Gili, Guido. (2005) *La Credibilità. Quando e perché la comunicazione ha successo.* [*Credibility: When and how communication is successful*]. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore. Pp. 102. ISBN 88-498-1334-1 (pb.) €14.

Gili is a lecturer in culture and communication at the University of Molise and has written a number of other books. Any form of communication fails if those who are trying to communicate a message are not believed. There are many reasons why people are unable to communicate credibly, as Scannell (1996) has shown. Here, Gili has asked what the factors are that are at the basis of the ability to be credible and who it is that is credible. This is something that affects us all, teachers, students, politicians, parents, business people, and those who make our media programming. Each person and organization has to be able to construct, promote, and retain a reputation.

Gili systematically considers the problematic of credibility. The sources upon which he draws come from a variety of authors, ranging from Aristotle to Weber by way of Luhmann, Ong, and C.S. Peirce. In a way that is not often seen in books from anglophone scholars, they come from a number of linguistic backgrounds.

We have to have faith in people or we cannot continue to have a relationship with them. Actors, performers and presenters, as well as politicians, come into our homes through the mass media and, unless we believe in them, their careers will fail. This is true, perhaps particularly true, of our religious leaders. One has only to consider the media and personal "performances" of John Paul II to see how people warmed to him because of his very credibility.

This book would be useful to anyone studying the social sciences and particularly those in the fields of media and communication or persuasion studies. It is to be hoped that at some time it may be translated into English.

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Horsfield, Peter, Mary E. Hess, and Adán M. Medrano (Eds.). *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity*. Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004. Pp. xxiv, 243. ISBN 0-7546-3830-8 (hb.) $89.95 or £50.00.

This volume, one of a series on media, culture, and religion featuring work by the members of the International Study Commission on Media, Religion, and Culture, presents conference papers and explorations of the research by the group. Therein lies both the strengths and the weaknesses of the book. The book's benefit lies in its look at the ongoing research and thinking of a particular research group and an international one at that: Members come from Australia, Colombia, Ghana, Italy, Mexico, Scotland, Thailand, and the United States. Among the weaknesses of the book are its paradoxical insularity and its lack of exposition of key ideas. The insularity arises from the members' familiarity with each other's work; the lack of exposition, from their presumption that their audience knows their previous work.

In his introduction, Peter Horsfield describes "four core issues" for the group:

1. In what ways can we say that the media have come to occupy the spaces traditionally occupied by religion? . . .
2. What is the relationship of religious authority to modes of symbolic practice? . . .
3. How must we re-think the relationship between religion and the media? . . .
4. What does this new situation imply about epistemology? (pp. xx-xxi)

Each essay in the book addresses one of these questions and Horsfield suggests various ways to read the book, depending on one's prior acquaintance with key fields of study (communication or religious studies). However, even this is not enough to orient the non-expert reader.

Robert White's concluding essay ("Major Issues in the Study of Media, Religion, and Culture") may well be the better place to start, as he attempts an historical overview of the study, addressing questions such as "Why and to what extent are the media a source of symbols for constructing religious identities?" (p. 198) and "In what sense are the belief systems constructed with media symbols 'religious'?" (p. 202). These questions are largely sociological and accurately represent the approach of some members of the group; they do not account for other, more historical (Santisakultarm, Chapter 12; Plude, Chapter 13), pedagogical (Hess, Chapter 11), or theological (Goizueta, Chapter 3) approaches. Surprisingly for a book dealing with media and religion, it is only here, half-way through the final chapter that anyone offers a definition of religion. White quotes Greil and Robbins:

> Religion is not an entity but rather a *category of discourse* whose precise meaning and implications are continually being negotiated in the course of social interaction. Religion from this perspective is not a concrete "thing" which may be either present or absent in a society, but rather an idiom, a way of speaking about and categorizing actors' experience. (qtd. p. 203)

Such a definition certainly helps and offers an insight into the direction of the study group's work. However, the various essays in the volume do not seem to distinguish among different meanings of "religion." Among others, the reader encounters all of the following: religion is an institution, a belief system, individual acts of piety or worship, a mediated reality, a response to a metaphysical reality. Perhaps one should expect such variety in a collection such as this, but the editors could have provided a bit more guidance.

White's essay also highlights another difficulty, though whether with the book or whether with the larger area of study is hard to determine. How much is the shift in the study of religion and culture a shift in how people construct identities or a shift in how scholars posit its occurrence? Has the reality changed or merely its description? Or is the description itself (the "category of discourse" mentioned by Greil and Robbins) the reality? Such questions plague the overall enterprise. Another example comes in Horsfield's attempt to sketch the "contours in a changing cultural terrain" (Chapter 2), where he runs into the hermeneutical problem of reading Niebhur's Christ and culture debate in contemporary terms. What Neibhur regarded as "cul-

ture" in the mid-20th century may well not be what later scholars envision by the same term.

These practical difficulties do not lessen the value of this book; they identify, perhaps, what the International Study Commission faces in its attempt to synthesize an approach to media, religion, and culture.

In addition to the essays already mentioned, the book presents three broad approaches: a cultural perspective (Part I), a section on mediated Christianity (Part II), and a look at Christian institutions (Part III).

Part I presents the work of several scholars, in addition to Horsfield. Lynn Schofield Clark ("Reconceptualizing Religion and Media in a Post-National, Postmodern World: A Critical Historical Introduction") provides a quick overview of some approaches to study. These include media coverage of religion, the connection between communication technology and religious authority, the use of media by religious groups, the use of media in (and as) ritual, the intersection of theology and film studies, Christian subcultures' engagement with media products, and young people's redefinition of religion (pp. 14-15).

Roberto Goizueta ("Because God is Near, God is Real: Symbolic Realism in US Latino Popular Catholicism and Medieval Christianity") gives both historical and theological interpretations of the use of symbols in Latino Catholicism, ascribing its differences from Anglo-Catholicism to the rise of nominalism in later medieval Christianity (p. 38). His point is well taken, for all too often scholars presume that their world view is the only world view and that the legitimacy of other groups or cultures falls away from an academic-centric norm.

In Chapter 4, Juan Carlos Henriquez ("Notes on Belief and Social Circulation (Science Fiction Narratives)") argues that "the most incisive works linking theology and communication, or more precisely the phenomena of belief with those of their social circulation" (p. 49) can benefit from research into symbolic exchange. He illustrates his theoretical model with an appeal to science fiction discourses, which often reconstitute theological questions as possible world questions based in science fiction.

Part II ("Mediated Christianity") takes the reader on a world tour. Here one encounters studies of Pentecostal media images in sub-Saharan Africa (J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu in Chapter 5), of the Latin American *telenovela* (Germán Rey in Chapter 6), of the use of visual media in Ethiopian Protestantism (David Morgan, expanding his work on visual images in

Protestantism in the U.S.), of the morality tales in West African video films (Jolyon Mitchell), and of Web religion and the Internet (Stewart Hoover and Jin Kyu Park, in Chapter 9). Each study gives a snapshot of media and religion, but they function more as undigested research reports. One can hope that the authors will develop the topics in more detail and with more theoretical weight.

Part III (Media Culture and Christian Institutions) presents similar research, but organized more by religious institution (here, largely Roman Catholic) than by geographic region. Adán Medrano gives an account of his work as a producer of religious media for the Catholic Church in the U.S. Siriwan Santisakultarm discusses how the Catholic way of life has changed in Thailand due to a combination of migration and media presence, while Frances Forde Plude tracks similar changes in the U.S., in the media coverage of the sexual abuse scandals. Mary Hess ("Rescripting Religious Education in Media Culture") gives a more theoretical view of changing religious education. In this chapter she attempts to correlate how the various regional meetings of the International Study Commission (Bangkok, Quito, Hollywood) either provided data to support such a rethinking or provided challenges to be met by an as-yet-to-be-developed approach. Similar to Part II, this part also proves somewhat frustrating. The case studies, while interesting, seems to run in different directions, theoretically, methodologically, and analytically.

Belief in Media, then, raises many issues in the study of media, religion, and culture; it offers fewer developed theories or even paths to understanding. It is less unified than one might hope, but it gathers a great deal of information. As a work in progress, this may well be the best that one can expect.

The book features an index and a bibliography. In addition, each chapter has its own reference list.

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Kruse, Holly. *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003. Pp. 188. ISBN 0-8204-5552-0 (pb.) $29.95.

Reading this book about independent music scenes reminds me a of a graduate seminar in linguistic analysis where, to prove the point that humans can have meaningful conversations about words without referents, one student led a hour-long discussion of an invented philosopher. Kruse wrestles with a similar problem: how to discuss something that everyone knows about, but about whose specific referents no one can quite agree. What exactly is "indie music"?

> Because the institutions and practices of indie music were substantially about defining the music and the people associated with it as separate from dominant institutions and practices, the choice of a term to define the music and its culture is critical. My use of "indie pop/rock music" or "indie music" to describe the object of study is somewhat arbitrary; other labels, including "college rock," " college music," and "alternative music" could also apply. For those who share a popular perception of what was played on college radio in the 1980s and early 1990s, the term "college music" (or "college rock") brings to mind various guitar-based bands that began and in some cases remained on independent record labels . . . (p. 6)

The book then deals with popular music of a certain type, with bands that were popular with the college music scenes and played in concert venues around colleges (but not necessarily in established music cities like Los Angeles or New York), whose music college radio stations featured, and who recorded with independent music labels. Kruse seeks a way to define and describe. Her method is qualitative, drawing on extensive interviews with representatives of this music scene in bands, record labels, college radio, and college town nightclubs.

