Professional Civility and Problematic Relationships in the Workplace

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Workplace Communication

Introduction

More or less everyone—with the possible exception of hermits—lives or works in organizations. This foundation of contemporary life draws people together for all manner of activities, but particularly for work, whether paid work or voluntary work. We simply do not seem able to function in today’s world without the organizations that bind and coordinate our efforts. Communication research has not ignored this aspect of our living.

Organizational communication study has long considered strategies for successful work communication, examining everything from the ideal make up of work groups to the patterns of superior-subordinate communication to measures of satisfaction with organizational life. Other studies look to larger issues like organizational identity and organizational culture. All of these approaches tend to see organizations as communication entities that somehow subsumed the individuals working within them.

More recent work has drawn on another strand of communication research—interpersonal communication—to study relationships in the workplace. A number of scholars report studies on the characteristics of successful working relationships. But not every relationship at work succeeds. Most people have encountered at one time or another in their working lives not only failures in communication—the mis-worded memo, the garbled telephone message, the ambiguous email, the undelivered letter, and so on. While each of these can cause problems for individuals and for the organization, most groups have learned to live with them and have developed corrective strategies. However, people also encounter another kind of communication failure: the harmful or even toxic communication that stems from painful or problematic relationships in the workplace. Here, too, communication scholars have described the characteristics of these relationships: bullying, free-riding, taking credit for more than one’s due, so forth. Many find these kinds of problems more troubling—and having greater consequences—since these kinds of communication failure corrode the very things that make organizations successful and can damage the people in them.

A first step in understanding such phenomena comes with description. The next comes with theory. How might we understanding what makes workplace relationships and communication work? How might we get beyond a simple list of what works and what does not work? Here, too, a number of scholars have explored how to explain, predict, and ameliorate, if not prevent, negative workplace communication.

In this issue of Communication Research Trends, David DeLuliiis and Sarah Flinko offer a review of one theoretical background that might explain both what succeeds and what does not: what they and their sources term, “professional civility.” Their essay situates professional civility in a much larger theory of culture and social change, suggesting that highly homogeneous societies did not need rules for civility, but that contemporary heterogeneity does. They draw a parallel to the behavioral norms like etiquette that allow strangers to coexist peacefully and even fruitfully. Their more philosophical turn examines a social theory of complex culture. Civility eases the tensions among people, allowing communication to function more smoothly. Analogous in some ways to the presuppositions of meaning that make ordinary conversation possible, civility sets a kind of minimum expectation in complex social encounters, which demand cooperation and collaboration.

But, they note, the more diverse society becomes, lacking the classical grounding of a shared polis, the medieval ground of a shared religion, or the Enlightenment ground of a shared epistemology, the more difficulty people have in finding any commonality. Here they argue for professional civility as a solution.

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1. Introduction

The topics of civility and incivility in the workplace have received much academic and popular attention. In the past few years alone, Stephen Carter’s Civility, Sara Hacala’s Saving Civility, Os Guinness’ The Case for Civility, Andrea Weckerle’s Civility in the Digital Age, and Cassandra Dahnke’s Reclaiming Civility in the Public Square, as well as Kent Weeks’s Doing Civility and In Search of Civility and P. M. Forni’s Choosing Civility and The Civility Solution all lament the loss of civility in society and offer guidelines for restoring the spirit of civility. Nevertheless, incivility is on the rise. In a 2014 survey conducted by public relations firm Weber Shandwick, over 90% of American adults thought that incivility in America was a problem, and over 60% believed that incivility had reached crisis levels in America (Weber Shandwick, 2014). In the same survey, 23% of Millennials (ages 18–33) believed that civility will get better in the future, compared to just 11% of Generation X (ages 34–50), 9% of Baby Boomers (ages 51–64), and 6% of the Silent Generation (aged 65–90) (Weber Shandwick, 2014).

Moreover, Millennials reported that they experience over nine instances of incivility every week, followed by seven for Generation X, five for Baby Boomers, and four for the Silent Generation (Weber Shandwick, 2014). More recently, Rose, Shuck, Twyford, and Bergman (2015) reported that between 13 and 36% of American workers have had a dysfunctional boss, defined as a leader who “impairs the function of performance and operation of the organization” (p. 2). Dysfunctional leaders engage in problematic behaviors from rudeness and taking undue credit to public insults and explosive outbursts (Rose et al., 2015). Many other scholars have searched the workplace for “weasels, tormentors, tyrants, serial slammers, despots, [and] unconstrained egotistical maniacs” (Sutton, 2007, p. 1). Popular business books make similar claims (Cava, 2004; Crowe, 1999; Gill, 1999; Jakes, 2005; Lubit, 2003; Solomon, 2002). All have found that problematic relationships in the workplace affect one’s quality of life, both personally and professionally (Fritz & Omdahl, 2006b; Omdahl & Fritz, 2012).

In this essay, we frame the concept of professional civility as an antidote to problematic relationships in the workplace. For both bodies of literature the connection to communication literature is through communication ethics. With communication ethics, Fritz (2013) and Arnett and Arneson (1999) and others build a bridge between professional civility and problematic relationships in the workplace. Communication ethics consists of goods—or those beliefs, values and worldviews that one protects and promotes—as well as the communicative practices through which one expresses those goods. The literature on professional civility concerns the goods that we protect and promote, and the literature on problematic relationships in the workplace concerns the ways in which we express those goods in the workplace. Professional civility is a response to narrative and virtue contention in postmodernity, in which failures to respond to postmodernity foster problematic relationships in the workplace.

Fritz (2013) proposes professional civility, or “communicative virtue at work,” as a pragmatic response to problematic relationships in the workplace (p. 1). For Fritz, the concept of professional civility reframes problematic relationships as sources of meaning rather than conflict in the workplace. Through professional civility, the work that makes up so much of a professional’s life becomes a “good” of human life (Fritz, 2013; Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). In the context of professional civility, problematic relationships “dis- close professional identity” as the purpose, or telos, of professional life (Fritz, 2013, pp. 135–136). Through professional civility, the purpose of professional life comes into phase with the telos of human life.
problematic relationships can reveal alternative paths to an organizational mission, professional civility reveals alternative paths for the common good of human life.

The path of this essay proceeds in three major sections. The first section, titled “Professional Civility,” reviews the work of Fritz (2013) and others on the theoretical foundations of professional civility. Professional civility responds to fragmentation in the historical moment of postmodernity that recombines the fragments of the original four professions within the framework of virtue ethics. The second section, titled “Problematic Relationships in the Workplace,” reviews the work of Fritz and Omdahl (2006a), Omdahl and Fritz (2012) and many others on problematic relationships in the workplace. When professional civility is absent, relationships in the workplace become problematic for both the organizational mission and human telos. The third section, titled “Implications of Professional Civility for Problematic Relationships in the Workplace,” frames problematic relationships in the workplace as a threat to professional civility, and offers professional civility as a corrective for problematic relationships in the workplace. Within the theoretical framework of professional civility, problematic relationships offer opportunities for working together amid narrative and virtue contention.

2. Professional Civility

Fritz (2013) defines professional civility as the “civil communicative practices fostering coordinated action in institutional settings that establish a minimal common ground of the good life together in organizations” (p. 3). In this section we situate the Fritz definition of professional civility within the historical moment of postmodernity. Professional civility responds to fragmentation in postmodernity by piecing together the fragments of modernity in service of shared goals. We next ground professional civility in virtue ethics. Within the framework of virtue ethics, professional civility protects and promotes the goods of particular organizations and the universal good of human life. Professional civility infuses the common good of “profession” into all specialties and divisions of labor, so that professionals feel fulfilled in their professions regardless of their job descriptions. Finally, we sketch the assumptions, which threaten professional civility, and the cynicism that produces problematic relationships in the workplace. Professional civility redefines what it means to work and reframes problematic relationships in the workplace as opportunities for reclaiming the common good of profession.

A. Theoretical foundation

The literature on professional civility as a communicative virtue in postmodernity consists of several books, most notably Professional Civility: Communicative Virtue at Work (2013) by Janie Harden Fritz, Dialogic Civility (1999) by Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson, and Communication Ethics Literacy (2009) by Ronald C. Arnett, Janie Harden Fritz, and Leeanne Bell McManus, as well as many chapters and articles scattered throughout the discipline. Although the tree of professional civility is relatively small compared to the forests of literature on civility per say, its intellectual roots extend into many philosophical schools with the following commonalities: a dynamic communication dependent on the cyclical motion of historicity (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). As opposed to history (defined as linear and chronological), historicity ties communicative acts to the questions of a given historical moment, rooted in its concepts and theories (Arnett & Arneson, 1999).

Responsiveness to the questions of a historical moment answers the why (praxis) behind the how (practice) of human communication. The “existential demand” of a historical moment provides a lens through which to interpret the appropriateness of communicative practices (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 35). Without the lens of a historical moment, organizations hold their employees to standards impossible to meet in postmodernity. Cynicism becomes routine and the logic of terrorism takes over, conflating narrative with ideology to recombine the fragments of modernity at any cost (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Professional civility is
driven by narrative, or a “story agreed upon by a group of people that provides limits within which we dwell as embedded communicative agents” (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009, p. 27). A narrative is open to difference and responsive to the questions of a historical moment. An ideology, on the other hand, is closed to difference.

Ideology attempts to stand above history and remake the historical moment in the image of the self. Ideologues ignore the “existential demand” of postmodernity, and impose a single perspective on the historical moment (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 35). Professional civility works within the limits of postmodernity to engage and learn from difference. Responsiveness to the historical moment is akin to Aristotle’s concept of phronesis, or practical wisdom. In the Nichomachean Ethics (350 BC), Aristotle defines the “good” as labor worthy of being done. The virtue of the good exists at the mean between the vices of excess and deficiency, determined through phronesis. To become virtuous and find happiness, one must not only study what virtue is, but also do virtuous things in the spirit of phronesis.

In the context of professional civility, phronesis is a contextual communication ethic within which phronesis emerges as a pragmatic response to narrative contention (Arnett, Arneson & Bell, 2006). Practical wisdom guides praxis in postmodernity. To “do” communication in postmodernity is to respond to concrete questions in the “interspaces” opened by the fragmentation of modernity’s metanarrative of progress (Arnett, 2012, p. 75). Professional civility turns the space between competing narratives into commonplaces, within which people engage difference on the common ground of the good of human life (Arnett, 2012). Through phronesis, people find common ground in the space between competing narratives. The narratives shape their communicative practices through praxis, or theory-informed action in a given profession (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009).

B. Professional civility in postmodernity

Professional civility plays out in the broadly-conceived historical moments of antiquity, Middle Ages, modernity, and postmodernity. We define historical moments by questions about what is worth dying for, or what should be “protected and promoted” (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009, p. 210). From Homer to the fall of the Roman empire, one’s sense of self was tied to one’s active role in the polis or public sphere around which everyday life revolved (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). For the ancients, the ultimate end of human existence, or human telos, was political activity in the Greek polis or Roman forum, through which one became virtuous, rational, and happy. In the Middle Ages, the polis gave way to the Church as a common good. In the early Middle Ages, the path of the human telos shifted with the Catholic Church from public performance to private contemplation. Medieval humanity sought to rediscover the secular culture of Greece and Rome and to integrate the secular learning of the Greeks with the sacred doctrine of the Church (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009).

Toward the end of the Middle Ages in the 15th and 16th centuries, modernity replaced the Church with the metanarrative of progress (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Modernity separated tradition from the self, which stood above history and watched progress. We characterize modernity by meta- or master narratives of progress through science and technology, as well as social and cultural unity and mass production and consumption (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Technologies such as Gutenberg’s printing press pushed the problematics of knowledge, universals, and individuation away from the sacred and secular and toward the social. Modernity subsumes the public responsibility of antiquity and the private intimacy of the Middle Ages into what Arendt (1958) calls the “social.” The social replaces competency, tested among equals, with individual worth, measured in social relationships, which can become problematic in the workplace with a lack of civility.

When unchecked progress led to World War I, then World War II and the Holocaust, people began to question modernity as a failure of the human condition that sacrificed the self to progress. The trend of thought called postmodernity reclaims the self, but fails to replace the polis, Church, or progress with its own metanarrative. Instead, postmodernity features virtue contention, where people cannot agree on a common good or how to be civil. The common good of postmodernity is difference, or lack of a common good (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Professional civility glues together the fragments of modernity in service of both an organizational mission and the human telos (p. 13). Fritz (2013) sees incivility in the workplace as a symptom of the “schizophrenic” spirit of postmodernity (Jameson, 1991, p. 10). Postmodernity “fractures” modernity’s metanarratives of progress, efficiency, and individual autonomy into many petite narratives, each
with its own objectives (Benhabib, 1992). Postmodernity rejects all master narratives and Grand Theories, and reflects social and cultural pluralism and disunity (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Postmodernity splits the human telos into many alternative paths, with fits and false starts, that lead everywhere and nowhere at once (Lyotard, 1979). People in postmodernity come together to accomplish a goal, but without a common narrative or shared locus of self-definition. In modernity, whatever traits are conducive to progress or successful in the market trump all else. Postmodernity, on the other hand, is characterized by fragmentation, where the self sets the standard for interaction with others.