After the introductory chapter, Kruse sets out on the journey of "Telling the Story of Independent Music." It is a story of definitions and rejections. While not rejecting outright traditional approaches to studying popular music, Kruse seeks a complementary approach to that "focused on readings of media texts, overly celebratory notions of audience consumption of media products, purely institutional or economic analyses of the mass media, or highly theoretical views of media texts and processes that are difficult to connect to the lived experiences of ordinary people" (p. 1). She lets her interview subjects provide their own definitions, even as they admit to a universe populated by this band or another, which chiefly are NOT something else.

Chapter 3 explores the world of producing independent music (which always gets defined by the institutional role of record companies—those inde-

pendent of the major labels or those bought by the major labels to produce independently of their own mainstream). Here the reader learns about particular labels and producers, about how a band seeks a publisher, about how labels market music and seek air play on stations and shelf space in stores. This leads easily into Chapter 4's treatment of "Disseminating Independent Music." We meet radio stations and DJs, enter the world of college radio (or, more precisely, of some college radio stations, the ones known as leaders in this alternative scene), learn about music charts, see the rise of video, and even come into contact with retailing. While interesting, the material (as Kruse would most likely admit) is dated: Changing technology has changed all of this in just a decade.

Chapter 5 provides more solid fare. Here Kruse seeks to flesh out the notion of a "music scene" as a combination of two aspects of locality: "locality as geographically-defined and locality as socially defined" (p. 113). Here at the heart of the book we find again the very problems of definition, but not of the music scene. Instead Kruse seeks a deeper sense of definition: how do humans regard themselves as part of a group? The tendency, even among Kruse's interview subjects, is to see themselves as part of a larger indie scene, even when they interact with only a much smaller group. It is in many ways an imagined community. Here and in Chapter 6 ("Theorizing Independent Music Formations") the book gets beyond the particular. It's still somewhat problematic, caught in the classic hermeneutical circle: in order to understand the particular, one must know the general, but one cannot know the general without understanding the particular. Kruse tries to help the reader navigate this world.

At bottom, though, the world of indie music was a small slice of one particular time in the United States. *Site and Sound*'s value lies not so much in the story of that scene—which is messy indeed—but in the attempt to find a methodology for communication scholars to examine the ephemera of popular culture.

The book has the usual scholarly apparatus: a name and subject index and a reference list.

—Paul A. Soukup, S.J.
Santa Clara University

Mashek, Debra J. and **Arthur Aron.** (Eds.). *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy*. Mahway, NJ:

> Close personal relationships are the very essence of human existence. Nearly as fundamental to survival as air and water are the links between persons—parent with child, lover with lover, friend with friend.
> —Hendrick & Hendrick (2000, p. xxii)

Relationship science is rapidly developing and covers much territory. The study of intimacy in relationships has been robustly multidisciplinary, with communication scholars making substantial scholarly and theoretical contributions. Communication scholars should be aware, however, that Mashek and Aron's *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy* overlooks our discipline's contributions, even when they are directly on point.

Professor Mashek is a researcher at George Mason University, having received her Ph.D. in Social and Health Psychology from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Her scholarship examines the relationship between interpersonal closeness and community connectedness to psychological adjustment, self-processing, and relational satisfaction. Professor Aron is Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook whose research has focused upon the cognitive structures and processes of interpersonal closeness. In addition to serving as co-editors, they authored or co-authored five of this book's chapters. Unfortunately, we know nothing about the other authors (other than the universities they are affiliated with), as there is no "About the Authors/Contributors" section, nor are relevant author notes included with each chapter. This handicaps the reader in a number of ways, not the least of which includes not being able to discern the scholarly discipline that influenced the chapter, its perspective, or its claims.

The organization of this handbook has been based upon six questions that involve, in turn, defining closeness/intimacy, measuring these concepts, describing their processes, exploring the effects of individual differences, situating intimacy and closeness in their contexts, and wondering about "dark side" aspects of intimacy. There are 23 chapters (including the introducing and conclusion), divided into six sections, based upon the above questions. Representative chapters include such titles as, "A Prototype Model of Intimacy Interactions in Same-Sex Friendships," "Measuring Closeness: The Relationship Closeness Inventory

(RCI)," "A Practical Look at Intimacy: ENRICH Couple Typology," "Perceived Partner Responsiveness as an Organizing Construct in the Study of Intimacy and Closeness," "The Impact of Adult Temperament on Closeness and Intimacy," "Loss of an Intimate Partner Through Death," and "Closeness as Intersubjectivity: Social Absorption and Social Individuation." Each chapter provides thoughtful scholarly examination of specific topics within relational science, with what appears to be a focus of primary interest to psychologists.

The use of the word "handbook," together with the editors' claims about this book—"The result is a volume likely to be indispensable to anyone interested in close relationships because of the distinction of its contributors, the breadth and inclusiveness of its coverage, the timeliness of the topic in light of the current surge of interest in it, and the array of creative new thinking it embodies" (Preface, p. ix)— operate together to create the impression that this book will offer the reader, at the least, a deep and broad review of the prior multidisciplinary literature. This does not happen. Many chapters are short (e.g., 10-12 pages), do not include significant scholarship in their literature reviews, and ignore current topics basic to the developing field of relational science. There are no chapters on opposite-sex friendships (see, Monsour, 2000; Werking, 1997), media influences on intimate relationships (i.e., television and film representations and the new "reality" shows), the effects of culture and ethnicity on relationships (Chapter 18 is entitled "The Cultural Grounding of Closeness and Intimacy," but, in fact, focuses on West Africa), friendship and intimacy in childhood and adolescence, cross-generational friendships and romances, the effects of disability and health care issues on closeness and intimacy, specific family relationships (including blended families and broken families), and intimacy and the communication of emotion (see Andersen & Guerrero, 1998).

While any book may legitimately limit its scope, this one claims the role of *handbook*, bringing together the latest thinking on the scientific study of closeness and intimacy. An additional concern about the comprehensiveness claimed by this handbook includes the thinness of theory throughout, which is surprising in a handbook. In fact, in the index, under "Theory" *no* theories are listed and only one specific page reference. A scan of the entire index reveals only Interdependence Theory and Attachment Theory as specifically discussed, which is a handicap for both scholars and graduate students looking for a useful resource. One example of a theoretical omission is Petronio's (2002) theoretical scholarship on the dialectical issues present in all intimate relationships (*Boundaries of Privacy: Dialectics of Disclosure)*— this would have been a key tool for many of these chapters, offering an applied theory for why people make decisions about disclosure in close relationships and supplying a broad cross-disciplinary literature review on the processes of intimacy. Two other key communication theories missing but relevant include Uncertainty Reduction Theory and Social Penetration Theory, both of which directly explain the development of intimacy and closeness in relationships.

It appears that these chapters were not blind peer reviewed and, further, that some chapters were not reviewed at all beyond the editors, who explain in the preface that "most" of the chapters were reviewed by other contributors. This is of concern, in that a number of chapters, for the first time, present original data and results in the form of quantitative studies. For scholarly readers, the lack of blind peer review calls into question methodological, theoretical, reliability, and limitation issues on the claims of those chapters. Again, scholars have a right to publish their original studies without blind peer review, but readers must then be cautious in their interpretation (or citation) of the claimed results.

The *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy* does not offer the thoroughness or breadth of review in similar books, such as *Close Relationships: A Sourcebook* (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000), *Handbook of Communication and Interaction Skills* (Greene & Burleson, 2003), or *Handbook of Family Communication* (Vangelisti, 2004). Consequently, it would not be a useful choice for a graduate course in relational communication. As a research tool, its limited scope suggests that some chapters might be worthwhile for specific topics of interest to communication scholars, with the *caveat* that any one chapter may not represent a comprehensive cross-disciplinary review of the existing scholarship.

As noted above, the book does have an index.

—Sunwolf
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Noam, Eli, Jo Groebel, and **Darcy Gerbarg**. (Eds.). *Internet Television*. (European Institute for the Media Series). Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. Pp. xxvii, 250. ISBN 0-8058-4305-1 (hb.) $79.95; 0-8058-4306-X (pb.). $34.50.

Internet television consistently ranks as one of the hottest possibilities for the Internet—something that will transform people's media habits as well as the Internet itself. But how much is hype and how much is real potential? The last 10 years (an eon in Internet time!) have seen similar predictions but few breakthrough technological applications. Rather than engage in forecasting the future, the essays in this volume attempt to situate Internet television from a structural perspective. What is it? What impact will it have on communications infrastructure? Communication policy? What business models might support it? What kind of content will it feature?

Contributors, from Europe and the U.S. represent researchers and policy makers from academia, business, and government. The task of their various essays is to introduce the reader to a relatively new communication technology; they do so without presuming a great deal of background knowledge. At the same time, they manage to highlight a good number of important issues, which stand the test of time fairly well. Though the book first appeared at the end of 2004, its content is still quite relevant.