Fritz (2013) and Arnett and Arneson (1999) offer professional civility as a guide to navigating narrative and virtue contention in postmodernity. Upon a theoretical foundation of virtue ethics in postmodernity, professional civility exposes the roots of problematic relationships in the workplace. For a growing body of researchers, incivility in the workplace results from fragmentation in postmodernity, shaped by the standards of a given profession. Changing standards and increased stress have fractured the original four professions—law, medicine, theology, and education—into many specialized fields, each with its own norms of behavior and incompatible standards of civility. To make sense of civility in postmodernity, Fritz (2013) ties civility to the “good” of professions. Civility forms a common ground that supports others within the setting of an organization and the standards of a profession. Since the term “profession” originally applied to only the four fields of theology, law, medicine, and education, civility occurred within somewhat narrow and homogeneous groups. Though definitions have changed, two enduring features have characterized “professions”: the autonomy that comes with a specialized knowledge base and a code of ethics embodied by individual professionals. This code of ethics defines the “good” of a particular organization and establishes standards for self-evaluation. Civility calls professionals to extend professionalism to co-workers, to the organization, and to the publics that the organization serves. Through professional civility, the practices of a profession become “habits of the heart” nourished and validated by the environment of an organization (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

Postmodernity fractures professions into specialized units “which require adherence to their own purposes” (Fritz, 2013, p. 12). When these purposes are violated, tensions arise between specialists over the supposed “good” of the same profession. Professional civility seeks to alleviate these tensions as a lowest common denominator across professions. Professional civility protects and promotes the “good” of profession as a carrier of communication ethics. Professional civility promotes productivity and protects the places and people of an organization. In protecting the good of profession, professional civility creates a community guided by shared practices rather than personal preferences (Fritz, 2013, p. 14). Professional civility frames the interactions of a workplace around the “good” of a profession, itself protected by professional civility. As a communicative virtue, professional civility foregrounds the good of a given profession as the “why” behind the “how” of communicative practices (Fritz, 2013).

Professional civility affirms the contention of competing narratives in postmodernity and responds with respect for differing perspectives in the space between public and private. Professional civility encourages honest and open dialogue in the space between public and private, all conflicts move the organization closer to its mission. Through public conflict grounded in professional civility, professions come into phase with their aims, that is with the good they seek to accomplish. In the public sphere, the goods of professions informs conflict in a way that augments private life and “impacts the productive life of people working together” (Arnett, 2013, p. 234). The organization-wide practice of professional civility cultivates a “community of memory” full of opportunities for promoting the good of the organization (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009, p. 137).

C. Virtue ethics and professional civility

As a virtue ethic, professional civility affirms differences in postmodernity. To outline professional civility as a virtue ethic, we first situate professional civility as a response to postmodernity. Next, we make the connection between civility and the professions.
Professional civility protects place, people, and productivity through the goods of a profession. The theory that informs the practice of professional civility begins with MacIntyre’s virtue ethics (1981). Through professional civility, the practices of communication within an organization come to protect and promote the good of the profession (Fritz, 2013). Professional civility situates communication in relation to the mission of the organization and telos of the profession. Amid virtue contention in postmodernity, professional civility transforms organizational practices into human virtues, oriented toward not only the organization’s mission, what it means to work at a particular place, but also a human telos, what it means to be a human being (Fritz, 2013). For example, professional educators come together in a given university (place) with students (people) to advance the university’s mission (productivity). In the dialectical service of place, people, and productivity, both students and teachers protect and promote the goods of the profession of education. Drawing from MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (1981), Fritz (2013) defines virtues as character traits that orient people to a good life, or Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*. Each profession has its own traditions and practices. The practices of a given profession protect the good of its tradition. Through professional civility, the practices fulfill the telos of human life in pursuit of a common organizational goal (Fritz, 2013, p. 26).

In the context of virtue ethics, professional civility “is a communicative virtue that protects and promotes respect for human beings and supports the various social contexts within which human lives find meaning and significance” (Fritz, 2013, p. 3). This definition draws on the work of Gecas (1981) on professional socialization, as well as that of Borden (2007) on standards of behavior. In the workplace, people enact roles determined by their skill sets and job descriptions. Within these roles, people engage other people, each with their own defined roles. These roles offer guidelines for communication among the individuals of an organization, where individuals become individuals through their role-driven participation in an organization. Individuals engage other individuals in their public roles, independent of their private personality. In the space between public and private, role-driven practices of communication sustain the mission of the organization, the good of the profession, and the telos of human life. People engage professional civility through their roles, which guide them “toward the enactment of the good” of their professions (Fritz, 2013, p. 27).

Professional ethics “provides narrative ground for virtuous professional practices,” informed by an organizational mission, or narrative (Fritz, 2013, p. 32). Virtue ethics protects the narrative and, through professional civility, promotes a sense of community within the narrative. For Fritz, “virtues are tied to a community—in the case of the professions, to a professional community that one is initiated into and contributes to as a member” (Fritz, 2013, p. 36). And the practice of public friendship sustains community by opening possibilities for virtuous behavior within the organizational *polis*. The virtuous practice of public friendship upholds and fosters community built on professional civility which, in turn, fulfills the telos of human life: a “human life at its best” (Fritz, 2013, p. 40). Unlike thoughtless habit or empty rhetoric, organizational practices informed by professional civility are virtues, goods in and of themselves. By engaging in communication practices, people fulfill the telos of human life through the traditions of their professions (Fritz, 2013).

**D. The “profession” in professional civility**

The term “profession” is colloquially understood as any occupation dealing with specialized work (Fritz, 2013). Within this framework of virtue ethics, Fritz defines a profession as a “socially established and cooperative human activity embedded within a tradition and aimed at some good end” (p. 48). This definition of profession has a long and winding history. The root of the word profession is the Latin *professio*, to declare publically (p. 50). In the 13th century, the term “profession” separated the secular from the religious and referred to the vows taken before joining a religious order (p. 51). In the later Middle Ages, the term grew beyond theology to include any “sense of dignity” associated with both secular and religious occupations, while retaining the aura of a religious call to faith (Fritz, 2013, p. 51; Kimball, 1995). With the emergence of terms such as “learned” and “liberal” professions, the professional calling lost its religious reference. The “professions” came to signify not only education and intellectualism, but also social status and access to financial resources, driven by “selfless service” in the fields of theology, law, medicine, and education (Fritz, 2013, p. 51).

In the late 19th century, Adam Smith’s metaphor of the “invisible hand” of the market became a metaphor for social relations in modernity. In modernity, professional callings came not from God, but from
the market. Occupations were not professed before God, but determined by professionals according to what the market valued (Fritz, 2013). Out of the shift from professed to professional emerged the “the ideal professions,” of politics and law, which embraced the ethos of modernity while retaining the “sense of dignity” associated with theology (Fritz, 2013). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, education emerged as a fourth profession. Like politics and law, early education was committed to training young capitalists with theological dedication. As modernity began to fracture in the mid to late 20th century, so did the professions (Fritz, 2013). The original four professions fragmented into many specialized fields, each with own claim to the status of profession. Postmodernity separates the professions from social responsibility, and professionals from the goods of their professions. Rather than callings and commitment, licenses and litigation separate the professions (Sullivan, 2005). The framework of virtue ethics seeks to reclaim the commitment to the common good embodied by original professions. The “selfless service” that characterized the ancient professions sustains postmodern organizations.

**E. The goods of professions**

Communication ethics looks for “goods,” or what people protect and promote in a given historical moment (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Professions protect and promote the goods of productivity, place, and people (Fritz, 2013). For example, a shared commitment to place makes people more productive. Productivity “permits the organization to thrive and contributes to the realization of the good of persons as contributing beings” (p. 58). People who feel that their work contributes to something they believe in will be more productive. In this case, productivity becomes a service to the common good, performed within an organizational community, or place. Attention to place protects the center of an organizational community, the public home of workers. As a good of profession, place is akin to Martin Heidegger’s understanding of dwelling, as articulated in his lectures on technology (1954/1977) and in his magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1927/1962). For Heidegger, dwelling nurtures a community through a mutual sense of the present, flanked by a known historical past and predicted future. Dwelling is a projection of being-in-the-world, of one’s identity in relation to Being (Heidegger, 1927). People invest more of themselves in dwellings, such as the childhood home, than buildings, such as a classroom or workplace. Through professional civility, people care for an organization as a dwelling that houses the good of their professions.

Arnett and Arneson (1999) cite American philosopher Nel Noddings’s “ethic of caring” (1984) to illustrate the relationship between care and professional civility (p. 243). For Noddings, care begins at the level of lived experience, not the “language of principle and demonstration” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 244). Noddings situates care within a theoretical dialectic from deduction (universal axiom to particular cases) to induction (particular cases to universal axiom) to abduction (explanation from unexpected or anomalous circumstances). Within the dialectic, care takes the form of complete emotional immersion, where one loses one’s sense of self in service of someone else, or impartial abstraction, where one explains the meaning of a situation with objective distance (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Women tend to approach moral problems from the standpoint of caring, by immersing themselves in the situation (Arnett & Arneson, 1999).

This approach activates past emotions, feelings and memories that inform the present response. The experience of femininity generates a world view grounded in genuine caring, a shared reality between caregiver and cared-for. Noddings identifies several aspects of caring. In one sense, caring becomes a burden. In another, caring manifests a desire to serve another. In a third sense, caring shows respect for another’s interests and views. Noddings understands care in the “deep human sense,” as the phenomenological relationship between caregiver and cared-for (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 244). For Noddings, care involves “taking on the other’s reality,” then acting based on that shared reality as the other (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 244). Professional civility exists at the intersection of caregiver and cared-for, aligning the reality of the caregiver and reality of the cared-for to align. Noddings’s ethic of care protects the place that houses the good of an organization in several ways.

The “organizational home” describes the place where people with conflicting perspectives work together toward a common goal, guided by professional civility (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009, p. 158). As “organizational citizens” (Fritz, 2013, p. 154), people care for the goods of their profession through the communicative practices defined by their role. Within Noddings’s ethics of care, professional civility recog-
nizes and respects the limits of postmodernity, while offering possibilities for working together amid narrative contention. The nature of the relationship between caregiver and cared-for depends on the situations of both. At one time, the caregiver occupies a position to care, and the cared-for needs care. Another time may reverse the situation (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 245). Care for an organization guided by professional civility respects the roles of cared-for and caregiver within a differentiated public sphere. Professional civility directs those in need of care to caregivers, and caregivers to those in need of care.

Noddings’s ethics of care also guides interactions between people. An organization flourishes when people protect and promote their organizational home through communicative practices. To care for an organization means to believe in what the organization stands for, that is, the direction in which it is headed. This understanding of care orientates the self away from itself and toward the organization. Like professional civility, care opens possibilities for an organization to achieve its mission through communicative practices. Members and outsiders judge communicative practices against the “public standard” of the mission, which the communicative practices, in turn, shape in a dialectic of care (Fritz, 2013, p. 164). Each stage of the dialectic depends on genuine, “open-ended” dialogue, where each party respects the other without presupposing the outcome (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 240). Constructive dialogue buttresses an organizational home, allowing it withstand change that results from disagreement. An organization buttressed by constructive dialogues contributes to a culture of caring for people.

Finally, professions protect and promote the good of people. The good of professions opens paths both for an organization to achieve its mission and for people to maintain professional relationships in public pursuit of the mission. Professions never sacrifice people to productivity. When workers support and encourage each other to achieve a shared goal, they reveal alternative paths to the goal, paved with professional civility (Fritz, 2013, p. 168). The idea of alternative paths resembles Arendt’s adaptation of Kant’s “enlarged mentality,” which Arnett, Fritz, and Bell (2009) describe as concerns for “those not at the table” (p. 111). As a result, the organization grows within the limits of roles and boundaries of public and private. Noddings’ concept of “confirmation,” which calls for co-workers to acknowledge the best in each other and work to bring it out in support of the organization (Noddings 1984, pp. 193–197), also bears on this issue. Confirmation strengthens interpersonal relationships in the workplace which, in turn, contribute to the common good of the organizational home.

From the perspective of professional civility within an ethics of care, people participate not only in an organizational community, but also in a human community that shapes the practices of an organization. Professionals are professionals for others (Fritz, 2013). Professional work occurs with and for the human community first, and with and for the organizational community second (Fritz, 2013, p. 60). The goods of place, people, and productivity exist in dialectical tension within an organizational home. In protecting place, people become more productive. As more productive workers, they promote the place through their productivity. These three goods (place, people, and productivity) then constitute the good of profession. When the goods of place, people, and productivity line up and work in tandem, people protect and promote a given place through productivity. The organization benefits from the productivity, and the people from a culture of caring for the place as an “element of human phenomenological consciousness” (Fritz, 2013, p. 61). Protecting the good of profession phenomenologically engages place, where people affirm the lived experience of productivity in support of something bigger than themselves. The something bigger than the self is itself a good, created and sustained through the practice of a profession.

F. Threats to professional civility

Virtue contention in postmodernity promotes cynicism, one of the biggest threats to professional civility. Each historical moment poses questions that reveal the common good: what people consider important, or what they are willing to die for (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). However, postmodernity highlights disputes over the common good. With so many questions and so many possible answers, people become cynical about the possibility of a common good, especially within an organization. To overcome that cynicism, one must respect and respond to the questions of a given historical moment (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Each historical moment demands phenomenological engagement with the common good, revealed through dialectical questioning and
response. Cynicism results from a mismatch between the questions of a given moment and the lived experience of everyday life. When the historical moment does not meet everyday life, cynicism becomes a routine “propelled by those who do not listen to the historical moment” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 14). Words become further and further detached from action, public absorbs public, and people cling to their own beliefs with close-minded commitment.

With no common good, people chase conspiracy theories and fall into repeated patterns of believing the worst in others and assuming that everything has a hidden meaning or message (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Cynical people with no shared good or goal distrust each other’s motives and become hostile toward other perspectives, anything different from one’s own received beliefs. Widespread cynicism leads to “interpersonal rootlessness,” the lack of a guiding narrative in interpersonal interactions (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 4). Drawing from the philosophies of Calvin Schrag and Paul Ricoeur, Arnett and Arneson (1999) argue that without a guiding narrative adaptive to difference, people fall into “existential mistrust” not only of differing perspectives, but also of existence itself (p. 16). The difference between rootlessness and rootedness resembles Schrag’s distinction between practice (or unreflective habit or routine) and praxis (or action informed by theory and reflection) (Arnett & Arnett, 1999, p. 6). Similarly, Ricoeur grounds communication in metaphors, which create new meaning, and narrative, which fashions metaphors into a story, subject to time (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, pp. 6–7). In both cases, meaning emerges in communicative praxis, “in the doing” of communication in metaphors and narrative (Arnett & Holba, 2012, p. 9).

For Arnett and Arneson (1999), reflective, theory-informed cynicism appears as a natural response to narrative contention. When cynicism becomes unreflective and routine, people lose the ability to “distinguish the important, the vital, and in some cases the sacred from the profane and the trivial” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 13). Professional civility engages narrative contention from an open stance of additive learning; routine cynicism pulls apart competing narratives glued by professional civility. With more and more narratives, routine cynics cling to their beliefs more and more tightly with an attitude of angst such as reflected in the existential novels of Franz Kafka and Albert Camus. While routine cynicism ignores the historical moment, choosing instead to focus on the self in despair, professional civility responds to postmodernity with hope reflected in a rhetoric of “we” and “us” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). As a communicative practice, routine cynicism marks out a lie to oneself that recreates reality based on one’s own biases, rather than through metaphors that disclose the world in new ways. Routine cynicism separates words from actions, and sacrifices praxis to practice. In response, professional civility returns to the role that every human shares: living within the limits of the historical moment.

Postmodernity creates and enforces limits for dialogic engagement (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). People who protect and promote the polis, Church, or progress with a classical, medieval, or modern mindset must also be open to differing perspectives, the good of postmodernity. In the classical, medieval, and modern moments, there was no question about the common good (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). In postmodernity, people question what counts as a good, and what good could possibly galvanize such diversity. The relationship of good to historical moment depends on the questions people ask, as well as on their responses embodied in communicative practices (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Professional civility affirms plurality in postmodernity. It forms the glue that holds together differing narratives so that people can work together to accomplish a goal. Professional civility recognizes limits to productivity and guards the boundaries of public and private. An organization guided by professional civility never demands the whole lives of its employees, but only their public commitment as defined by their role in service of their profession (Fritz, 2013). Guided by professional civility, employees should extend respect to other employees within the boundaries of public and private. Professional civility responds to postmodernity by acknowledging that, like postmodernity, organizations are fragmented, consisting of diverse perspectives and frames of reference (Fritz, 2013). Professional civility provides the common ground for competing perspectives to complete tasks in service of the organizational mission.
3. Problematic Relationships in the Workplace

The lack of professional civility can lead to problems for an individual, the workplace, and the culture. As pointed out in the previous section, cynicism marks that failure in individuals; this overflows into the culture in the form of limited dialogic engagement. Within the workplace, the failure of professional civility brings the added consequence of problematic relationships, the focus of this section.

The section outlines the extant literature on problematic relationships in the workplace in five parts. The first part, “Overview of Problematic Relationships in the Workplace,” identifies commonalities in the disparate and interdisciplinary literature on problematic relationships in the workplace. The second part, “Types of Problematic Relationships in the Workplace,” provides an overview of the many efforts to categorize and compartmentalize the forms and functions of problematic relationships in the workplace. The third part, “Health of Workplace Relationships,” locates in several types of troublesome bosses and subordinates the organizational causes of problematic relationships in the workplace. The fourth part, “Organizational Culture Shock,” proposes Ward, Bochner, and Furnham’s (2001) five phases of culture shock as examples of what happens when the boundaries of workplace relationships are breached by unknowing or unconcerned others. The final section, “Exclusion and Identity in the Workplace,” reviews the issues of communication that arise when the physical appearance of an employee fails to match the cultural assumptions about his or (most often) her job description. As a whole, these five parts offer a glimpse of the growing literature on problematic relationships in the workplace and the interdisciplinary efforts to identify the point at which relationships in the workplace turn problematic.

A. Overview of problematic relationships in the workplace

Scholars use several disciplinary terms when discussing problematic workplace relationships, such as organizational or workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Bennett & Robinson, 2003), organizational misbehavior (Vardi & Wiener, 1996; De Schrijver, Delbeke, Maesschalck, & Pleysier, 2010), insidious workplace behavior (Greenberg, 2011), social undermining (Gant, Nagda, Brabson, Jayaratne, Chess, & Singh, 1993; Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Neuman & Baron, 1998), workplace bullying (Rayner & Hoel, 1997), employee abuse (Lutven-Sandvik, 2003), antisocial behavior (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997), and incivility (Fritz, 2013; Fritz & Omdahl, 2006a; Omdahl & Fritz, 2012). Rose, Shuck, Twyford, and Bergman (2015) searched 260 articles for characteristics of dysfunctional bosses, then organized the characteristics into four quadrants with annoyance and trauma on the abscissa and high dysfunction and low dysfunction on the ordinate (p. 8). The acts of undermining, rudeness, withholding information, taking undue credit, and having unfair or unrealistic expectations fell between annoyance and low dysfunction (Rose et al., 2015, p. 8). The acts of disrespect, overwork, public ridicule, and controlling behavior appeared more traumatic, but still low in dysfunction. The acts of angry tantrums, intentional lying, silent treatment, holding favors hostage, and concentration of employee weaknesses were highly dysfunctional, but more annoying than traumatic. Finally, the acts of explosive outbursts, bribes, derision, vindictiveness, intimidation, insults, yelling, coercing, threats, public scorn, physical mistreatment, destructive criticism, and telling employees they are stupid were both traumatic and highly dysfunctional (Rose et al., 2015).

All of these behaviors contribute to problematic relationships in the workplace, the “interactional locus” of workplace misbehavior research (Fritz, 2013, p. 21). These terms refer to different aspects of problematic relationships, with one commonality: “almost all of the behaviors are perpetrated by members of the organization, directed at the organization and its members, and intentional and (potentially) harmful” (Fritz, 2012a, p. 5). Problematic relationships in the workplace can begin at the bottom of the organization and move upward, when lower-level employees undercut their supervisors, or begin at the top of the organization and move downward, with behaviors such as “destructive leadership behavior, petty tyranny, abusive supervision and dysfunctional leadership” (p. 9). Either way, communication schol-
ars have shown an interest in aspects of the communicative environments within which misbehaviors become problematic relationships.

One such aspect is trust (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006). In both public and private relationships, trust correlates with job satisfaction and overall happiness, as well as feelings of honesty, openness, competence, dependability, and reliability (Davenport Sypher & Gill, 2012, pp. 85–87). An organization-wide culture of trust implicitly discourages misbehavior and rewards productivity in service of an organizational mission; an organization-wide culture of mistrust makes people pick and choose whom to trust and sets mistrust as a default norm for the organization and mode of behavior for incoming employees (Davenport Sypher & Gill, 2012). Trust extends from employees to the organization, from the organization to employees, and from employees to other employees in a “mutuality of concern” for the organizational mission (Beebe & Masterson, 2015, p. 60). A violation of trust in any of these spheres leads to incivility or “acting rudely or discourteously without regard for others, in violation of norms of respect in social interaction” (Davenport Sypher & Gill, 2012, p. 88).

On the individual level of analysis, researchers most often operationalize incivility through employee self-reports of the frequency of disrespectful, rude, or condescending behaviors from supervisors or other employees (Davenport Sypher & Gill, 2012, p. 91). For instance, Davenport Sypher and Gill (2012) surveyed 468 employees of a large organization and found that workplace incivility correlated negatively with overall interpersonal trust (p. 96). Incivility or mistrust affect the relationship between employee and employer through the “everyday, repeated interactions in the relationship” (p. 97). Pfieffer (2006) attributes the negative correlation between trust and incivility to more individual and competitive relationships as opposed to communal and cooperative relationships (p. 100).

On an organizational level, scales such as the Organizational Trust Index measure the level of trust between an organization and its stakeholders (La Porta, Lopez de-Silanes, Shleifer, & Vishny, 1996). Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, and Cesaria (2000) identify five factors of organizational trust: competence (effectiveness of co-workers and leaders), openness and honesty (amount, accuracy, and sincerity of information shared), concern for employees (exhibition of empathy, tolerance, and safety), reliability (consistent and dependable actions), and identification (sharing common goals, values, and beliefs). Organizations with high levels of trust benefit from more adaptive organizational structures, strategic alliances, responsive virtual teams, effective crisis management, and reduced transaction and litigation costs (Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, & Cesaria, 2000).

B. Types of problematic relationships in the workplace

The literature on problematic relationships in the workplace draws heavily from a larger literature on problematic relationships in interpersonal communication (e.g. Giordano, Soto, Manning, & Longmore, 2010) and organizational communication (e.g., Markus, 1994), as well as in psychology (e.g., Caplan, 2003) and the human science of communication (e.g., Fritz & Omdahl, 2006a; Omdahl & Fritz, 2012). The labels of “problematic” or “oppressive” or “difficult” have their grounding in “rhetorics of motives, attributions, and accounts” defined by one’s personal identity and public role, not anything intrinsic in the individual (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 4). In the workplace, the act of labeling another individual as problematic is “socially-charged”, or shaped by the public standards of the organization and private perceptions of other individuals (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 6). What groups or individuals consider “problematic” differs from organization to organization (p. 6). The variability across organizations places “situational constraints” on employees, who must match their personalities to their public role (p. 6). The label “problematic,” then, becomes bound up with the identities of the problematic person and the person oppressed by the problem (p. 7). Once labeled problematic, the oppressor must redefine his or her organizational identity to match the organizational standard through the metaphors of containment, production, and equivalence (p. 9).

The containment metaphor considers the organization a static entity within which communication occurs, like a slide on a microscope (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 9). Through containment, employees match their behavior to a fixed standard set by the organization. The production metaphor sees organizational culture as a dynamic process of co-creation, where the organization and employees negotiate standards of behavior (p. 9). Communicative practices become patterns of communication; patterns of communication become organizational standards; and orga-
izational standards provide resources for future communication (p. 9). Finally, the equivalence metaphor equates organization and communication. Communication constitutes organization, and organization constitutes communication. In all three cases, employees may experience role strain when their personal identity and public persona become out of phase (e.g., Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). A mismatch between employee conduct and organizational standard generates three types of workplace tension: person-to-person incompatibility, role-to-role incompatibility, and person-to-role incompatibility (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

Person-to-person incompatibility occurs when two people share public responsibilities, but cannot reconcile their personal differences (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Person-to-person incompatibility creates problematic workplace relationships when isolated incivility congeals into a commonplace communicative practice, concretized by one’s role. Role-to-role incompatibility occurs when people dislike or do not fit their roles (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006). A role determines the behavior of the person in the role. When two mismatched roles must work together, the personalities of the people in the roles overshadow the roles themselves, blurring the boundary between person and role. Person-to-role incompatibility occurs when a person’s role does not fit their personality, even if the person if not problematic outside the role (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006). When roles require aggressive leadership from a passive person or passive submission from an aggression person, the roles “bring organizational constraints to bear through interpersonal interaction” (p. 16).

C. Health of workplace relationships

The health of workplace relationships closely relates to one’s overall well-being (Omdahl & Fritz, 2006). To assess the health of workplace relationships, Fritz (2006) divides workplace relationships into three types—bosses, peers, and subordinates—each with its own set of subcategories for when the type becomes troublesome. Six categories of troublesome bosses emerged. The (1) Defensive Tyrant is incompetent and fearful for his or her job. The Defensive Tyrant has no regard for ethics and will do anything to keep the job. Like the Defensive Tyrant, the (2) Taskmaster ignores ethical standards. The Taskmaster makes excessive and unrealistic task demands, sometimes unrelated to work. The (3) Different Boss works within ethical standards, but does the work differently from the ways that his or her subordinates would do the work. Unlike the Different Boss, the (4) Sand in the Gears brings personal problems to work and lets personal problems interfere with public responsibilities. Like the Sand in the Gears, the (5) Extreme Unprofessional is critical and manipulative, always worried about “looking good” to superiors (Fritz, 2006, pp. 22–23). Lastly, the (6) Okay Boss is overly careful and noncommittal, with few negative or positive characteristics. All of these troublesome bosses redirect the focus of employees from the organizational mission to the petty problems of their peers.

Eight categories of troublesome peers emerged. The (1) Independent Other resists the role-based authority of co-workers, and clings to his or her independence at the expense of the organizational community. The (2) Soap Opera Star makes private problems public and distracts others with gossip about co-workers unrelated to work. The (3) Bully is an expert delegator who takes credit for the work of others and demands that the work be done his or her way, regardless of role. The (4) Adolescent is a young employee preoccupied with promotion and who works only when watched. Like the Adolescent, the (5) Self-protector is driven by self-interest and values the self over the community. The (6) Rebellious Playboy/girl defies legitimate authority through sexual innuendo. The (7) Abrasive, Incompetent Harasser combines the characteristics of the previous six peer types, especially the Rebellious Playboy/girl. Lastly, the (8) Mild Annoyance is neither positive nor negative, just listless (Fritz, 2006, p. 23). All of these types of troublesome peers blur boundaries between public and private, and authority and subordinate.

Five categories of troublesome subordinates emerged. The (1) Intrusive Unprofessional undermines authority through rumor and gossip, like the Extreme Unprofessional boss and Soap Opera Star peer. The (2) Harmless Busybody is also intrusive, but simply for the sake of being intrusive rather than to harm the object of inquiry. The (3) Backstabbing Self-Promoter sets the self above the community and looks for opportunities to embarrass or belittle co-workers. The (4) Incompetent Renegade is incompetent and knows it, but still refuses to rely on anyone else. Lastly, the (5) Abrasive, Incompetent Harasser exhibits traits of the Intrusive Unprofessional, Harmless Busybody, Backstabbing
Self-Promoter, and Incompetent Renegade, depending on the day. For both bosses and peers, perceptions of these roles were important: “patterns of perception of persons at one’s own status level may be a relatively enduring part of the perceptual landscape of organizational roles” (Fritz, 2006, p. 43). The behaviors associated with these types of troublesome subordinates became mixed up with defined role of the troublesome person, to the point where others came to expect troublesome behavior from a given role, regardless of who filled it (Fritz, 2006).