In the introduction, Darcy Gerbarg and Eli Noam begin with an honest admission about a definition:

What exactly is Internet television (TV)? There is no agreement on a definition. It comes with different names—web TV, IPTV, enhanced TV, personal TV, and interactive TV, for example—which signify slightly different things. At the lower end of complexity, it is merely a narrowband two-way Internet-style individualized ("asynchronous") channel that accompanies regular one-way "synchronous" broadband broadcast TV or cable. This Internet channel can provide information in conjunction with broadcast programs, such as details on news and sports, or enable transactions (including e-commerce) in response to TV advertisements. This is known as "enhanced TV." At the other end of complexity is a fully asynchronous two-way TV, with each user receiving and transmitting individualized TV programs, including direct interaction in the program plot line. In between is one-way broadband with a narrowband return channel that can be used to select video programs on demand (VOD). (p. xxi)

The task they set for the book includes fleshing out these possibilities and examining their implications.

Part I discusses infrastructure implications. In Chapter 1, A. Michael Noll attempts to refine the definitions. His very helpful charts (p. 2) illustrate both the convergence of technology and the forces in communication and software that make Internet television possible. At the same time, he honestly indicates the false starts and failures that have already characterized Internet television. Andrew Odlyzko puts the question in terms of its "implications for the long distance network." Even though network capacity and local storage capacity have grown dramatically, video will place huge demands on the current structure. However, he concludes, "the long distance Internet backbones are not going to be affected much by TV. Local 'last mile' bottlenecks in data networks, as well as the slow adoption rates of new technologies by consumers, will ensure that by the time true convergence takes place between the Internet and entertainment TV, something on the order of a decade will have gone by" (p. 16), time he judges enough for improvement in the local loop. Noll concludes Part I with a chapter on technical challenges.

Part II takes the reader in a different and, for many, more interesting path in its examination of network business models and strategies. The communication industry has already built networks for telephony, radio and television broadcasting, and data transmis-

sion. From this perspective, Internet television is simply another kind of data. Michael Katz in Chapter 4 discusses how the existing business models and competitive structures could and will probably handle distribution. David Waterman offers a complementary chapter on "Business Models and Program Content." Much of this hinges, of course, on the revenue generation possibilities of such communication. Finally, in Chapter 6, Bertram Konert takes the reader on a tour how broadcasters currently engage the Internet. From the early 21st century, networks like CNN and the BBC and programs like Big Brother have actively developed supporting websites.

Any new technology raises policy issues that governmental entities must address. Part III presents chapters on regulatory concerns, standardization of engineering protocols, intellectual property, copyright licensing, and international regulatory issues. Providing online programming, for example, makes content available worldwide. Since the current assignment of rights follows a national model, Internet television will require a previously unimagined coordination, not only of program ownership, but of broadcast standards, suitability of content for different groups of viewers, and compensation for producers, writers, actors, and others involved in Internet television production.

Part IV of *Internet Television* presents discussions of content and culture. John Carey asks the obvious question, "Do audiences want TV over the Internet"? (p. 187). Drawing on studies of the adoption of earlier media, ethnographic research, the experience of users, and current digital practices, he concludes that "there is a latent appetite for video delivered over the web based on the evolving behavior of broadband web users." But, before that demand will take off, he cautions that "web video will have to meet a higher standard" (p. 201). Both Jeffrey Hart ("Content Models") and Gali Einav ("The Content Landscape") examine what is available, the former from the perspective of existing networks and producers; the latter, including user-generated content, failed models, and suitable content. Einav also acknowledges past successful content on new media: entertainment, news and sports, children's programming, information-based shows, education and training, corporate communication, and pornography and games.

In a final chapter and a final part ("Future Impacts"), Noam poses a question that raises key cultural and economic concerns: "Will Internet TV Be American?" After a review of the current industry, he writes, "Thus, the medium of Internet TV combines the strengths of the U.S. economy and society in entertainment content, in Internet, and in e-transactions. Add to that economies of scale, and there is nothing on the horizon that can match it" (p. 242). He wrote this, of course, before the user-generated content of a YouTube or Google video took off. Even though Google will now provide programming from Viacom and NewsCorp, short, quirky, personal video has gained a foothold that few expected.

Internet Television provides author and subject indices, as well as an "about the contributors" section; individual chapters have their own reference lists.

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Nussbaum, Jon F. and **Justine Coupland**. (Eds.). *Handbook of Communication and Aging Research* (2nd ed). Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. Pp, vii, 596. ISBN 0-8058-4070-2 (hb.) $125.00; 0-8058-4071-0 (pb.) $55.00.

The editors organize this work into seven units of aging research from three decades of published works that reflect various ideologies of aging. Individual chapters examine current theoretical and methodological approaches to aging, as well as argue for future directions in aging research that, in particular, incorporate communication and cultural reflexivity.

Part I deals with images of old age. In Chapter 1, "Social Construction of Old Age," Mike Hepworth provides a nice opening chapter that paints a backdrop for a societal conceptualization of aging, Hepworth focuses on how old age is depicted via material artifacts and metaphoric imagery. He critically analyzes the idealized and real "normal" process of aging. As Hepworth describes, images "are constructed products whose form and content reflects the beliefs and attitudes of their makers and therefore their historical culture" (p. 9). If we view old age as images of cultural resources, it will help us understand the process of aging and allow us to see aging as a dynamic interactive process. Three key images of old age are examined—geriatric body, physiognomic body, and mask of old age in representing relationships between body, self, and society. He challenges us to become aware and contribute to society via communication, understanding, and embracing the process of aging. Hepworth concludes by arguing that creating awareness of the process of aging via communication

research and practice, society will better understand the social construction of old age.

In Chapter 2—"Attitudes towards Aging: Adaptations Development and Growth into Later Years"—Ann O'Hanlon and Peter Coleman examine how adults evaluate aging and its associated constraints and challenges. We know little about attitudes or knowledge adults hold about later parts of life. O'Hanlon and Coleman examine the challenges of later life and how adults evaluate and experience these challenges, followed by theoretical explanations of optimal development of later years. "Adults' attitudes toward their own aging and future old age can have significant effects on later life" (p. 21). Overall, the chapter is a well thought out state-of-the-art synthesis beginning with the problems/challenges that include physical health, social relationships, and role changes; and psychological functioning (i.e. intelligence, memory, psychosocial). Following this opener, they continue with how adults cope and adapt to such challenges including selective optimization, assimilation and accommodation, and adaptation in relationships.

O'Hanlon and Coleman indicate that "optimal functioning and well-being into later years is not solely about adaptation to challenges but also about one's ability to find enjoyment and pleasure in life" (p. 47). They focus on three theories in particular that highlight the positive and optimal development into later years, Erickson's eight-stage theory of development, Levinson's expansion of Erickson's thinking, and Tornstam's Theory of Gerotranscendence. The chapter concludes with identifying measures used for age-associated attitudes and methods and challenge researchers to continue to expand this line of research.

Part II addresses questions of "language, culture, and social aging." Nikolas Coupland (in "Age in Social and Sociolinguistic Theory") argues that sociolinguistic research on age and aging is limited, and that past research focuses mainly on changes of maturation and communication competencies. The focus of the chapter lies in critiquing the sociolinguistic status quo of the "apparent time" method of aging, as well as identifying the need for additional theoretical models of social aging in our contemporary society. The future of sociolinguistic models needs to address "how the changing social meaning and values of old age are convey in language and related symbolic practices" (p. 79). Coupland challenges scholars to create sociolinguistic aging models that consider human development, his-

torical influences, and contexts of social structure and culture in order to capture the complete ideology of the aging process.

In Chapter 4 "The Role of the Age Stereotypes in IP Communication," Mary Lee Hummert, Teri Garstka, Ellen Bouchard Ryan, and Jaye L. Bonnesen provide an overview of how aging stereotypes and communication behaviors affect the social construction of aging. Former models of age stereotypes have focused primarily on the Communication Predicament of Aging (CPA) model that identifies what happens with negative age stereotyping. While there is support for this model, Hummert and her colleagues extend the model to include negative and positive stereotypes and emphasize both parties in the interpersonal communication interaction into The Age Stereotypes in Interaction Model (ASI). This model "acknowledges that the communication behaviors of the individuals may serve to reinforce or alter initial perceptions" (p. 101). Suggestions for future research include refining the current models as well as potentially using the Communication Enhancement Model which takes into account both partners as well as a continual assessment of the interaction in order to maximize positive communicative outcomes.

Angie Williams and Jake Harwood provide a rationale for aging as "meaningful social categories in communication" (p. 115) in Chapter 5, "Intergenerational Communication: Intergroup, Accommodation, and Family Perspectives." Williams and Harwood indicate that age groups are socially identified but the actual chronological age groupings in which individuals are placed is influenced by the age of the perceiver. Research on intergroup and Social Identity Theory concludes that younger adults hold more negative stereotypes of older adults, which in terms of communication, these "negative stereotypes extend to beliefs about older adults' communication abilities and intergenerational conversation" (p. 118). Further intergenerational communication can be explained by the Communication Accommodation Theory and Intergroup Contact Theory. Although these approaches have been applied to nonfamily elders, additional critique of how familial intergenerational communication and intergroup literature is explicated. The authors conclude by calling for more theory on the salience of age identities and its effects on family interaction and intergenerational communication.