D. Organizational culture shock

People negotiate the culture of an organization through communicative practices (Millhous, 2012). And personal identity emerges from the negotiation of organization culture: “speakers negotiate their identities so that the cultural identity they ascribe to the other person comes into synchrony with the avowed cultural identity of that person” (Millhous, 2012, p. 168). When negotiated public identities come into phase with avowed private identities, people have at hand the resources for making attributions about communicative practices in relation to organizational culture. Communicative practices carry charges, or valences, that define the difficulty of workplace behaviors. Difficulty in the workplace stems from difference, which can foster jealousy, anger, and perceptions of inequality (Millhous, 2012, p. 163). Difference stems from culture, or the “behavioral sequences that evolve idiosyncratically in a group over time” and are “connected with meaning for the group” (Millhous, 2012, p. 166). Following Ward, Bochner, and Furnham’s (2001), culture-difference hypothesis—the more cultural diversity, the more potential for problems—Millhous (2012) argues that people unfamiliar with the culture of an organization are more likely to see anomalous behavior as a cultural norm, or the reverse.

Based on misinformation, they mistakenly attribute problematic behavior to organizational culture and see “the use of power and inflicting pain on others as appropriate within a work relationship” (Millhous, 2012, p. 171). Combined with authoritative personalities, ambiguous organizational culture creates the conditions for culture shock, or the feeling resulting from a change in setting or environment (Holba, 2008). Culture shock advances in five stages:

1. Honeymoon Phase—where one feels happy about a new environment and often overlooks emerging disappointment and flaws in the new environment.
2. Comparison Phase—where one compares and contrasts experiences in both the old and the new environments. One considers how it is to how it was. In this phase one might feel frustration with those differences which might be exaggerated.
3. Negotiation Phase—where one begins to negotiate through differences. The focus of attention shifts from the self as an outsider to the tasks that need to be done in the new environment.
4. Clarity Phase—where one begins to see differences between environments more clearly and one can determine what is an advantage and what is a disadvantage. This phase marks one’s adjustment to the new environment.
5. New Perspective Phase—where one returns to the old environment and begins to see the old environment in a different way. One realizes that one cannot turn back time and therefore comes to see the old and the new environments in a new way (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Culture shock “creates a steep learning curve” made steeper with every communication interaction with bosses, peers, or subordinates (Millhous, 2012, p. 174). Moreover, changing personal circumstances, such as family or financial problems, retard the process of acclimation. Through the challenges of culture shock, individuals “create a new understanding of themselves as cultural individuals within a new cultural context,” sometimes with little or no understanding of the new context (p. 174). Cultural confusion results when two individuals claim the same culture with contradictory understandings of what the culture means, or when roles are ill-defined in relation to the organizational mission. Organizational culture constitutes the “symbolic convergence” of personal identity and public role, where personal identity plays out as a public role in pursuit of a shared organizational mission.

E. Exclusion and identity in the workplace

Kanter’s (1977) Tokenism theory states that minority individuals, such as women in the 1960s and 1970s, were “tokens” of diversity in workplace situations (Collins, Gill, & Mease, 2012, p. 191). The label of token connotes identity-based differences, such as gender, race, or sexual orientation, as well as role-based assumptions about industries and job titles and
Many often association job titles with certain identity-based characteristics, with higher-ranking jobs meant for white men (Collins, Gill, & Mease, 2012). A mismatch between the identity of a person and assumptions about their role mark the person as a token of diversity. Tokens embody the interplay of social stereotypes, occupational assumptions, and numerical rarity (p. 193). Tokenism appears unlikely when a numerically minority individual “fits” the status quo assumptions of his or her job; on the other hand, when stereotypes of the same individual do not fit the assumptions of the job, tokenism appears more likely. The feelings associated with tokenism can be negative, when the token feels excluded, or positive, when the token feels that others notice him or her (Collins, Gill, & Mease, 2012). There is nothing innate or hard-wired about the phenomenon of tokenism; rather conversation and communicative practices rhetorically construct the token. For instance, some perceive a female doctor unfit in a role meant for males, while they see her male nurse as a trespasser in a facilitatory role meant for females (Collins, Gill, & Mease, 2012).

To make sense of this in the workplace, Arnett and Arneson (1999) turn to the work of Carol Gilligan, who examines moral judgment and personal identity among adult and adolescent women. Gilligan argues that as women develop unique world views, their worlds become more and more male-dominated (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Whereas boys buy into a culture of masculinity early on, “girls try to maintain their own thoughts and feelings while trying to fit an image” (p. 158). As women mature, they move away from their own thoughts and feelings, and toward society’s image of what a woman should look like. The woman feels “disconnected” from her adolescence because those experiences appear no longer relevant to society’s image of an adult female (p. 161). At the same time, as an adult female she is “excluded” from relationships in the male-dominated workplace (Sias, 2012, p. 117). As the woman’s adolescent feelings move out of phase with her adult world view, her adult world view moves out of phase with workplace culture: “Thus, relational exclusion is often marked by a noticeable lack or absence of verbal communication. This absence, paradoxically, speaks volumes to an employee about his or her role in the social network” (p. 107). Sias ties relational exclusion in the workplace to tokenism and numerical rarity. Women and minorities with high-ranking jobs are perceived as “outsiders within” a male-dominated environment, making it difficult to form close relationships with colleagues who are demographically dissimilar (p. 108).

In this case, women are not only disconnected from their peers, but also alienated from their social environment role or position (p. 113). Arnett and Arneson (1999) examine Gilligan’s work on female maturation within the framework of “responsibility in relationship-grounded caring” (p. 161). Because femininity is socially constructed in relation to a masculine ideal, women “must practice resistance to social and cultural conventions that mute her own voice” (p. 161). These cultural conventions enter the workplace through “relational exclusion,” or the practice of marginalizing those who cannot meet a minimum threshold of masculinity (Sias, 2012, p. 108). If women do meet the threshold for masculinity, they cannot match society’s image of femininity and are excluded just the same. Moreover, those who do not match an image of masculinity or femininity are seen as less productive and less capable of contributing to organizational mission (Sias, 2012). Their personal self-esteem suffers and so does their public productivity: “exclusion, whether intentional or not, provides a blow to the isolated individual’s self-concept and self-esteem” (p. 113). Identity develops in relation to cultural conventions constructed in conversation. When one’s identity strays too far from convention, or convention from one’s identity, culture excludes the rebel and calls her (in Gilligan’s view) problematic, in much the same way that cultures define disability in relation to conventions of normality constructed by able-bodied men.

In this section we put a large and growing literature on problematic relationships in the workplace into conversation with a newer literature on professional civility. All of the manifestations of problematic relationships in the workplace described in this section are natural but unnecessary responses to fragmentation in postmodernity. Professional civility as understood by Fritz calls people to come together in service of a shared objective, such as an organizational mission statement. People look for the worst in each other when they focus on each other’s personalities or physical characteristics instead of the shared objective. When co-workers come to rely on each other to achieve an organizational mission that parallels the human telos, people bring out the best in each other, developing meaningful relationships that revolve around the goods of a given profession instead of problematic relationships in the workplace.
4. Implications of Professional Civility for Problematic Relationships in the Workplace

This final section offers implications for considering problematic relationships in the workplace from the perspective of professional civility. We describe Arnett and Arneson’s (1999) call for a return to narrative ground in the workplace, then diagnose problematic relationships in the workplace as symptomatic of a misdirected “focus of attention” (Buber, 1937/2004). When an organization’s focus of attention fails to protect the shared space among employees and “between” (Buber, 1937/2004) employees and the organization, employees feel forced to engage in emotional labor for the organization. We briefly sketch the growing literature on emotional labor, then describe professional civility as a strategy for emotion management. Finally, we offer professional civility as a way to find meaning in postmodern organizations, where meaning is sifted through many specializations and divisions of labor. Arnett and Arneson (1999) provide a snapshot of professional civility that can be set into motion with a return to the narrative ground of particular organizations around the common good of profession.

A. A return to narrative ground

Arnett and Arneson (1999) enrich the literature on problematic relationships in the workplace with their call for narrative ground. Postmodernity replaces modernity’s metanarrative of progress with many, petit narratives, each with different biases and assumptions. In a historical moment defined by difference, Arnett and Arneson reclaim difference as common ground for overcoming problematic relationships in the workplace. For Arnett and Arneson, “a public narrative is a means to invite common ground between communicators. Narrative serves as a background for communicative action” (p. 52). Drawing from French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Arnett and Arneson argue that narrative infuses communicative action with purpose within a shared public space, or “narratival neighborhood” (Schrag, 2003). The difference between an organization with a narrative and an organization without a narrative approaches Ricoeur’s distinction between appropriation and distanciation, as articulated in his 1976 book Interpretation Theory. He defines appropriation as the hermeneutic act of making the unfamiliar one’s own. In appropriation, one uses one what one already knows to understand a new situation.

Distanciation, on the other hand, allows for meaning to emerge from the situation independently of the author’s intentions. Distanciation requires distance from the situation, or “semantic autonomy” (Ricoeur, 1976). Through Ricoeur, Arnett and Arneson (1999) call for constructive engagement with others and the organization with an appropriate balance of appropriation and distanciation. Ignorance of pubic narrative or an imbalance of appropriation and distanciation dismisses the common ground of professional civility and creates the conditions for problematic workplace relationships. For instance, Liu and Buzzanell (2006) tell the story of Lucy, a young woman who left her job after the birth of her first child. Lucy clashed with her boss and blamed her disagreements on irreconcilable differences, as well as on a perceived lack of support throughout her difficult pregnancy and lengthy maternity leave. Lucy’s boss argued that Lucy lost support when she looked for loopholes in company policy and flaunted the company’s very progressive policy on pregnancy. Both Lucy and her boss failed to acknowledge the narrative of the other or to find common ground within their shared organizational home (Liu & Buzzanell, 2006).

Like the relationship between Lucy and her boss, relationships between friends in the workplace can become problematic without respect for personal and public narratives. Friendships in the workplace can deteriorate in several ways, including problem personalities, distracting life events, conflicting expectations, promotion, and betrayal or backstabbing (Sias, 2006, p. 72). Narratives bring meaning and purpose to deteriorating friendships. Narrative provides a “fulcrum” for friendship, through which personal convictions takes public shape (Arnett & Holba, 2012). The common ground of narrative redirects one’s attention away from oneself and toward the other, without compromising one’s own convictions. For Arnett (2012), “the soil for the problematic Other . . . is not only nourished by individualism but fertilized by monad-like disregard for
others” (p. 150). In postmodernity, difference offers the only common ground. In the workplace, narrative creates the common ground that fuels genuine friendship.

Problematic relationships in the workplace stem from a mismatch between one’s behavior and the limits of one’s role, as well as from “perceived external demands” about the role itself (Omdahl & Fritz, 2006, p. 111). Problematic relationships create stress that, combined with the pressure to be more productive, can lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion (p. 111). Emotional exhaustion occurs when “caretakers feel fatigued, worn out, and generally unable to summon sufficient energy to adequately perform their jobs” (p. 111). In the case of emotional exhaustion, the demands of work overwhelm the worker. Emotional exhaustion creates negative emotional states that affect both professional and non-professional relationships (Maslach, 1979).

Without proper care, emotional exhaustion leads to long-term loss of concentration, satisfaction, and self-esteem, as well as “problems with emotional, psychological, and physical health and well-being” (Kinney, 2012, p. 75). In a workplace filled with emotionally exhausted people, one’s co-workers become sources of both support and stress (Fritz & Omdahl, 2006, p. 131). The level of emotional exhaustion is a function of the ranking of the role (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). From the perspective of the subordinate, emotional exhaustion tends to be greater in problematic relationships with superiors, rather than those between co-workers or between superiors and subordinates from the perspective of the superior (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Omdahl & Fritz, 2006).

A problematic relationship with one’s boss can decrease commitment to the organization and increase burnout and emotional exhaustion (Fritz & Omdahl, 2006, p. 135). For instance, Hess and Sneed (2012) asked people how they coexist with a problematic other in the workplace. Many respondents said they minimized interaction and concentrated on their work, which indicates “that doing their job well was a major element in their approach to dealing with this difficult co-worker” (p. 240). Unpleasant work interaction relates not only to low job satisfaction but also to mental health and satisfaction with one’s private life (Fritz & Omdahl, 2006, p. 133). A workplace filled with emotionally exhausted and unsatisfied workers creates a culture of non-commitment and routine cynicism (Arnett & Arneson, 1999; Fritz & Omdahl, 2006, p. 135). Without commitment to the organization, people will not work to make it better. Especially in stressful and competitive work environments, an unsupportive workplace leads to excessive organizational turnover, which in turn creates an organizational atmosphere of ambiguity.

B. Ambiguity and focus of attention in workplace relationships

To make sense of ambiguity, Arnett and Arneson (1999) frame problematic relationships in terms of background assumptions and foreground events. Professional civility sets foreground relationships against background experience, and organizational mission against human telos (Fritz, 2013). Problematic relationships in the workplace are informed by “commonsense background assumptions” in the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, Viktor Frankl and Sissela Bok, among others (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 198). In postmodernity, recognition of difference compels one to search for meaning in crisis and chaos. In the same way, unpleasant or unenjoyable work or work conditions propel the search for meaning. In response to problematic relationships in the workplace, people may distance themselves from the source of the problem. For Arnett, Fritz, and Bell (2009), distance provides clarity for making judgments. Without distance, people become too emotionally tangled in their relationships to untie themselves when the relationship becomes problematic (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). On the other hand, clear boundaries between public and private create distance, or “interspaces,” wherein different people can come together in service of a shared organizational mission (Arnett, McManus, & McKendree, 2014). Arnett and Arneson (1999) cite German philosopher Martin Buber, whose metaphors of the between, focus of attention, and ambiguity inform their insights into problematic behaviors in the workplace.

For Buber, there is no good without evil; good comes with unintended evil; and evil opens possibilities for good. Buber calls people to embrace the evil in good and the good in evil through two attitudes: the attitude of the “I” towards an “It,” towards an object that is separate in itself, which one uses or experiences, and the attitude of the “I” towards “Thou,” in a relationship in which the other is not separated by discrete boundaries (Buber, 1937/2004). While the I-It refers to the world of experience and sensation, the I-Thou describes the world of relations, where “I” acknowledges living relationships without objectifying any “It”
Arneson (1999) argue that people live organizational life in “between” good and evil—“between persons, between person and event, between person and idea, even in crisis” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 128). Distance minimizes the possibility for workplace relationships to become problematic.