Chapter 6 ("Inter- and Intragroup Perspectives on Intergenerational Communication") by Valerie

Barker, Howard Giles, and Jake Harwood provides an overview of current theories of intergenerational communication from an intergroup perspective. In addition a new model of inter- and intragenerational communication is proposed. In terms of historical explanations of intergroup theories, the following are examined: Social Identity Theory, Communication Accommoda-tion Theory, Communication Predicament Model, Stereotype Activation Model, and Communication Enhancement Model. Although, in part, these theories can contribute to the understanding of intergenerational communication, a complete parsimonious model is limited. Barker and her coworkers introduce an integrated model of inter- and intragenerational communication that enhances those elements of previous models, introduces new components necessary for a comprehensive intergenerational model that takes into account social and cultural implications, and highlights appropriate strategies that lead to positive outcomes. Barker et al. hope this new model will meet the needs of scholars, medical professionals, and others interested in communicating with elderly individuals.

Although cultural implications have been discussed in other chapters, Chapter 7, "Cultural Issues in Communication and Aging" by Loretta Pecchioni, Hiroshi Ota, and Lisa Sparks, specifically examines cultural issues associated with communication and aging. To set the stage, cultural communication and the impact of cultural norms are explained, that is, how we approach individuals (or groups) from whom we differ. Pecchioni, Ota, and Sparks first identity issues to help understand communication, aging, and culture. They include the weakness of chronological age as a predictor of behaviors, definitions of aging across cultures, the fact that age may be co-cultural, and that the percent of aging individuals impacts culture itself. In addition, they provide an overview of current cross-cultural and intercultural literature on communication, aging, and culture, highlighting the notion that the perceptions and experience of aging differs vastly across cultures. The chapter is extended to include cultural influences on communication and aging in various contexts such as relational, organizational, political, mass, health, and educational communication. They conclude by stating that "complex theoretical circumstances are needed to develop adequate theories of aging—theoretical circumstances incorporate culture, time in history, place, individual characteristics and experiences" (p. 195). No theory is offered but they provide a broad overview of existing literature and challenge researchers to include cultural aspects to theory development. This chapter has an excellent list of references.

Part III of the volume deals with "The Communication Construction of Relationships in Later Life." The first chapter, Chapter 8, by Karen L. Henwood ("Adult Parent-Child Relationships: A View From Feministic and Discussible Social Psychology") focuses on the different theoretical and methodological perspectives in relationships between aging parents and children. Particular emphasis is a critical approach where she argues that "too much attention has been paid to the outcomes of relationships and too little to the communicative process by which they are produced" (p. 223). We need to consider the social psychological perspective of examining parent-child relationships. Henwood examines research in parent-child relationships via discussing a social psychological perspective, feminist research of mother-daughter relationships, and the gendered and social bonds by which such relationships are maintained.

In Chapter 9, "Communication in Close Relationships of Older People," Marie-Louise Mares and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick provide a primarily empirical overview of research regarding marital and close relationships. One of the difficulties of research on older people, as pointed out by Mares and Fitzpatrick, is that it is "unlikely future cohorts of older adults will have the same marital experience as the cohorts described in the research reviewed here" (p. 23). Overall, their current synthesis of research portrays a positive outlook on old age, which is somewhat contrary to previous research on aging. This review focuses on key issues of older relationships and includes primary selections of marital quality in old age; effects of transitions in later life that include retirement, children moving away from home, spousal caretaking, sexual activity, and satisfaction in old age; and communication in the aging couple. They commend the current observational work being conducted on elderly adults and encourage and challenge scholars to continue the use and development of rigorous theory and research techniques.

In examining the familial life span perspective (in Chapter 10, "The Nature of Family Relationships Between and Within Generations: Relationships Between Grandparents, Grandchildren, and Siblings in Later Life"), Valerie Cryer McKay and R. Suzanne

Caverly provide a historical account of four decades of research. Their review is based on a feminist perspective that includes gender, culture and socio-economic issues as a framework for explaining communication and aging research. Their focus is on how grandparent-grandchildren and sibling relationships are long-term familial relationships and need additional research to understand more fully the rich experiences these generations have to offer. They challenge traditional social science research and argue that such research may disadvantage less mainstream relationships (generational and non-traditional) in our contemporary society. They conclude by offering lifespan and feminist perspectives as a way to enrich the explanation of familial relationships.

In the last chapter of Part III, "Friendships in Later-Life," William K. Rawlins focuses on the importance of friendships in later-life such that diversity and life circumstances are just as salient in older friendships as any other developmental life period. He examines later-life friendships via the dialectical perspective to identify the social and functional roles friends play in later-life.

Rawlins identifies what is perceived as aging in social and personal contexts—such as gender-linked friendship—as well in broader realms of retirement, marriage, and widowhood or other familial relationships. In addition to the contexts, Rawlins carries the dialectical perspective throughout the chapter by addressing various tensions and challenges of older adult friendships and familial relationships such as independence vs. assistance, among others. Overall he concludes that "despite their limitations, friends typically play vital roles in sustaining older persons' feelings of well-being and life satisfaction" (p. 293).

Part IV deals with organizational communication in three chapters. In Chapter 12, Mark J. Bergstrom and Michael E. Holmes examine "Organizational Com-munication and Aging: Age-Related Processes in Organizations." As our workforce ages, organizations must consider the "physical, psychological, social, and cultural facts of aging related to retirement processes" (p. 306), which, according to Bergstrom and Holmes is being ignored in organizational arenas. The authors provide an excellent critical review outlining the challenges organizations and employees face in regard to aging. A beginning discussion of the perspectives of aging to include age as chronological, functional, psychosocial, and organizational set the stage for the chapter. Next, strengths and weaknesses of various models and theoretical applications to the process of aging from an organizational perspective are addressed and include the life-span approach and career theory. Bergstrom and Holmes continue their discussion challenging the myths of old age in organizations that still exist today: illness, accidents, job performance, learning and change, and retraining. They conclude with suggestions to address the phenomena of the social construction of aging within organizations.

As baby boomers have been a primary marketing target, "marketers now realize that the boomers' parents are alive and well" (p. 329), thus, Chapter 13 ("Marketing to Older Adults") by Anne L. Balazs focuses on how current marketers have turned their attention to older adults. Balazs begins by identifying the foundations of marketing research via several disciplines and outlining the main objective of marketing to older adults: an exchange of life satisfaction and quality of life. Balazs does an excellent job of identifying variables examined by marketers in order to target older adults. In addition, older adults' purchasing habits are also highlighted, thus proving a spectrum of marketing, from consumer to producer. As both sides of the spectrum inform each other, stereotypes are dispelled and implications for research in the older populations are highlighted. Conclusions indicate the importance of marketers to pay attention to the societal changes of an elder population to create the appropriate communication products and services to enhance the life satisfaction of the older consumer.

Because one's career is a vital part of life, for both men and women, the notion of retirement and leisure among the older population is the focus of Chapter 14 ("Retirement and Leisure"). Miriam Bernard and Chris Phillipson provide a description of retirement as a social institution, socially constructed and perceived by society. They provide a nice breadth of men's and women's issues surrounding retirement, including activities and social relationships; thus, dispelling the stereotype that retirement and leisure are equitable assuming that retirees are functionless and unproductive. The argument is that emphasis should instead focus on the activities individuals engage in during and after the transition of retirement. The authors challenge researchers to "document new lifestyles, institutions, and identities among the old" (p. 373).

Part V turns to issues of political and mass communications. Chapter 15, "The Political Power of

Seniors" by Sherry J. Holladay and W. Timothy Coombs examines the political power (perceived and actual) of seniors in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. They first identify how the media's portrayal of seniors is misleading, thus framing seniors as having a powerful voting bloc and perhaps influencing people's perception that "older adults are a force that cannot be ignored" (p. 385). In order to dispel these myths, Holladay and Coombs point out the "actual power of seniors." They argue that although seniors are more interested in and knowledgeable about politics than younger individuals, their interests are not monolithic and that while they have influence on others, they don't have decision-making power. Future implications of senior political power include the involvement of AARP, the aging generation of the baby boomers, and the use of technology regarding political activity of seniors. As highlighted in the beginning of the chapter, future research needs to consider the media's perceptions against the actual political behavior of seniors.

Lynda Lee Kaid and Jane Garner examine "The Portrayal of Older Adults in Political Advertising" in Chapter 16. Because the senior generation is the largest segment of the population, the verdict is more conclusive regarding their power in political advertising. While media have portrayed older adults as both positive and negative, it is impossible to ignore the seniors when considering political advertising. Kaid and Garner tackle this phenomenon of the role of seniors in political advertising via a content analysis of political television advertisements from 1960-2000. Their results indicate that overall, senior's issues addressed in only 13% of the television spots. However, the last two elections of 1996 and 2000 demonstrate an increase of senior targeted ads. Results highlight several categories within the ads, including the number of ads with seniors, political party of candidates, gender of seniors, fear appeals, positive or negative focus of ads, and the portrayal of seniors in the ad. While seniors may not be decision-makers (as seen in Chapter 15), politicians are increasingly paying attention to how seniors are placed within their political ads and campaigns. The role of seniors and how they are influenced by political advertising is constantly evolving and one in which political candidates need to consider when communicating successfully with older voters. This chapter is a nice addition as it provides a specific study within the aging context.

In addition to how seniors are portrayed in television advertising, James D. Robinson, Tom Skill, and Jeanine W. Turner examine senior portrayals, perceptions, and viewing habits of mass media in general in Chapter 17—"Media Usage Patterns and Portrayals of Seniors." Specifically, this chapter describes "the media usage of older adults and compare[s] these patterns with other adult age cohorts" (p. 423) through a synthesis of research including television, radio, newspaper, magazine, and computer usage of seniors. In terms of media usage, seniors are diverse in their viewing, which includes differences in gender and socio-economic status. For portrayal, little has changed and seniors are still limited in visibility on television when being portrayed in lead roles. The authors conclude that diverse portrayals of seniors need to be included in mass media in order to increase understanding, knowledge and improved social attitudes toward seniors.

Part VI, "Health Communication" turns to an area often associated with aging. In Chapter 18, "The Older Patient-Physician Interaction," Teresa L. Thompson, James D. Robinson, and Analee E. Beisecker examine older patient-physician communication, an important area for communication study with the increased number of the elderly visiting physicians—more than any other age group. Comparisons are made between older and younger patients in regard to the amount of communication questions asked, responses made by physicians, gender differences, and patient involvement. In addition to those variables within the interaction, Thompson, Robinson, and Beisecker also examine outcome variables of health care including satisfaction, patient compliance, and health status. Other circumstances surrounding the patient's health care include the impact of a companion, telemedicine, and advanced directives, all issues which are becoming more prevalent for health care than in the past. Because a great deal of research is empirical in nature, the authors argue for more methodologies in studying patient-physician interactions, as well as a call for more theoretical frameworks. This chapter also provides an excellent review of research and a vast list of references.

In Chapter 19, "Communication and the Institutionalized Elderly," Karen Grainger provides an analysis of her work (among others) regarding interactions within institutionalized facilities. She shares her synthesized research and identifies three themes from her analyses: absence of talk, task-oriented talk, and dependency-inducing talk. These themes appear to be

consistent among research conducted and include methodologies of content analyses, discourse analyses, ethnographies, and participant observations. Limited research focuses on the communicative interactions; thus, this analysis contributed to the communication discipline's analyses of diversified perspectives in examining institutionalized older adults. Overall, conclusions indicate that communication between caregivers and patients is impoverished and that more attention needs to be placed on the verbal interactions of parties. Granger argues that an important move would be "for long-term care of older adults to take place in an environment in which the 'caring' (versus curing) is elevated to the level of a valued occupation and skill" (p. 493).

In Chapter 20, "Online Support and Older Adults: A Theoretical Examination of Benefits and Limitations of Computer-Mediated Support Networks for Older Adults and Possible Health Outcomes," Kevin B. Wright and James L. Query examine the benefits and limitations of support networks via computer-mediated communication applications. They delineate older adult's use of computer-mediated communication and how social support affects health outcomes as a backdrop for their discussion of how computer-mediated relationships serve as social support for older adults. They provide an insightful and thorough review of the positive and negative implications of computer-mediated communication and highlight how it can help older adults feel similarities, empathy and support among each other. Overall, they argue that although computer- mediated communication and health outcomes among the elderly is a challenging research venue, it is important and necessary given the number of the age groups using technology. Their implications and directions for future research provide researchers a wealth of avenues to consider and pursue in examining social networks and computer-mediated communication research.

The last section, Part VII, addresses issues of "Senior Adult Education." In Chapter 21 Frank Glendenning looks at "Education for Older Adults: Lifelong Learning, Empowerment, and Social Change." This chapter begins with Glendenning outlining the historical perspective regarding studies of aging and stereotypes of intellectual decline and the psychology of aging. He teases out the debate of aging and intelligence and argues that because of the longevity of our population, education for older adults is becoming increasingly important. In his remarks, he claims that

education is about social change and that the "policy makers have paid only lip service to the international movement for education for older adults" (p. 527), and only a few countries provide public funding. His review examines the movements in various countries and their educational development of elderly. Older adult education is important for not only health practitioners, but for general professional careers, social workers, general public, and the elderly themselves. In essence we are inexperienced in training and caring for the elderly. Rather than robbing elders of their roles in society (as many times is the case), we must continue to increase the access to education in our postindustrial society. He concludes by stating that in order to make social change to benefit members of society, we need to embrace the identification of, understanding of, and seek input from those who benefit from policies and services. Thus, in order to make change, we need to realize that the older generation is a valuable resource, not only to themselves, but also to society as a whole.

While Chapter 21 examined a more global approach to elder education, this final chapter ("Instructional Communication and Older Adults") provides a more intra- and interpersonal look at how older adults engage in their continued educational process and how instructional practices can enhance learning for adult students. Doreen K. Baringer, Amanda L. Kundrat, and Jon F. Nussbaum begin by discussing how motivation, physical state, and psychological aspects impact an individual's ability to learn. As students in the classroom become older they are affected by perceived issues of self-esteem, cognitive decline, processing speed, vision and hearing impairments, among other things. In order to make older students feel more comfortable, Baringer and her colleagues provide various strategies for classroom communication. One key component to approach older learners is to recognize that they are a heterogeneous population with various experiences and need to be treated as such. The authors identify key methods/ strategies for classroom instructors to adapt their classrooms to the adult learner. Overall their emphasis is on how educators can embrace adult learners and implement pedagogical strategies to include the diversity of all learners in the classroom. It is a great practical guide not only for educators to consider for adult learners, but for all students.

From intrapersonal to global/international levels, communication and aging are examined from multiple

theoretical and discipline-specific perspectives. The text overall is a wonderful addition to our understanding of older adults that includes multiple cultural contexts and state of the art research.

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Pendakur, Manjunath. (2003). *Indian Popular Cinema: Industry, Ideology, and Consciousness*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. Pp. xiv, 226. ISBN 1-57273-501-5 (pb.) $23.95.

Though it accounts for the world's greatest per country film output, few in the United States know much about the cinema in India, much less what Pendakur terms "Indian popular cinema." By this he refers to a range of production: "Bombay cinema, commercial film, masala film, formula film, Bollywood film, and so on, all of which refer to the films aimed at the mass audience" (p. 1). This mass audience encompasses both city dwellers and villagers. The films themselves go well beyond the high cinema of directors like Satyajit Ray and includes films produced for the many linguistic groups in India.

True to its subtitle, Pendakur's book addresses a range of topics: the structure of the industry, the star system, the genres of Indian film, and popular reaction. Unfortunately, this leads to a book that more closely resembles a series of independent investigations rather than a synthetic look at Indian cinema. The fact that the book is a labor of love to which Pendakur returned again and again over a 15 year period reinforces that sense. But the individual chapters have great value in introducing the reader to a vast and often little understood part of world cinema.

An introductory chapter lays out the scope of the book and of the cinema. The non-Indian reader comes face to face not only with films in different linguistic traditions but also with different cultural traditions. The scholar wrestles with a lack of resources: loss of primary documents, a late start on film preservation, more writing in the popular press than in academic journals, and a disinterest among film principals (producers, directors, actors) in any kind of research (pp. 3-4). But Pendakur has persevered nonetheless.

As part of the general introduction, Pendakur captures some of the distinctive qualities of Indian popular cinema:

> Indian popular cinema springs from a long tradition of Indian theater and art. The garish costumes, music, dance, the eye-popping visuals forming the spectacle, and convoluted story lines originate from the folk drama tradition that was so popular prior to World War II. The audiences know what to expect out of a popular film. They don't necessarily go there to find a new story every time, but to see how the formula unfolds, how clever the director is in coming up with the twists and turns to the plot, and how good the songs, dances, and fights are. (p. 11)

Knowing this goes a long way to understanding Indian cinema.

Chapter 2 examines the industry, particularly the changing scene of exhibition, production, and distribution. From big city locations to the "touring cinemas" that travel from village to village, distributors organize an industry that accounts for some 13 million ticket sales each day (p. 16). But this is only one part of an industry that coordinates exhibitors and producers. In addition, the Indian popular film industry now supplies a growing expatriate community in global markets. And, like many other industries in many other places, Indian films face pressures from underworld figures or racketeers.

Chapter 3 switches the focus to the film industry's relationship with the government. India has a National Film Development Corporation to support production; the government also has a bureaucracy of film censorship (which, as in other countries, has seen changing cultural values and hence film guidelines). In addition the government influences the film industry by regulating the import of non-Indian films.

After the general sketch of the external structures that shape Indian film, Pendakur turns to the internal landscape of the cinema: aesthetics, genres, and topics. In Chapter 4, an examination of the "masala film" anchors a larger discussion of the interplay of aesthetics and politics.