Arnett and Arneson (1999) use Buber to refocus attention on the space between public and private, or on the “common ground” where meaning emerges in the interplay of private intimacy and public responsibility (p. 51). The between opened by distancing orients workers away from themselves and toward the organization. Buber’s call for more space in human relationships seems to contradict the common phrase, “I need space,” which often signals the end of a romantic relationship. However, for Buber human relationships die without space, or what Arnett and Arneson (1999) call common ground. Buber’s between starts from space, and maintains space throughout the course of a workplace relationship. Space provides common ground for making informed decisions about future courses of action, and for making sense of past experience (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Without space, relationships becomes stuck in the present and preoccupied with private intimacy at the expense of public responsibility. The between reveals common ground hidden in the overlap of public and private.

Distancing also differentiates private relationships (personal, non-work relationships focused on the relationship itself) and public relationships (relationships “organized and sustained within a context oriented toward roles and joint action for a purpose other than the relationship itself”—Fritz, 2013, p. 174). Private relationships become problematic when they play out at work. Public relationships become problematic when they carry over to the private domain. The public roles of the people involved define the boundaries of public relationships; public accountability to an organizational hierarchy enforce these boundaries. However, these boundaries of public relationships are negotiated in private and enforced through implicit agreement. A violation of the boundaries of public and private relationships, such as a personal friendship between superior and subordinate, compromises the private relationship, as well as one’s public responsibility for role-driven work.

For Arnett and Arneson (1999), distancing reclaims the space between public and private and sets explicit expectations for private intimacy and public responsibility. Indistinct boundaries between public and private create the perception that, for instance, a subordinate’s personal friendship with a supervisor violates the limits of their roles, or that a strictly role-driven relationship is overly rigid. Workplace friendships are voluntary, but many friends feel forced into personal friendship by their public roles, sometimes through promotion. Promotion “refers to events in which one of the partners is promoted to a position of authority over the other. In these instances, respondents decrease the closeness of their relationships with coworkers because they fear others will perceive favoritism” (Sias, 2006, p. 72). In the case of promotion, distancing reinforces the new public roles at the expense of the preexisting friendship. After a promotion, many friendship dyads seek to close the distance in public authority with more personal closeness. This arrangement requires that friends flip back and forth between personal friendship and public role, especially when the public superior is the private subordinate, or the reverse (Sias, 2006).

When flipping fails, one or both of the friends may doubt the other’s and the organization’s motives. An attitude of defensive cynicism, or “contempt for whatever is or might be proposed,” moves from a “constant act of fault finding” to a “general rejection of the pleasures of life” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 13). Cynicism becomes routine, and routine cynicism becomes existential angst (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Through Buber, Arnett and Arneson call for an attitude between unquestioning obedience and existential angst, where workplace friends meet the responsibilities of their public roles and the expectations of their private relationships. For Fritz (2013), distancing opens space for professional civility and redirects one’s focus of attention from co-workers to the organizational mission. However, most literature frames distancing as a last-resort response to potentially harmful relationships in the workplace.

For Hess (2006), distancing is the process of extracting oneself from a problematic relationship, either physically or emotionally. Motivations for distancing from problematic others in the workplace include saving face and avoiding stress brought on by turning points in a relationship. A turning point is any “event or occurrence that is associated with a change in a relationship” (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p. 288). Negative turning points, such as ad hominem attacks or personal threats, can cause several forms of distancing, such as interaction avoidance, withholding of information.
tion, and cognitive disassociation (Hess, Omdahl, & Fritz, 2006). In response, Fritz, calls for “cognition-based trust that emerges from a shared narrative” (Fritz, 2013, p. 184). The shared objective reframes the intimacy of private relationships as public accountability to the organization. With a shared “focus of attention,” friends bracket any aspect of their personal relationship not relevant to a shared objective.

Arnett and Arneson (1999) ground their concept of “dialogic civility” in Buber’s metaphor of “focus of attention” (Buber, 1937/2004). For Buber, dialogue only generates meaning when one’s focus of attention falls on the other person or group, not an outside source or influence (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Dialogue demands “an awareness of the other as central for understanding dialogue between persons” (p. 132). When one’s focus of attention moves out of the between and away from the other, one engages the other with “negative vibes,” or an assumption of arrogance, selfishness, and untrustworthiness (Hess, Omdahl, & Fritz, 2006, pp. 96–97). Buber’s focus of attention is always ambiguous, leaving room for meaning to emerge in the between, rather than from rules and regulations. Over-reliance on rules and regulations imposes order on workplace relationships, leaving nothing to the reflective imagination.

In his 1964 book, Technological Society, Ellul defines la technique, or technique, as the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity. With the attitude that “what can be done should be done,” technique integrates technology into society on technology’s terms to construct the kind of world technology needs (Ellul, 1964). As punishment for problematic behavior, rules and regulations take the form of technique. Technique subsumes both public and private under progress and productivity, leaving no room for the between (Arnett & Arneson, 1999).

Dialogic civility responds to postmodernity in “moments of discourse” through the metaphors of between, focus of attention, and ambiguity (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 136). For Arnett and Arneson (1999) through Buber (1937/2004), ambiguity provides a defense against the totalizing tendencies of technique. Unlike technique, “real communicative living requires taking general ideas and suggestions and applying them to the concrete moment of discourse” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p.136). Ambiguity allows meaning to emerge from individual communicative encounters and to congeal into communicative practices in service of an organizational mission. When relationships turn problematic, one’s focus of attention shifts from the other to the self; role-driven communicative practices become rule-driven techniques, and labor and management become emotional labor and emotion management.

C. Emotional labor and emotion management

Difference characterizes the postmodern marketplace (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Differences of vision and opinion appear inevitable in increasingly diverse workplaces (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). In response to increasing diversity, many organizations use physical traits or personality-based criteria to ostracize or exclude those who do not fit the image of a given role (Sias, 2012). The experience of exclusion negatively impacts one’s emotional state of mind, to the point where the person lashes out at colleagues or the organization (Sias, 2012). These “emotional displays” often result from exclusion, which is “marked by a noticeable lack or absence of verbal communication. This absence, paradoxically, speaks volumes to an employee about his or her role in the social network” (Sias, 2012, p. 107). Inconsistent communication with a particular person, especially if communication continues with others, often signals exclusion at the expense of shared responsibilities.

Strategies for exclusion include physical avoidance and cognitive distancing, or some combination of the two (Kramer & Tan, 2006, p.169). The experience of exclusion retards the regulation of one’s “best self,” and widens the gap between expectation and reality (p. 178). The experience of exclusion leaves one emotionally vulnerable. When vulnerable, the excluded individual will more likely engage in problematic behavior. The problematic behavior then justifies the initial exclusion: “While exclusion can arguably be an uncivil act toward a member of a workforce, exclusions may result when costly behaviors are recurrent” (Omdahl, 2012, p. 21). When exclusion leads to problematic behavior, continued problematic behavior reinforces the decision to exclude. Problematic behavior and exclusion engage in an interpretive tug-of-war until both collapse under the weight of their emotional labor.

Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labor as “management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display . . . sold for a wage” (p. 7). In the workplace, individuals must match their mood to the public image of the company, despite oppressive working conditions (Hochschild, 1983). Eidelson
(2013) cites Starbucks’s “Come Together” campaign as an example of the exploitation of emotional labor. In 2012, Starbucks launched a marketing campaign in the U.S. in response to a congressional impasse over the federal budget. As part of the campaign, Starbucks required all servers, or baristas, to write the words “Come Together” on each cup of coffee. In a letter about the campaign, Starbucks President Howard Schultz wrote, “My hope is that this simple message will serve as a holiday reminder from Starbucks of the spirit that has always bridged differences and that we all have the power to come together and make a difference during every season of the year” (Starbucks, 2012). For Eidelson (2013), the company required the baristas not only to serve coffee, but also to “act out a part—from speaking from a company script, to smiling despite verbal abuse or physical pain, to urging that Congress embrace a deal that could imperil their retirement” (Eidelson, 2013). Starbucks required its employees not only to do their described jobs, but also to manage their emotions so they looked happy doing the jobs, regardless of their personal problems. One miserable barista, whose mood mismatches the mantra of “Come Together,” puts the whole public image of the company at stake.

The Starbucks example illustrates the potential problems with emotional labor, as well as the challenges of emotional management. Despite its downsides, a “certain level of emotion management is necessary for organizational members to interact in a civil and effective manner” (Kramer & Tan, 2006, p. 156). Emotion management promotes the “notion of responsibility for and with a relationship,” so that people protect relationships for the good of the organization, not the relationship itself (Fritz, 2012b, pp. 258–259). A failure to manage one’s emotions can lead to exclusion which, in turn, exacerbates the inherent difficulty of emotion management (Omdahl, 2012). When appropriate, the management of one’s emotions can mitigate misbehavior. When used to mask legitimate concerns, emotion mismanagement can erupt into a public display of problematic behavior that threatens workplace relationships. For Fritz (2012b), workplace “relationships remain a key motif in the narrative of human work life; they offer the potential to make everyday tasks light or heavy, pleasant or distasteful, and rewarding or distressful” (p. 260).

Exploitation of emotional labor introduces resentment into relationships among employees and between employees and the organization (Eidelson, 2013). Well-adjusted emotional management bridges the binaries of light and heavy, pleasant and distasteful, rewarding and distressful in service of the organizational mission. Emotion management thus forms a communicative practice of professional civility. Through emotion management, professional civility protects and promotes the good of the organizational home (Fritz, 2012b). For Fritz, “civility permits persons sharing the same space to encounter one another without running over each other, to acknowledge one other’s humanity without violating personal boundaries” (p. 262). Emotion management respects the space between public and private opened by professional civility, and affirms distance as prerequisite for postmodern dialogue (Omdahl, 2012).

D. Finding meaning in postmodern organizations

In the Nichomachean Ethics (350 B.C.), Aristotle defined happiness as labor worthy of being done. One’s occupation infuses existence with meaning and purpose, as “something final and self-sufficient,” or the “end of action” (Aristotle, 1962, p. 54). Unlike Plato, who locates meaning in ethereal, abstract Forms on a higher realm than the imperfect earth, Aristotle affirms an active life of labor as the telos of human existence (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Arnett and Arneson return to Aristotle’s understanding of labor to make sense of incivility caused by problematic relationships in the workplace. Both Fritz (2013) and Arneson and Arneson (1999) seek the “why” behind the “how” of human communication, where workplace relationships contribute to both an organizational mission and Aristotle’s human telos (p. 228). For Fritz (2013) grounded in Arendt (1958), “Our discourse with others supports the good of others’ personhood and their capabilities as manifested in their contributions to shared projects of enduring significance” (p. 94). For Arnett and Arneson (1999) grounded in Aristotle, the “why” of human communication reaches beyond the self to respond to the other as a mentor of “humanness” (p. 59).

In a chapter on Austrian psychiatrist Victor Frankl, Arnett and Arneson (1999) argue that a true mentor protects and promotes the best interest of the mentee. After surviving the Holocaust, the Jewish Frankl chronicled his experience as a concentration camp inmate in his best-selling book, Man’s Search for Meaning (1959/1974). Frankl’s understanding of “lived life as thoughtful action” became influential in existential therapy and humanistic psychology (Arnett
& Arneson, 1999, p. 211). Arnett and Arneson’s understanding of mentorship as a remedy for incivility relies on Frankl’s concepts of “hyper-intention” and “hyper-reflection,” as well as the “tragic triad” of pain, death, and guilt (p. 222). For Arnett and Arneson (1999), the mentor makes “every suffering and mistake an opportunity to assist the other to grow. The mentor does not protect against suffering, but assists in understanding what the suffering means and how one might find increased insight and wisdom from its occurrence” (p. 219). Frankl frames the “why” behind the “how” of human existence as something more than mere survival. The meaning of one’s work emerges through a dialectic of mentor, mentee, and meaning.

A mentor in the workplace assists the mentee in his or her search for meaning (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). The postmodern mentor calls the mentee to respond to difference and, like Frankl, to find meaning, or the “necessary background to meet the foreground challenges of everyday existence” (p. 208). The mentor looks through an “interpretive screen” of background experience to make sense of foreground events (p. 209). Without revealing where to find meaning, the mentor guides the mentee through narrative and virtue contention, searching for something secure. The something secure is professional civility, anchored to “narrative ground” in postmodernity (Fritz, 2013, p. 32). In the meeting of communicative practice and the communicative virtue of civility, professional civility turns technician to craftsman (p. 95).

In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between an expert and a craftsman. Both expert and craftsman know everything about their crafts, but only the craftsman loves the craft and invests himself in the craft (Aristotle, 1962). For Arnett and Arneson (1999), the mentor is akin to Aristotle’s craftsman, who combines expertise and meaning “in the doing” of human experience (p. 62). While the technician “needs to follow a given set of rules,” the craftsman has a “background of knowledge that permits . . . necessary alterations in accordance with the demands of the job” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 212). The technician engages in routine or habit. The craftsman engages in communicative praxis, or theory-informed action (Arnett & Holba, 2012). Through praxis, the craftsman adapts to unexpected changes with imaginative energy and flexibility. For the craftsman, meaning emerges in revelatory moments that interrupt routine: “it is not the routine, but the crisis, that calls us to uncover a sense of meaning for life” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 214).

Difference and instability define postmodernity. In response to postmodernity, Arnett and Arneson (1999) echo Frankl’s call to find meaning in difference and instability, rather than in stability and routine. However, “many people continue to look for meaning in stability, a sense of place; such meaning is not possible in a workplace that values rapid change. People seek security in the meaning of their routine, simply because other meaning structures are not visible” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 214). In search of meaningful relationships, many people follow the false scents of stability and sameness, routine and habit. In postmodernity, stability and sameness make meaningful relationships problematic. Problematic behaviors in the workplace often emerge from a failed search for meaning in stability and sameness, while postmodernity provides only instability and difference.