> *Masala* is an appropriate metaphor to analyze India's popular cinema because it draws attention to the variety of ingredients that make up the basic narrative structure of the popular film. Just as there are regional variations to the masalas (spices) that are used in Indian cooking, cinemas also take on certain regional specificities. (p. 95)

These typically melodramatic films have not only predictable plots but particular aesthetics, which play into the various nationalistic movements in India and its regions. One feature of these aesthetics that most (even non-viewers) outside of India know is the use of music. Chapter 5 takes the reader on a tour of film music, its kinds, functions, and extra-film manifestations.

The last two chapters of the book examine sexuality in Indian cinema. Chapter 6 puts it in terms of a kind of voyeurism coupled with government enforced restrictions. The last chapter examines a particular kind of film—snake movies, "in which snakes play central characters" (p. 173). Despite the potential for opening up difficult topics, both chapters tend more to feature plot summaries or move-star gossip. We learn a lot about various actresses and their roles, but not so much about the overall cultural significance of the representation of sexuality.

While this film comment approach is most evident in the later chapters, Pendakur veers into it throughout the book. In the midst of many of the discussions, the reader must detour through the plots of representative films. Such an procedure does teach about Indian cinema, but this reader, at least, found it distracting.

The book has a reference list, subject and author indices, and a list of interviews. Since it is one of the first academic books of its kind, the interviews are very helpful in preserving a partial oral history of Indian cinema.

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Rantanen, Terhi. *The Media and Globalization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005. Pp. ix, 180. ISBN 0 7619 7313 3 (pb.) $35.95.

Terhi Rantanen attempts two things in this book: using some popular globalization theories, she tries to introduce media into the mix; then she adopts an original form of empirically demonstrating the consequences of media within the globalization process. There are many questions to be asked of the warrant of this brief book, but they are not to downgrade an original approach to an important topic. To begin with, the author proposes a definition of globalization that includes media (unlike a number of other globalization theorists): "Globalization is a process in which worldwide economic, political and cultural and social

relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space" (p. 8). After a brief discussion of the consequences of mediated globalization, Rantanen turns to the issue of an appropriate methodology which she identifies as "mediagraphies" or life histories of media use and their consequences for a series of three families over four generations or approximately the last century. The premise for the use of this method is that it works at the individual level of media use over the last approximately 100 years from three families widely separated culturally and economically to trace how, when, and with what consequences the introduction of various media had in their lives. There is a distinct advantage of looking at different generations as it helps to trace the changes over time. She makes it clear, however, that she does not expect to generalize from her findings; rather she wants to begin to empirically trace the globalization/media process on a small sample to understand what concepts like "time," "space," "interconnectedness" and even "globalization" might mean in relation to mediation of people's social relations.

In Chapter 2 the author begins with a review of globalization and media periodization (when globalization as a process began and when different media were introduced) by combining the work of Robertson on globalization and Lull and McLuhan on media. She opts for a view of media and globalization as relatively recent phenomena with a return to Giddens' notion of globalization as a continuation of modernization in the form of "high modernity." With this established in a table of modern media introductions beginning in the last quarter of the 19th century, she begins to trace the life histories of her three family sample. She concludes that each generation in different ways became exposed to the different forms of mediated communication in ways that allowed for exposure to modern content as well as the media being used for mediated forms of interpersonal communication among families as they moved to different locations.

In the next two chapters, Rantanen tackles the two poles of the consequences of the media/globalization debate: homogenization and heterogenization. The first was proposed by the cultural imperialism theorists, arguing that the flow of American popular culture to other nations and cultures eroded national cultures. This position emphasized the production and distribution structures of dominant American companies and added a focus on accompanying capitalist con-

sumerism. The second position was a later response and critique beginning around 1990 with an emphasis on the active audience and the individual response to foreign content. The author devotes Chapter 4 to a review of the arguments in favor of homogenization, but adds that nationalism in media was perhaps a more important form of media influence than was globalization. In Chapter 5 she examines the arguments for indigenization of foreign content and the heterogenization position. In the end she examines her three families and finds that both factors are at work in the globalization process, and that both consequences are good or bad according to the circumstances and the interpreter's own position.

In the final substantive chapter on cosmopolitanism and in the conclusion, the author makes her case for media's role in globalization and its consequences. What emerges is her sense of cosmopolitanism as a result of the growing media and communication interconnectedness. Her position contradicts the position of other scholars who argue against identities that go beyond the national localities we inhabit, but she makes her case with a reference to the "imagined community" of Anderson's analysis of nationalism in new countries created in the 20th century. The conclusion that globalization is promoted by media in very different ways and with different consequences for the four generations of the families that she has traced makes some sense. In the end, she concludes that all of the positions seem to have a stake in outcomes but that the process is complex and nuanced in ways not common in the literature.

There are a few caveats that might be noted: first, the methodology is not clearly articulated as it is not ethnography in any accepted sense and, as a consequence, the reader must stop on occasion and ask whether some of the conclusions are based on the data or a construction of the author; second, the focus on the consequences of media and globalization for families is never clear as the author touches on large variables such as homogenization/heterogeniczation, cosmopolitanism, and identities and does not make the connections between data and concepts clear. Still, as an exercise in further expanding the frontiers of the media and communication in the globalization debate, the book has made a significant contribution.

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Salwen, Michael B., Bruce Garrison, and **Paul D. Driscoll**. (Eds.). *Online News and the Public*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. Pp. xix, 384. ISBN 0-8058-4822-3 (hb.) $110.00; 0-8058-4823-1 (pb.) $45.00.

While reading *Online News*, I kept thinking of Moore's Law, the oft-quoted tenet developed by Intel founder Gordon Moore. First appearing in an article Moore wrote in 1965 in *Electronics* magazine, Moore amended the statement in 1975 to state that the number of devices on computer chips would double every 24 months, meaning, in essence, that performance doubles about every 20 months or so. That computer you just bought may already have a smaller, faster, cheaper replacement.

I wonder if there's a corollary that relates to studies examining digital trends. By the time the work is published, it's very nearly outdated. That is the main drawback to *Online News and the Public*. The fast-evolving nature of the Web and ways to use it to communicate news, opinion, and information barely give one time to analyze and place each trend and development into perspective before one is hurdled into the next trend.

The book was published in 2005, yet looking through the reference lists for each chapter, I couldn't find a citation published after 2003. A discussion of Web portals barely mentions Google and Google News, though there is an explanation of how Google uses algorithms to develop its news content.

Despite that major drawback, the book's authors have assembled a good starting point for other research on digital trends.

Online News is in three parts: first, an overview of the history of online news and online newspapers, trends, and legal issues; second, a series of eight studies "grounded in the media effects and uses traditions," including credibility, public fear of terrorism, third-person effect, uses and gratifications, community building, and media substitution; and third, two studies that look at online posters and chat rooms. The studies are meticulously executed and overwhelmingly quantitative, drawing data from telephone surveys conducted in 2000 and 2001. One study that looks at postings to Arab chat rooms after 9/11 has qualitative elements.

The value of *Online News* is in that meticulous research in what the authors term baseline studies, beginning with author Bruce Garrison's history of online newspapers in Chapter 1, an insightful and con-

cise timeline. Subsequent chapters describe models and theoretical approaches to online news. Again, the main value to the reader/researcher is laying that foundation to evaluate where the trends are going.

Author Michael B. Salwen offers the hope that online news sites "can, if properly harnessed, contribute original information, stimulate public debate about the issues, and emerge as important news media and social forces" (p. 49). It seems blogs have taken part of the roles he envisions, but one of the handful of mentions of blogs in the books comes in a footnote in Salwen's chapter:

> Blogs are controversial because they are often untrue. They are uncensored and free for everyone to use. This may make them appear a desirable outlet for news. However, blogs lack the checking for good journalism and are often regarded as personal views, rants, and responses. (p. 69)

He's right, but the power of blogs can't be dismissed in 2006.

It's inevitable that new developments and new research eventually overtake older work, but the new work needs a good base. *Online News and the Public* is an excellent foundation for building further research into the fast-evolving world of online news and information.

References appear at the end of each chapter, with author and subject indices at the end of the volume.

—Carol Zuegner
Creighton University

Sorice, Michele. (2005) *I media: La prospettiva sociologica* [*The media: the sociological perspective*]. Number 437 in the series "Media Studies" directed by Alberto Abruzzese and Fausto Colombo. Roma, Italy: Carocci, Editore. €20.30.

Michele Sorice is one of the foremost researchers in the area of media studies in Italy. He is Professor of the sociology of cultural and communicative processes at Rome's La Sapienza University and also teaches sociology at the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano. He is, in addition, a visiting lecturer at the Pontifical Gregorian University's Centro Interdisciplinare sulla Comunicazione Sociale.

This book is aimed at both students and scholars in Italy and gives an up-to-date, coherent account of recent developments in the media. It is also a use-

ful book with which to introduce media studies to students as it is written in clear, accessible language, which is not so usual in academic books, whether they are written in Italian or in any other language. It would be useful both for media studies students and for others who are studying human and social sciences in giving them an overview of the methodological foundations of media research, particularly, as its cover tells us, of the most recent trends in European research in cultural studies.