Frankl’s search for meaning is slowed by “ontological blindness” (Frankl, 1959/1974, p. 9), or the inability to “see what is present or hear meaning in the existential moment” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 213). For Frankl, meaning is always present but seldom visible (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Meaning emerges in the “attitude one takes into an action and event” (p. 212). Arnett and Arneson frame this attitude in terms of Husserlian phenomenology and its method of “bracketing,” “unplugging” from a “natural attitude” of unquestioning faith in the reality of what one experiences (Husserl, 1913/1980). From this perspective, problematic relationships in the workplace offer moments of crisis that create meaning. Following Frankl, Arnett and Arneson (1999) “listen for meaning” in problematic relationships, then redefine the natural attitude of the workplace in terms of the meaning revealed in problematic relationships (p. 213).

To guide the search for meaning in postmodernity, Arnett and Arneson (1999) turn to Swedish-born American philosopher Sissela Bok. In her work, Bok searches for “meaning that goes undetected in everyday looking” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 204). Bok affirms fragmentation in postmodernity, and responds with practical suggestions for navigating narrative and virtue contention. Bok redirects one’s focus of attention from the self to something beyond the self: “The common theme that runs throughout all her work is getting a person to think beyond ‘me’—to ask how a decision might impact the larger public, and social good” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 201). Like
Frankl, who searches for meaning in chaos and destruction, Bok looks for meaning in what is withheld in lying and secrets. She offers pragmatic correctives for problematic behaviors that reflect and respond to her historical moment.

In her popular books, Lying: Moral Choice in Private and Public Life (1978) and Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation (1982), Bok reflects the schizophrenic mood of her historical moment. As a graduate student at Harvard University in the 1960’s, Bok experienced metanarrative confusion and crisis first-hand. Amid this chaos, Bok looked for strongholds of meaning through which people could begin to recombine the fragments of postmodernity (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Rather than recreate the world before postmodernity, Bok affirms fragmentation and recombines the fragments of postmodernity into a call for community, oriented away from “me” and toward the human telos. Bok seeks to reclaim the meaning lost in lying and secrets, and restore the “commonsense background assumptions” that make sense of foreground chaos (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 198).

Fritz (2013), too, seeks to reclaim background through professional civility, which protects the “good of action together in the public sphere, our shared public environment and its institutions, and others’ face and dignity” (p. 77). Bok argues that lying and secrets compromise this public space. Like Buber, Bok believes that good contains evil, and evil contains good. In service of the common good, the evil of lying and secrets may benefit a community. By itself, the evil of lying and secrets tries to stand above the human telos, and privilege “me” over the community toward which the human telos tends (Fritz, 2013, p. 65). Both Bok (1978) and Fritz (2013) propose public places as strongholds of meaning, where people can come together in shared space to make sense of their shared experience of chaos.

5. Conclusion

In this essay, we reviewed the extant literature on professional civility as a response to postmodernity, as well as its theoretical foundations in Levinas, MacIntyre, Arendt, and others. We then described the role of professional civility in a postmodern marketplace and the goods that professional civility protects and promotes as a virtue ethic. A common emphasis of the work on professional civility is the notion of historicality, a metaphor that guides responsive and responsible communication in postmodernity (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). As articulated by Gadamer (1960/1986), historicality commands that one live “in the historical moment, not an imaginary ideal” (Arnett and Arneson, 1999, p. 30). The reality of postmodernity is disagreement on the common good (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Professional civility affirms difference and gives guidelines for navigating narrative contention through the goods of productivity, people, and place or organizational home. The organizational home describes the common center of an organization, where different people come together in common service of an organizational mission and the human telos. Organizations nourished by professional civility direct society to the human telos, and professional civility carries competing goods to the organizational home, without demanding agreement or sacrifice.

In service of the organizational home, professional civility creates personal character. For McDowell (1983), “the decisive factor in determining whether a nation will survive and prosper in freedom, or decline into despotism, is not its wealth or refinement but the character of its citizens” (p. 541). Professional civility refines people by redirecting their attention away from themselves and toward a common good: the organizational home. The organizational home provides a place, or interspace, for contrasting perspectives to announce their shared commitment to the organization (Fritz, 2013). The organizational home offers a public space for proximity that respects private distance with professional civility. Professional civility protects the “vulnerable internal environment” of an organization and reclaims the theological commitment of the early professions (Fritz 2013, p. 155). Just as Adam Smith set sympathy in service of moral sentiments, professional civility opens possibilities for serving an organization mission and fulfilling the human telos. Informed by the past, Smith responded to the challenges of his
present situation for the benefit of future generations of Scottish citizens.

Civility on the level of society moves humanity into phase with history. From the perspective of professional civility, humanity is not subject to history, as in Hegel, or creative of history, as in Marx, but responsive to history, or the questions that emerge in a given time and place. Civility provides a “communicative form of moral conduct” that displays respect, tolerance, or considerateness (Calhoun, 2000, p. 260). Civility responds to postmodernity in language, through an announcement of respect, tolerance, and considerateness as communicative virtues. Civility describes a virtue performed through communicative praxis that glues together the many goods that constitute postmodernity (Fritz, 2013). Professional civility protects and promotes the good of professions, announced by an organizational mission. Common service of the organizational mission protects and promotes the goods of people, place, and productivity with a “constructive orientation to tasks, the host organizational or institution, and others in the workplace as positive goods integral” to one’s identity in postmodernity (Fritz, 2013, p. 87).

This essay has reviewed the literature on problematic relationships in the workplace within Fritz’s (2013) framework of professional civility. Within Fritz’s (2013) framework of professional civility, problematic relationships in the workplace signal fragmentation in postmodernity. Professional civility responds to fragmentation in postmodernity with pragmatic guidelines for relationships in the workplace. Professional civility fosters an attitude of forgiveness for problematic behavior in the workplace (Fritz & Omdahl, 2006a; Omdahl & Fritz, 2012). Patterns of problematic behavior make the aggrieved person more reluctant to forgive. The act of forgiveness ends the cycle of exclusion-problematic behavior-exclusion that fuels problematic relationships in the workplace. With patterns of problematic behavior, the aggrieved person may forgive only conditionally, “stipulating that certain changes in behavior must occur before the process can proceed” (Waldron & Kloever, 2012, pp. 274–275). The severity of problematic relationships depends on several factors, such as the recurrence and public exposure of the transgression, as well as the extent to which the transgression violates explicit rules of conduct (Metts, Cupach, & Lippert, 2006, pp. 258–259).

When severe transgressions occur, the aggressor should seek the forgiveness from the aggrieved, and the aggrieved should engage the aggressor with a forgiving heart: “[Forgiveness-seeking communication] may be demanded, encouraged, or discouraged by victims and their organizational allies, and a victim’s response to initial forgiveness-seeking behaviors will influence the trajectory of the process” (Waldron & Kloever, 2012, p. 279). Forgiveness for problematic relationships in the workplace is negotiated in accordance with established rules of conduct, as well as cultural expectations for abiding by these rules (Metts, Cupach, & Lippe, 2006, p. 257). Forgiveness involves both a willingness on the part of the aggressor “to cede power to the aggrieved” (Waldron & Kloever, 2012, p. 274), as well as an opportunity for the aggressor to “maintain or restore viability” to the relationship with the aggrieved (Metts, Cupach, & Lippe, 2006, p. 250).

Arnett and Arneson (1999) cite Bellah’s metaphor of the “broken covenant” to illustrate the implications of problematic relationships for postmodern organizations. In his 1975 book, The Broken Covenant, Bellah argues that there exists in America a nonsectarian civil religion, complete with its own values, rituals, and holidays. America has betrayed its covenant with civil religion in favor of a secular trinity of progress, efficiency, and individual autonomy (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Both Fritz and Omdahl (2006a) and Omdahl and Fritz (2012) piece together the fragments of Bellah’s broken covenant to make sense of problematic relationships in the workplace. Fritz (2013) frames problematic relationships in terms of professional civility, and sets relationships in the workplace in service of the human telos. Arnett and Arneson (1999) reframes mundane work tasks as vocational calls to serve an organization mission. All share a responsibility to “ground, construct, rework, and support broken covenants” in the workplace (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 269).

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Book Reviews


This short book begins with a very personal question. Schuurman writes, “What does my faith have to do with my work as an electrical engineer?” (p. 7). He wrestles with this question of faith and technology, asking more particularly in the introduction whether or not the Christian faith might have something to say to a computer-assisted world. He writes, “This book is dedicated to working out the question of what faith has to do with computer technology. Not only is this question of academic interest; it also has many implications for a world in which computer technology has become ubiquitous” (p. 11–12).

Schuurman organizes his thinking in a fairly predictable way, at least predictable for book on technology. He asks what technology is, and then he goes on to look at different characteristics of technology, many of which appear in general introductory texts: technology is not neutral, he writes, and then he explains the ways in which technology comes to us already value laden. He turns to the work of Jacques Ellul, comparing technology to la technique. Expanding technique to computer technology, Schuurman notes some of the common approaches to computer technology. These include a rejection of technology, an indifference to technology, an embrace of technology, and a cultivation of responsible technology (p. 24). Other books raise many of these questions about technology. However, Schuurman bases his answers on a theology informed by the tradition of Calvinism. He draws on many Calvinist theologians to set out the general principles with which he will approach technology.

The overall plan of the book views computer technology through the lens of theology. Schuurman divides the book into four key chapters. First comes a consideration of creation and how technology has a role in creation; then, he offers reflections on the role of the fall (the theological view of human sinfulness) and how that has affected creation and consequently how it affects computer technology. The third general topic takes redemption as the starting point, asking what redemption might hold for, as he says “responsible computer technology.” The final general chapter looks toward the future, towards perhaps an eschatological theological approach.

Each chapter has a similar structure. First, Schuurman introduces the particular approaches to technology and theology, then he traces the implications of the theology for technology. In Chapter 2 (dealing with creation), Schuurman considers the Genesis story as establishing God’s creation of all things. This leads to what Calvinist theology refers to as the cultural mandate in which human creativity and human responsibility is given by God. Then he considers how human beings are created in the image of God and must seek to be faithful to that image. This includes things like a Sabbath rest, something that has implications for how humans engage technology. Schuurman introduces some other key issues: first of all, the problem of reductionism; secondly, all the ways in which people could have a more holistic approach to creation. Here he introduces in some detail a very important structure for the rest of the book, a theological framework for the readers to use in order to reflect upon how humans should work with technology. He draws on the work of the Dutch Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. Dooyeweerd had argued for what he called 15 different modalities, or aspects of reality.

These modal aspects are not objects in themselves but are ways of understanding how diverse entities function in creation. These modal aspects are as follows: (1) the numeric, which is the aspect that relates to discrete quantities; (2) the spatial, which relates to geometry;
Schuurman offers this summary of his work:

In creation we see that God created a wonderful world that was full of potential for things like culture and technology. Furthermore, God entrusted us with the responsibility of unfolding the possibilities latent in his creation and to care for the earth and its creatures. Near the beginning, however, humankind fell into sin, which has implications for all creation, including the...
area of computer technology. As a consequence, there are distortions in the use and place of computer technology. Another consequence is that people have increasingly replaced their trust in God with a trust in technology. Thankfully, God did not abandon this world but sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross to redeem his people and the entire cosmos. In the end, based on the atoning work of Christ on the cross, God will come again to make all things new—including technology. (pp. 121–122)

The book develops a consistent theological view of technology, one that leads the reader through various thoughtful approaches to how technology might function in the world. At the same time, because this theological view can be somewhat narrowly drawn, the book works better as a stimulus to thinking rather than as a complete treatment of technology and theology. Perhaps one could think of this as a way of reflecting on technology by applying one’s faith or, conversely, reflecting on one’s faith in a world of technology. Both approaches offer important conclusions.

The book draws on a number of thinkers, people well-known in the Christian world as sources for a religiously-oriented technology critique. These include Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, and Neil Postman. The theological grounding, as mentioned above, is largely Calvinistic.

The book has a bibliographic list as well as a set of study questions to guide further reflection on the topic. There is also an index.

The book may well work as a supplemental textbook for technology courses at the college or university level. It may also work well as a guide for a parish reflection session or a Bible study session where people living in the contemporary world of technology seek a structured guide to this important part of life.

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This yearbook of the media and information literacy and intercultural dialogue group (MILID) presents an overview of the collaboration itself as well as articles and papers discussing the different aspects of the program. The yearbook results from an association of partner universities making up the network for this particular UNESCO-backed program. These universities include Ahmadu Bello University, Cairo University, Hosei University, Nnamdi Azikiew University, Punjab University, Queensland University of Technology, Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University, Temple University, The Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of São Paulo, Tsinghua University, University of Gothenburg, University of Guadalajara, University of South Africa, University of the South Pacific, University of West Indies, and Western University.

Emerging from the United Nations sustainable development goals, this project looks at the role that media literacy and information literacy plays in working toward those goals. An introductory essay based on the framework and action plan of the UNESCO program sets out different principles grounding the action plan. These include convergence (an approach that would bring together different theoretical components in media and information literacy); a rights-based approach, targeting both citizens who have rights in media and information literacy and those who have the duty to develop those rights; equal rights for female and male adults and children, people with disabilities, indigenous groups, and ethnic minorities; prioritizing empowerment over protectionism; the inclusion of cultural and linguistic diversity; and the balance of actions and organizations in various regions of the world. In addition, the plan sets out a number of specific goals and objectives for the overall collaborative work. The editors arrange the 31 essays according to five key goals, with the majority falling into two categories: sustainable development through teaching and learning; and media organizations, information providers, and freedom of expression.