The chapters look at subjects from the definition of the terms used, through the history of media research, effects studies, and ethnographic and audience studies; the book would be useful for its extensive, multilingual bibliography (pp. 201-225) alone. The book concludes in an unusually frank manner, saying:

> It is not an easy task [to cover these subjects]. Here is why this is so, once again, it is not possible to arrive and to write true conclusions: Research is always the joining of trajectories that come from new points of departure. There are only two rules that should always bring to those who undertake social research on the media. The first of these is that humble and impassioned participatory style of which Boltanski speaks, which will then result in many other things. The second is to remember that the beginning and end of our research are the people of today and of tomorrow. (p. 199)

—Maria Way
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Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy and **Dejan Vercic**, *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 2003.Pp. xxxvi, 564. ISBN 0-8058-3922-4 (hb) $155.00; 0-8058-3923-2 (pb.) $65.00.

The editors, from Singapore and Slovenia, respectively, say, in their Preface, that the book was prompted by "the need for a comprehensive body of knowledge that will help public relations practitioners operate strategically" in a global context characterized not only by democratization and by the development of more scientific and sophisticated forms of public relations but also by a proliferation of regional and worldwide organizations and trading blocs that

often involve public relations professionals in their management. They saw a need not only to describe public relations practices in regions around the world but also to link those practices with sociocultural variables (p. xxiii).

Over a period of two years they assembled "contributions from 35 leading scholars and professionals with first-hand knowledge about the status of the public relations industry in their region" (back cover of paperback edition). They also aimed to deliver a "thorough discussion on the transnational public relations activities of governments and NGOs" (*ibid*.). The role of UNESCO is emphasized both in a foreword by UNESCO Director Koichiro Matsuura and in chapter 20, "Public Information in the UNESCO: Toward a Strategic Role," by Vincent Defourny, UNESCO's web chief editor (pp. 425-440).

Defourny's discussion of UNESCO's vicissitudes is, in itself, a study of public relations problems on the global level. After an early period marked by some successes, such as the preservation of Egypt's Abu-Simbel Temple, the organization became embroiled in debilitating controversies—most notably that over the "New World Information and Communication Order," in the early 1980s (pp. 429-430). The fading of the Cold War and some administrative and personnel changes gave hope that the organization might regain some ability to accomplish its original objectives. Various studies attempted to learn how the organization could be made more effective. In particular, inquiries in 2001 found that, in spite of a broad measure of support for its original principles and mandate "there were many signs of frustration and disappointment vis-a-vis an institution that has embarked upon too many fields, that it does not possess resources to match its ambitions, and that tends to be stultfied by a degree of bureaucracy," and that it was unable to "illustrate its mission by a simple and easily understandable image" (p. 434). This image problem threatened to sink the organization's impact "in a mood of general indifference" (*ibid*.).

The editors have striven for broad international coverage. Chapters deal with Western Europe, the United States, Australasia, five countries in Asia, two in Africa, two in Latin America, and three from among former Soviet bloc countries, in addition to a "conceptual piece" on sub-Saharan Africa. They express regret that additional contributions from Africa and Latin America were frustrated by lack of data (p. xxviii). In order to establish comparability among the various chapters, authors were asked "to not only describe public relations practice in their countries but to attempt to make informed linkages between environmental variables and the profession." (p. 1). To standardize the material in the 17 individual country chapters, the editors presented, in Chapter 1, "a theoretical framework for global public relations research and practice," which was followed in each of the country chapters (p. 1). Although earlier authors have recognized the need to link international public relations studies to social, political, and economic contexts, apart from some work on culture few studies have effectively dealt with the relationship between those variables and public relations (p. 2).

Part 1 applies the framework to Asia and Australasia, with chapters on China, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Australasia. Part 2, on Africa, focuses on South Africa and Egypt. Part 3, on Europe, goes into detail with chapters on Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Poland, Slovenia, and Russia. Part 4, on the Americas, has chapters on the United States, Brazil, and Chile. Part 5 broadens the geographic perspective in Chapter 19 to discuss "transnational public relations by foreign governments," and in Chapter 20 to deal with UNESCO, as was mentioned above. Chapter 21 confronts problems of "Managing Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," and formulates in the process "a communication ethic for the global corporation." Chapter 22 discusses public relations agencies. Chapter 23 deals with the "movers and shakers" of transnational corporations. Chapter 24 is concerned with "Nongovernmental Organizations and International Public Relations."

Finally, as an epilogue (Chapter 25), co-editor Sriramesh isolates "The Missing Link: Multiculturalism and Public Relations Education," arguing that, "Given the extent of globalization that has occurred especially in the past 10 years, a majority of public relations practice in the 21st century has, and will continue to, become multinational and multicultural in nature" (p. 505).

References follow each chapter, and both author and subject indexes are provided.

—W. E. Biernatzki, S.J.
General Editor, *Communication Research Trends*

Stout, Daniel A. and **Buddenbaum, Judith M.** (Eds.). *Religion and Popular culture: Studies on the Interaction of Worldviews.* Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 2001. Pp. 327. ISBN 0-8138-2276-9. $44.99.

Religion and the media are gridlocked in constant conflict. Religious groups' accusations against popular culture and primarily its big media exhibitors range from a liberal bias on one hand to outright hostility toward religion on the other. Yet the opportunity to benefit from media power to shape perspectives on all subjects is also too strong for those religious groups to pass up. This symbiotic relationship is the subject of Daniel Stout and Judith Buddenbaum's *Religion and Popular Culture: Studies on the Interaction of Worldviews.* These worldviews present a conflict of values, a fusion of theoretical perspectives on both religion and popular culture, and a rich interaction of perspectives played out on a popular culture battlefield.

The essays in the first section, "Theoretical Perspectives on Religion and Popular Culture," survey theoretical issues in religion and popular culture. The fundamental question addressed by the four essays is, what is the *relationship* of religion and popular culture? Buddenbaum (p. 19) answers that question through an extension of Agenda Setting theory and Cognitive Processing to conclude that the media and churches comprise a dual force that influences public opinion. Schultze (p. 40) describes the relationship of media and religion as "love/hate"; religious groups benefit from the unifying characteristics of a common media enemy, yet those commonalities are often reinforced by a popular culture that obscures the uniqueness of the religious groups. Hoover describes the relationship of religion and popular culture as has having shifted, in a major way, from a dualism between the "private and the public, between the religious and the secular . . . [to] a less definite space where those distinctions exist in a state of fluidity and flux" (p. 50). Stout (p. 63) draws from medium theory to examine how evolving technologies provide a context or "information environments" for purposes of sharing religious information to build community. The way religious information is exchanged helps to create and modify the information itself.

The essays in the second section, "Institutional Perspectives on Religion and Popular Culture," present various religious perspectives on the media.

Buddenbaum reviews Christian approaches to media, Cohen the Jewish Tradition, Luthra reviews Hinduism, and Palmer and Gallab address Islam and the West. (This book's publication precedes the incidents of September 11, 2001.) The authors draw from Yamani (1994) to assert the now plain understatement that "Islamic-Western tensions may be growing with the expanding information society" (p. 112). However, their discussion of the challenge faced by Muslims in the West to maintain a balance between Western values and their own deep religious values and the use of Arabsat as a communication system designed to reach other Muslims still provides a framework for understanding contemporary fundamental challenges between the two groups.

The theoretical base laid by the first two sections is complemented by "Empirical Studies, Essays, and Case Studies." Though the opening sections provide a diverse take on the relationship of religion and popular culture, the case studies are decidedly Christian in focus. A few examples bear this out. Warren (p. 169) interviews Southern Baptists to pinpoint their reasons for the 1997 Disney boycott (betrayal and distinctiveness). Lepter and Lindlof (p. 217) use a root metaphor analysis, a process of identifying linguistic patterns that compare dissimilar concepts that drive worldviews, to examine Kentucky and Tennessee Nazarene's emergence from abstinence (withdrawal) from movie going. They identify the language patterns of battle, legalism, and athletic contests as the sources of major root metaphor explanations for movie-viewing habits of the subjects. Haley, White, and Cunningham (p. 269) use interviews to determine how young evangelical Christians use religious products. What emerges from the interviews is the notion of a Christian brand that young people associate with CDs, bracelets, and other popular items.

Other studies in this section transcend the Christian question. Rimmer and Brody (p. 146) interviewed Vietnamese in a southern California community to examine their tolerance (defined by the authors as a show of "support for the constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties of individuals or groups") for First Amendment rights. The study draws from the received model to identify one finding significant to this volume—"religion was found to be associated with intolerance" (p. 164). Buddenbaum revisits her 1996 Middletown studies to establish a breakdown by religion of radio genres from which members of various religions receive information about politics. Hess

(p. 289) concludes the volume with an essay calling for educators to embrace popular culture into religious education.

The battle lines drawn in the amorphous culture wars have undoubtedly blurred. The proliferation of media channels and accessibility coupled with bourgeoning religious expression in the U.S. has confounded the soldiers on the front lines. Television programs such as the *Simpsons*, once considered the bane of fundamentalist Christians but now even called the "the most moral show on television" (Holsten, 2003), may be seen as an opportunity to capitalize on mainstream programming. Exploring this middle ground is one of the primary objectives of this volume.

Contributors are primarily in the fields of communication, journalism, and mass communication. The volume has a combined author/subject index.