The first part of the volume on “Sustainable Development through Teaching and Learning” explores both theoretical and practical approaches. Jose Reuben Q. Alagaran II offers a theoretical underpinning for a model for teaching media and information literacy (“Explore, Engage, Empower Model: Integrating Media and Information Literacy (MIL) for Sustainable Development in Communication Education Curriculum”). His suggested model consists of three aspects: (1) exploring, asking, “How do I identify, access and retrieve information and media content skillfully?”; (2) engaging, “How do I analyze and evaluate media and information critically?”, and (3)
empowering, “How do I create, share, and use information and media content ethically, safely, and responsibly for decision-making and taking action?” (p. 33). He develops the model by showing how it might take place in the classroom. Thomas Röhlinger (“The MILID Dividend: A Conceptual Framework for MILID in the Glocal Society”) also takes a theoretical perspective. He too suggests a model with which one could understand the different aspects of this particular UNESCO-backed operation and identifies new factors arising from the combination of media and information literacy and intercultural dialogue. The third chapter, presented by Jagtar Singh, (“From Information Skills for Learning to Media and Information Literacy: A Decade of Transition in South Asia: 2004–2014”), offers an historical overview of the South Asian developments in 10 years of the United Nations sustainable development goals. Singh notes both changes in the ways the material has been presented and those things still lacking (“gaps and divides”). His overview also includes modules that have been used for teaching this material to young people. Carolyn Wilson and Tessa Jolls (“Media and Information Literacy Education: Fundamentals for Global Teaching and Learning”) offer an overview of different approaches to teaching media and information literacy. One thing they stress is “connected learning,” a learning approach based in the work of Marshall McLuhan and Len Masterman. Anubhuti Yadav (“Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Literacy for Sustainable Development”) turns more specifically to the situation in India. Yadav examines the digital divide, particularly as it appears between rural and urban areas. Often connected to differences in education, this divide has led to a number of projects seeking to offer more students some access both to the technology and to the literacy they need to use it. He presents in some detail the Digital India project coordinated by one of the ministries of the government of India.

Jordi Torrent (“Media and Information Literacy: New Opportunities for New Challenges”) gives a different kind of overview of the media and information literacy programs. Torrent criticizes the ways that many schools in the West have approached information and media literacy, by replacing humanities studies and critical thinking studies with these kinds of technological studies. Ibrahim Mostafa Saleh (“From Living Rooms to Classrooms: ‘Turn on the Lights’ of Mobile Learning in MENA”) looks at Arab countries and e-learning and mobile learning initiatives. He describes in some detail the approaches in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area. The next chapter turns once more to India. Harinder Pal Singh Kalra (“Media and Information Literacy in Higher Education in India”) focuses, as the title suggests, on university level instruction that deals with information literacy. Kalra first describes the higher education system in India, and then UNESCO’s role in media and information literacy as it is put into practice in that sector. The next chapter, Senada Dizdar, Lejla Hajdarpašić (“Information Literacy Initiatives at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo”) describes the situation of university education in that city. The article reviews what is happening in a number of different faculties, including a program of pedagogical training for teachers.

The second section “Media Organizations, Information Providers, and Freedom of Expression,” presents a number of articles which look at approaches to teaching and the provision of information by agencies and media organizations. Alton Grizzle (“Measuring Media and Information Literacy: Implications for the Sustainable Development Goals”) reviews the competencies involved and then suggests specific things that would be needed in developing the kind of curriculum for teaching and assessing the sustainable development goals in the area of media and information literacy. He presents some helpful tables looking at different frameworks based on eight key dimensions. These include context, purpose, interdisciplinary approaches, the types of learning domains, broad assessment levels, broad assessment categories, the assessment process, and the tools or instruments provided (pp. 118–120). Tibor Koltay (“Data Literacy: An Emerging Responsibility for Libraries”) suggests a different view. With so much attention devoted to schools, Koltay turns to libraries. The overview looks at the importance of data and the contemporary role of the library in storing and sharing data. Koltay argues the need for libraries to prepare people to use such data. The next essay returns to policy questions. José Manuel Pérez Tornero, Tomás Durán Becerra, and Santiago Tejedor Calvo specifically look at the “MIL Policies in Europe 2004–2014: The Uniqueness of a Policy and its Connection to UNESCO.” As one would expect, this essay reviews the responses of European member states to the UNESCO policies; they look at both legislative development as well as the system of indicators used to measure the accomplishments based on the policies. The indicators include “1. the efficient use of technologies; 2. the capacity to access information and make informed
choices and decisions; 3. the need to understand how media content is produced; 4. critical analysis of techniques, language, and content related to the media; 5. the use of the media to express and communicate ideas; 6. the need to identify and avoid harmful media content and services; and 7. the efficient use of the media in order to exercise democratic and civil rights” (p. 143).

The authors then discuss how these European indicators were merged with the UNESCO indicators. Kyoko Murakami directs attention to the Asia-Pacific region. In the essay, “Information Freedom and GAPMIL in Asia-Pacific Region: Challenges and Suggested Action Plan,” Murakami not only looks at how media and information literacy is carried out in that region of the world but also asks questions about specific challenges for these countries in the context of diverse national cultures.

Neelima Mathur offers similar reflections for the South Asian context, particularly for the Indian subcontinent in “MIL Empowerment for an Enhanced Democracy: An India Perspective.” Here the discussion has to do with the role of the government as well as of media organizations in setting up a media code of conduct as well as offering training in these things for a very diverse and lively media. Mathur looks in particular at a pilot curriculum based on the UNESCO model provided by the Uttarkhand Open University and then draws from that lessons that could be applied in other places. Sally S. Tayie turns to North Africa and the specific role of social media in Egypt (“Impact of Social Media on Political Participation of Egyptian Youth”). She writes, “this study aims at examining the role played by social media in empowering and encouraging Egyptian youth for political participation.” Her research combined different methodologies (surveys and in-depth interviews) with the uses and gratifications theory framework; her findings included documenting that “social media became the most prominent among youth in Egypt after the January 25 Revolution. The study also found that most Egyptian youth use social media on a daily basis. Egyptian youth consider social media as a platform through which they manage to share their common concerns and possibly turn it into collective real-life actions” (p. 169).

Adebisi O. Taiwo (“Media Literacy and Political Campaigns in Nigeria”) looks at the role that different forms of media play in the political life of Nigeria. The essay sketches the ways that political groups or the government distribute messages in political campaigns as well as how people will perceive and understand those messages. Taiwo argues that these examples highlight the need for greater media literacy. The article includes examples of some of the media materials. Also reporting research based in Africa, Kathleen Tyner (“WeOwnTV: Survivors Speak Out in Sierra Leone”) describes the WeOwnTV as “a long-term collaborative media project with local residents of Sierra Leone, North American film makers, and regional humanitarian organizations” (p. 189). Sponsors conceived the project to allow survivors of war to speak about and share their stories of survival trauma and culture. By empowering people to tell their own stories they wanted the people to then take charge of their own healing and also to discover other areas in which the country needed to develop, such as health messages. Tyner includes an ethnographic study of the effectiveness of the program.

Dilara Begum (“Media and Information Literacy in Bangladesh: A Case Study of East West University”) looks at media and information literacy through quantitative and qualitative methods. The essay provides an overview of the situation in Bangladesh as well as specific research-based findings of the interviews. Based on this, Begum presents a number of recommendations, including the need for adequate government funding, a stronger government role in promoting media and information literacy, an increased role for universities and schools, the need to update syllabi in teaching materials, and the establishment of standard curricula.

The third part of the yearbook presents studies under the heading of “Linguistic Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue.” The studies look again at many of the parts of the world already seen in the other studies; however, here they focus on the intercultural development aspect as opposed to the media and information literacy aspect. K. S. Arul Selvan (“Measuring Linguistic Diversity in Indian Online Scenario”) presents the results of a content analysis of the different languages of Internet users in India, basing the study on Google search details as well as the data sets drawn from other online materials. Selvan highlights several key findings: the difficulty of the use of Roman letters for Internet use (Unicode has helped resolve this issue); the role of national and state governments in providing resources; and the role of institutions of higher learning in the regional and national levels. Forest Woody Horton, Jr. provides a very different approach. A longtime activist in the information and media literacy areas, Horton reflects on his experience in countries around the world using a first-person approach to both describe cultural expression and what he calls coffee and tea houses as central for this type of intercul-
tural work. Ogova Ondego (“Media Wise: Empowering Responsible Religious Leadership in the Digital Age”) describes a workshop provided by the African media development initiative to train religious leaders—Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Copts—in the use of media and to develop a deeper understanding of “how representations shape perceptions, and . . . how religious leaders can best respond to misinformation in the media about religious groups” (p. 229).

Jun Sakamoto (“Intercultural Dialogue and the Practice of Making Video Letters between Japanese and Chinese Schools”) describes a program for schoolchildren in the two countries of Japan and China. He explains that the “exchange learning of video letters and digital storytelling works is the beginning stage of intercultural collaboration approach in the context of developing children” (p. 239). This develops a greater intercultural sensitivity starting in the school years; the program responds to the sometimes negative perceptions of each other’s countries, sadly fostered at times for governmental purposes. The last essay in this section of the yearbook returns to strategy. José Manuel Pérez Tornero, Santiago Tejedor, and Marta Portalés Oliva (“Towards a Global Strategy for Media and Information Literacy”) set out to describe how the overall information literacy strategy in Europe has led to concrete results. Beginning with the policy recommendations and the gathering of material into databases on media literacy, the group worked out an approach that could be shared as different learning opportunities throughout Europe, but also in Latin America and the Caribbean regions. The authors also summarize a number of recent publications in the areas of media literacy, intercultural dialogue, the communications law in Spain, and technology guides for teachers.

Section 4 of the yearbook focuses on “Gender Equality and Persons with Disabilities.” The first three essays in this section report on particular activities, with the fourth offering a more theoretical approach. Adebola Adewunmi Aderibigbe and Anjuwon Josiah Akinwande (“Communication Strategies for Effective Participation of Women in Healthcare Programs in Rural Nigeria”) describe particular programs that connect women and disabilities/health in Nigeria. They provide a helpful review of literature to situate their study and then, based on specific research, suggest recommendations, which include “localism in message content” and “localism in the media channel” (pp. 262–263). The next essay by Mia Rachmati and Syarif Maulana (“Women’s Life-Skills Education through Local Cultural Arts: Enhanced by Media and Information Literacy”) examines how women in Indonesia have been able to use media literacy skills to work towards greater equality. The program they describe is one that worked with cultural programs to develop personal skills, social skills, and vocational skills. As part of the report they indicate core competencies as well as the basic competencies they recommend in working with the different women’s groups. Manukonda Rabindranath and Sujay Kapil (“Information Literacy among People with Disabilities”) present a study of information access for people with disabilities in India. They include data about the estimated number of those with disabilities and the kinds of disabilities. They then review information literacy programs, looking both at government policies as well as the reality in the local communities, paying attention to the approaches at some schools and universities. Finally, they make a number of recommendations, including identifying children with disabilities, noting levels of accessibility in schools, changing the academic curriculum, sensitizing the stakeholders, and strengthening educational institutions. As noted, the last essay in this section addresses policy. Vedabhya Kundu (“Towards a Framework of Media and Information Literacy Education for Children with Disabilities: A Global Entitlement”) again reviews the situation in India and then, based on interviews, suggests ways in which a more global approach might be taken.

The last section of the yearbook addresses “Advancing Knowledge Societies: Environment, Health, and Agriculture.” The four essays in this section turn to what often occupies a central role in communication and development studies: agricultural situations as part of sustainability and development. Antonio López (“Ecomedia Literacy for Environmental Sustainability”) begins by defining a problem in what he terms “green cultural citizenship” (p. 301). This includes a number of things: awareness of how media connect with living systems and how the media themselves play and environmental role, the influence of the media on perceptions of people in ecological areas, and how media help to shape environmental ideology. Cornelius B. Pratt, Ying Hu (“Beyond Training the Trainers: Engaging the Grass Roots in China’s Public Health Campaigns”) consider an area more closely associated with health communication. They examine some of the different campaigns used to raise people’s awareness about public health and compare different models (the personal influence
model and the media and information literacy model). With this context, they present the health campaign goals, strategies, and tactics for the information campaign they conducted. The next essay also takes a look at health communication and health education. Li Xiguang, Zhao Pu and Ouyang Chunxue (“News Kills: Media Literacy and Health Education”) consider specific cases of news reports in China which attacked a vaccination program, leading to both factual errors in the reporting and serious public health consequences. They suggest how people might respond to this both at the governmental level and at the media level. Inder Vir Malhan (“Role of Agricultural Information Literacy in Agricultural Knowledge Mobilization”) describes a program of agricultural information in India. Highlighting different gaps in knowledge, the author identifies the role that information literacy could play in remedying those gaps.

The volume includes biographies of each of the contributors. Individual chapters contain bibliographic reference lists as well as notes. This yearbook, as many yearbooks do, offers a good overview of some of the concerns and research findings in this particular area of media and information literacy and intercultural dialogue. Because it is based in a consortium of universities the yearbook offers a valuable insight into the research approaches taken in this worldwide consortium. Those who are already familiar with media literacy or information literacy or with communication for development will find an interesting perspective of the joining of these individual communication efforts and an added sense of the role of intercultural dialogue. Those not familiar with it will find a good introduction to the area. However, as in any yearbook, one gets only summary kinds of information, the editors choosing to include a greater number of studies rather than in-depth treatments of a few areas.

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Interrogating the Theory and Practice of Communication for Social Change: The Basis For a Renewal begins with a compelling preface. It is the first book in Palgrave’s series on communication for social change (CSC), so it has a big job of laying out the problem—that the field of CSC has lost its way. One reason is the institutionalization and corporatization of CSC. As a case in point, the term CSC has been trademarked, a point of contention that shows the extent to which top-down CSC approaches now dominate, and bottom-up approaches to CSC are marginalized. The whole enterprise suffers. CSC is tightly bound with development communication, and in recent years, the nature of the discourse has shifted. Terms such as empowerment and participation have been co-opted and gutted of their emancipatory meaning in the service of a neoliberal agenda. Further, the corporatized use of the term participation obscures the workings of power. While Interrogating clearly outlines the misdirected path the field of CSC traveled to arrive in this place, a place both ubiquitous and impotent, it does something unusual to critiques—it offers a way out. Solutions demonstrates hope and commitment to the power and promise of CSC. Interrogating is well-written and thought provoking. It clarifies the problems with current CSC practices, theory, and scholarship and accounts for their rise and invisibility. Therefore, Interrogating is worthwhile reading for CSC or C4D (Communication for Development) scholars, teachers, and practitioners.