—Pete Bicak
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References

Buddenbaum, J. M. (1996) The role of religion in newspaper trust, subscribing, and use. In D. A, Stout and J. M. Buddenbaum (Eds.) *Religion and mass media: Audiences and adaptations* (pp. 123-134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holsten, N. (2003, April 27). A Homeric odyssey. *Newsday.* Retrieved May 2, 2006, from http://www.snpp.com /other/articles/homeric.html.

Yamani, M. A. (1994). Islam and the West: The need for mutual understanding. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, 14,* 88-98.

Sumiala-Seppänen, Knut Lundby, and **Raimo Salokangas** (Eds.). *Implications of the Sacred in (Post) Modern Media.* Göteborg: NORDICOM, 2006. Pp. 274. ISBN 91-89471-34-2 (pb.) €30.

Studies of media and religion have become more prevalent recently, perhaps because of the supposed religious connection of many news stories, although the connections with religion may or may not be relevant to the story. *Communication Research Trends* was a forerunner in supporting and exploring the early research into media and religion. This edited collection came into being following discussions of members of the Uppsala Group at Jyväskylä that were then continued at the Media, Religion, and Culture Conference in Louisville, KY, in 2004.

The book's first four papers consider the sometimes awkward field that is "Studying Media and the Sacred." Academics in some countries, perhaps particularly the United Kingdom, have a tendency to denigrate any academic work that has even a slight relation to "religion" or "the sacred." Lundby (pp. 43-62) discusses the meaning of the term "sacred" which is that of something being "set apart." Often, what is set apart is anyone with a religious faith, who may either be pictured as a little stupid or, alternatively, as a fanatic. This book attempts to make steps forward towards addressing this lack of attention to this important area, even if other earlier steps have been made.

The implications of the sacred in history, news stories relating stories with a religious connection, and also the religious import of media coverage are considered in Section 2. News and current affairs having been used as case studies, the third section looks at digital culture, the Internet, film, and literature. While news and current affairs are "serious" subjects of study, this section looks at the more "popular" areas of culture. A particularly interesting chapter is Jeanette Sky's piece on the religious import that it is possible to draw from Harry Potter. Perhaps the next volume will consider the *Da Vinci Code* furore, which occurred just too late for the publication of this book.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of this book's authors come from the Scandinavian countries, but there are also pieces written by scholars from the United States and the United Kingdom. The vast majority of works on the media and religion come from an American background or deal with issues relating to terrorism. Sadly, Islam is often conflated with terrorism and those who write such articles or books may have very little knowledge of the tenets or cultures of Islam. In consequence, this book is an interesting addition to the literature on media, religion, and culture and would be a useful addition to any library or to the reading lists of courses or modules in this field.

For some time, scholars have begun to search for religiosity and spirituality in popular culture, even those with no obvious religious content or even intent. Films, books, plays, and songs, even some computer games, have dealt with religious subjects and some of the best selling media products have a religious background to their stories: Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ;* Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons*; not to mention the innumerable horror films that relate in some way to

religion, if only through the symbols used. Following the Enlightenment, the message from certain circles of academia has continuously been that God is dead and religion will soon no longer exist, yet the 2001 census in the United Kingdom had 71% of the population describe themselves as Christian. According to the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the UK also has 1.9 million Muslims, around one million Hindus, 330,000 Jews and a variety of other faiths, including (again according to the census) 10,000 people who describe their faith as "Jedi Knight"! This is a quite uncanny connection between the media and religion, even if a rather strange one.

The growth of this study area can only be for the good, but more clarification of the relationship between media and religion is needed. Academics tend to write, speak, and teach about democracy and freedom of speech, but religion can, as I noted above, often be the subject of denigration. If this book can be a tiny step towards greater depth and recognition of the academic study of media, religion, and culture, it may help to obviate this tendency.

Each essay has its own reference list; there is no index. There is an "About the authors" section.

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Valkenburg, Patti M. *Children's Responses to the Screen: A Media Psychological Approach.* Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. Pp. vii, 164. ISBN 0-8058-4763-4 (hb.) $45.00; 0-8058- 4764-2 (pb.) $22.50.

The influence of screen media in the lives of children is a topic continuously debated within both the academic realm and popular press. There are those who argue media have a deleterious effect upon our youth, while there are others who believe media can play a positive role in the life of a young child. Despite interest in this highly debated field and the thousands of studies related to children and media, Valkenburg notes that much of the academic research is "still in its infancy when it comes to our knowledge about the uses, preferences, and effects of different media" (p. vii). In this book, Valkenburg attempts to fill this void by discussing the latest theories and research on children and screen media. She

explains that the book is not intended to be a comprehensive textbook on children and media but rather encompasses what she believes to be some fundamental topics that should be included in a media psychology course on children and the media.

The book begins with a discussion on how the perspectives of childhood have changed over time, and how these perspectives have been influenced by historical, political, and economic factors. Valkenburg attempts to show how perceptions of childhood relate to changes in media content designed for children. The history of research into children and media is also touched upon in this chapter. While the chapter is fairly brief, it offers a solid introduction into understanding the relationship between children and media—and the research that revolves around it.

Following the introductory chapter, the book is comprised of five additional chapters which "together offer an insight into the most important subjects in the research into children and media" (p. 12). Chapter 2, "The Development of a Child Into a Media Consumer," reviews how media preference develops over time and how some developmental-psychological characteristics of children predict preferences for media content. Further, a discussion is offered on differential media preference by gender along with possible explanations for these differences.

After discussing how children develop as media consumers, Valkenburg presents information in Chapter 3 on an area of research that has arguably received the most attention in the literature: "Media Violence and Aggression." Specifically, she presents the state of empirical research in this area, the theories presented within the research, media factors and child factors that may influence the relationship between media violence and aggression, and finally, ways that adults can offset the possible harmful effects of media violence on children. Valkenburg continues in Chapter 4 by describing children's fear responses to news and entertainment screen media. She addresses the development of fears and the role screen media plays in this development. Several theories on the attraction of violent media are presented along with the strategies that children employ when confronted by frightening media.

Leaving the realm of violence and fear, Valkenburg offers a discussion of children and advertising in Chapter 5. Beginning with a discussion of children as both consumers and an important market

to advertisers, Valkenburg illustrates how children's brand awareness develops and how their influence on family purchases has changed over time. She reviews information on both the intended and unintended effects of advertising on children, and discusses characteristics of advertising that may increase its effectiveness with this young audience. Finally, she offers a brief discussion on which subgroups of children (e.g., younger children) are more susceptible to advertising than others.

In the last chapter of the book, Valkenburg explores the "Uses and Effects of Interactive Media"—a growing area of interest to both policy makers and academics. She describes common characteristics of entertainment websites targeting children as well as the different types of video and computer games that children are presented with. Following up on this general description, information regarding access as well the possible beneficial/detrimental effects of interactive screen media is presented.

While this book does not cover all areas of children and media research, it does utilize empirical evidence to offer a concise description of some of the more essential topics in children and media research. The content areas covered, along with the extensive reference section (pp. 137-151), make this book a valuable reference to both children & media scholars and students.

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Wilson, Toni. *The Playful Audience: From Talk Show Viewers to Internet Users.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press Inc.: 2004. Pp. xiii, 333. ISBN 1-57273-528-7 (pb.) $29.95.

The key message of this book is clear and precise: "Everywhere, people use television, regarding it as pleasurably relevant in satisfying their desire to be distracted and entertained, educated and informed" (p. 5). And they do it in a very similar way, i.e., with ludic responses to television, "continually playful processing meaning" (*ibid*.). In the context of this book play means at first the creative freedom of decoding texts

(constructing meaning), the pleasurable experience of playful identification and involvement. In addition to that, the author is able to show that there is "a cultural pluralism of enjoyment" that can be provided by "many varied interactions between audiences and people on television" (p. 10). Hypertexts on the Internet on the other side offer by definition a huge variety of personal interpretations and points of view. They are unique examples of openness. Following the author, interactive computer-mediated communication can be studied analogously to "similarly dialogical exchanges between television's talk show presenters and their audiences" (p. 197). Internet use is seen as play-full as watching television.

This is in short the message of the book on the playful audience. It is in accordance with findings that understand watching television and Internet use as playful experiences. Beside this, the book is quite descriptive, anecdotal, and redundant. It is a collection of various statements and quotes that are pitched at the reader like a piece of "staccato" music. It looks as if somebody had turned a file-card box upside down in a hurry. The average length of a paragraph is around 10 lines. A good bad example can be taken from the pages 237 and 238. There are 14 paragraphs of an average length of six lines, every paragraph paraphrasing at least one author, 19 altogether. A similar experience can be made on the pages 233 and 234. Two pages for 13 paragraphs and 14 references. An alternative to the stringing together of quotes is to cite single witnesses: "One male Malay student noted . . ." (p. 54); "One Chinese student conveyed her mystification, . . ." (p. 37); "For one Malay woman, . . ." (p. 44); "One male Indian undergraduate had difficulties in . . ." (p. 39).

The book has been published in the year 2004. The most recent reference (S. Livingstone), just one, dates from 2002. Personally, I learned one basic lesson: Ethnographic hermeneutics and research will have a tough time to be accepted by the mainstream communication research. There is a demand for research questions, theories, hypothesis, qualitative or quantitative methods and findings, for reliable and valid empirical research.

—Louis Bosshart
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