A follow-the-money chapter outlines the financial and political agenda of the neoliberal project to globally promote democracy and “soft diplomacy” through CSC. Often a follow-the-money chapter trails off in an emotional rant. Thomas and Fliert do not. They craft clear summary points from the evidence presented. They ask that CSC thinkers understand “it is important that we not underestimate the geo-political motivations behind aid in media development” (p. 75).

In a chapter on the role of technologies in social change, Thomas and Fliert outline the three broad solutions that have been explored in global development projects. These are information stations such as televiosks and telecenters, hardware solutions, and connectivity solutions such as mobile phones. Thomas and Fliert describe the key assumptions of technology for social change and the problems with each. The assumptions are flawed because they are based on “partial truths” (p. 99). Also, the information resources ebb and flow based on funding priorities and usually end up replicating existing cultural contexts so that the mar-
ginalized do not share the resource equally.

The set of solutions offered in Interrogating includes the need to shift from thinking about communication as a tool, which they point out convincingly carries a pre-set agenda, to thinking about communication as a process for listening, sharing, and building mutual understandings of local problems and workable solutions. Along with a shift in the way communication is commonly conceptualized, transdisciplinarity is needed. “Transdisciplinarity, as we advocate for it here, strives for shared understanding by all stakeholders of the implications of each relevant disciplinary perspective that relates to the issue at hand in each of the other disciplines” (p. 121). This approach, then, paves the way for effective implementation. To be effective, a CSC strategy has to stick to the basic principles of dialogue, advocacy, participation, and purpose across all phases of a mutually discovered and holistically understood plan. This in no way resembles what is currently in practice. Each component of their solutions and framework is detailed and the built-in flexibility highlighted.

Interrogating ends in a focus on the importance of humans as communicative beings, who rely on language, to be in relationship. It highlights the importance of voice to social change, to true democratic practices such as two-way communication, and to power sharing. The authors take up the Right to Communication movement along with an inspiring list of CSC efforts that are going well. “Communication rights enable people to have their Voices heard and be involved in the shaping of development through processes of their choice” (p. 137). Interrogating calls for a renewal. It asks that the prevailing social change work that doesn’t lead to real change be replaced with the social change work that does.

For CSC practitioners, Interrogating is useful. First, it is useful through its argument for transdisciplinarity and its high level look at the trends in the field. Second, it is useful through the practical examples and existing resources available. For example, The United Kingdom’s International Institute for Environment and Development has a treasure trove of practical guidelines available to use along with a Participatory Learning Action Plan series. Thomas and Fliert do caution that methods are only as good as their implementation. Practitioners could profit from learning that UNICEF is the only global organization with a useful network of specialists in communication for development (C4D), although this network is not without significant problems. Practitioners interested in the use of technology for social change could study the Bhoomi project. Based in India, the project was a massive effort to digitize land records. Practitioners tired of a one-size-fits-all model that does not make substantial difference should find the model Interrogating offers exciting.

For those who teach undergraduate courses with sections on media and globalization or communication for social change, Interrogating has great case studies. One case, for example, the Alliance of Youth Movement, is detailed. The authors then describe how to critically see it. They say the movement is really about “influencing everyday cultures of mainly middle-class youth through the world who are united by their use of social networking technologies to generate and share content but who have now been enlisted to work towards a greater cause—that of bringing ‘democracy’ along with presumably the ‘market’ to their countries” (pp. 63–64). A generative class discussion could follow.

For those who teach graduate-level seminars on communication for social change, political economy, development communication, or global media systems, Thomas and Fliert make clear the connection of how theory informs practice. For example, diffusion of innovations theory has served to guide CSC for decades. Interrogating traces how power functions in a Foucaudian perspective, how hegemony is maintained by the powerful, and how the two-step flow highlights the importance of opinion leaders as a key concept in development. The authors also discuss many of the newer ideas about problems with technological determinism. They point out that, as is often the case, projects do not carefully conceptualize or implement technology, so problems occur when technology does not deliver in local contexts, contexts rife with race, class, and gender divides. One example that illustrates the failure to examine technology in a specific context can be seen in the effort to provide texting options to the Dalit (untouchables) in South India. Texting did not allow for the expected “obedient conversations” between the Dalit and the upper-caste members and was therefore unsuccessful.

What is useful for teachers will also help scholars. Specifically Interrogating offers recent lists of scholarship in each chapter. In the chapter on agencies and structures, Thomas and Fliert point to “the most comprehensive overview of the literature on International Media Development Cooperation” (p.
In the chapter on communication, power, and social change, they argue that the organizations involved in social change are worthwhile objects of study if you consider both power as a resource and power as a strategy (p. 71). The chapter on theory describes that “any given theory of communication and social change is based on five levels” and argues for the need for more theorizing of each as well as a general enlarging of the field of enquiry. One way to do this is to include political economy. The authors consistently point to fruitful areas of research or theorizing. They assert that CSC work under theorizes the digital and, similarly, theorizing about power is both needed and lacking. Interrogating shows that “the most important recent contributions have congealed around visual and ethnographic methodologies” (p. 17).

The writing is sometimes humorous. For example, in describing the efforts of the UN to improve coordination for development programs, Thomas and Fliert write, “Couched in extremely bland UN-speak, the language is consistently vague and reflects perfectly the ad hoc nature of thinking through C4D in UN circles” (p. 108). And in describing the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD), Thomas and Fliert say the “Congress turned out to be a talk-fest” (p. 111).

However Interrogating does not discuss the movement underway with some organizations that refuse money for fear of the ideological and political pressures that accompany funding. The idea emerges implicitly in the long list of ways CSC projects serve as vehicles for neoliberal values, the free market, and democracy.

McPhail’s (2009) book, Development Communication: Reframing the Role of the Media, which was written in part by McPhail, and in part by selected experts, has some areas of overlap with Interrogating and some differences. Both books share the assumption that something is wrong with the current state of CSC. McPhail sees a moment of change and aims to move the field forward in productive directions by arguing for interdisciplinary, or at least more inclusive, approaches to development communication. McPhail’s book does not see easy solutions and calls for a rethinking of development communication’s theoretical orientations because simplistic perspectives will not result in change. Interrogating does see a clear set of solutions and details them (see above) in line with McPhail’s desired direction that are interdisciplinary, holistic, inclusive, localized, and in McPhail’s case, feminist.

Both books cover the systems of agencies, task forces, commissions, and funding sources involved in development communication efforts. Both books cover the role of media and technology in CSC work. Both books offer useful cases to consider. One could offer either book to students and use the other as a companion or set of selections. In terms of scholarship, both together make a solid foundation for a need for change and a productive way forward.

—Heather Crandall Gonzaga University

Reference


This 2014 Yearbook from the NORDICOM Clearinghouse on Children, Youth, and Media addresses the complex relationships among youth, health, and media. While some contributors address long-standing concerns like the link between mental health and violent media content, others expand those risks to examine how young people’s media use (time on the Internet, visual screen content, messages, and so on) affect physical and mental health. Still others ask about how young people’s access to information (particularly health information) affects them and how access to participation in the media can become a tool for greater social inclusion. These sets of questions broadly define the two parts of the volume: studies on “media use and health risks” and studies on “the right to participation—communication for health and social change.”

This yearbook marks a very important move in the study of media and children because it both raises issues of health in new ways and presents empirical evidence of harm done to children.

In the first part, Leslie Haddon and Sonia Livingstone (“The Relationship between Offline and Online Risks”) report on data from the EU Kids Online study to compare offline and online risks in the areas of bullying and viewing pornography, since both occur in these different areas of children’s lives. As a context, they draw on early Internet studies (Woolgar, 2002) to point out the importance of the local social context in determining the impact of online material, the evidence
that online or virtual material supplements rather than replaces face-to-face behaviors, and the different ways that young people incorporate online materials and practices into their offline living (p. 7). At the same time, they draw on boyd (2008) to remind us that online material persists over time, is easily scalable and replicable, reaches invisible audiences, and blurs traditional ideas of the public and the private. The *EU Kids Online* data indicates support for the “risk migration” hypothesis, that is, that children at risk of playground bullying, for example, are more likely to face online bullying (by a factor of 10) and that “seeing sexual materials offline increases the odds of seeing sexual content online” (p. 29), by a factor of 15. A close reading of the data indicates complex relationships among a number of predictors and very complex relationships among the potential harms. “Interestingly, for both being bullied online and seeing sexual images online, experiencing the offline risk seems to result in children being less bothered by the online equivalent” (p. 29).

Reporting on a longitudinal study in Austria, Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink and Jasmin Kulterer (“Socially Disadvantaged Children, Media, and Health”), examine “the role media play in socially disadvantages families with special respect to children between five and 10 years of age” as well as “the relationship between children’s media use and health problems” (p. 33). Their case studies indicate that “the circumstances in which children grow up have a severe impact on their development, their health, and their socialization” (p. 42). Many turn to the media as agents of socialization, leaving television, for example, as a chief supplier of role models and behavioral guidance. (Given their circumstances, many of these children lack access to online materials.)

One of the volume’s editors, Cecilia von Feilitzen, summarizes some material on violence as a public health problem (“Mediated Violence and Related Risk Factors: Examples and Reflections”). She suggests two roles for the media: a positive one, to raise “awareness about different kinds of violence against children” and, a negative one, to increase “exposure to images of violence and male domination of women and girls due to globalized media and new ICTs [which] can affect opinions, norms, and behavior and is therefore a risk factor in the community” (p. 46). Rather than summarizing years of data on media violence, von Feilitzen instead draws on the UN’s *Violence Against Children* study to present some research examples and questions. For example, studies show consistent findings that exposure to media violence is associated with an increased risk of later aggression and that parental monitoring can decrease that risk (p. 52). Others indicate that such risk is cumulative—the more violent media consumed in different formats, the greater the risk. She also points out that popular culture plays a strong role in young people’s development and identity formation and that “for some, the use of mediated violence is a more or less conscious attempt to work through and understand their feelings of anxiety, oppression, frustration or aggression, and circumstances that have contributed to an aggressive environment” (p. 54, italics in original). The overall research collection highlights the need, von Feilitzen concludes, to more clearly identify risk factors and their relative impacts on the lives of children and communities.

In a case study of threats to children in Egypt, Ibrahim Salah (“Stealing Children’s Innocence in Egypt: Media Literacy, Human Rights, and Roads of Violence”), draws several themes together, connecting routine violence against children—arrests and sexual abuse of street children, regular beatings in schools, parental neglect—with both media coverage and (the lack of) media literacy education.

It comes as no surprise to regular media consumers that marketing and entertainment have sexualized children and their depictions of children. Jeanne Prinsloo (“Sexualization of Children’s Relationship with the Media”) cites the American Psychological Association’s definition of “sexualization” and then shows how it applies, particularly to the treatment of girl children. She also proposes a theoretical account, examining both structuralist and post-structuralist explanations. The first “approach tends to focus on the context of production and the content of media texts to explain an existing phenomenon. It excludes attention to the audience as active consumers who might negotiate meaning” (pp. 74–75). The latter critiques this view, articularly from a feminist perspective and draws attention to the lack of definition of “healthy sexuality” in these discussions as well as the lack of any attention to power relations, particularly in patriarchal societies. She calls for more empirical work, not only in media depictions of sexualization of children but of children’s use of the media and of such depictions.

The next set of essays in the volume present work addressing specific health issues: obesity, sleep and learning, food marketing, and the relation between consumerism and mental health.
The editors reprint the 2011 policy statement of American Academy of Pediatrics (Council on Communications and Media) on “Children, Adolescents, Obesity, and the Media.” This remarkably blunt statement, supported by extensive research, sketches the links between childhood obesity and the media. Recognizing that researchers have not determined the exact mechanisms of causation or influence, the pediatrics association still concludes that “sufficient evidence exists to warrant a ban on junk-food or fast-food advertising in children’s TV programming” (p. 85). Some of the mechanisms that connect media consumption with obesity include “small, incremental increases in caloric intake (or increases in sedentary activities),” media use “displacing more active pursuits,” “unhealthy eating habits and effects of advertising,” and the “effect of media on sleeping habits” (pp. 86–89). This latter category shows an indirect link, in that sleep loss connects to snacking, lower energy levels, which lead in turn to less activity, and metabolic changes. The Council recommends that “pediatricians should ask parents and patients two key questions about media use: (1) How much time per day does the child or teenager spend with screen media? And (2) Is there a TV set or unrestricted, unmonitored Internet connection throughout the house, including in the children’s bedroom?” (pp. 89–90).

Markus Dworak and Alfred Wiater (“Impact of Excessive Media Exposure on Sleep and Memory in Children and Adolescents”) report evidence from their studies of sleep patterns in children. Different kinds of sleep (NREM, REM) play crucial roles in memory and learning. Media consumption (with television viewing and playing exciting video games representing the extremes of involvement with the media) disrupts those essential sleep patterns and thus affects learning. Their theoretical model traces connections from the more acute physiological consequences of media use (“heightened alertness, increased physiological arousal, altered neurotransmission, fright reactions, reduced physical activity, and [perhaps] altered melatonin secretion [due to the bright light of screens])” to sleep problems (“increased onset latency, reduced sleep quality, reduced SWS/REM sleep, anxiety, night awakenings, shortened sleep duration”) to learning and memory problems and potential long-term behavioral consequences, such as school performance, metabolic disorders, and risk of hyperactivity disorders (p. 107).

Susan Linn (“Too Many Screens, Too Much Stuff: How Media, Marketing and Commercialization Are Harming Children’s Health”) calls attention to the contradiction of global spending on improving children’s health and the global spending on marketing threats to children’s health. Marketing to children has dramatically increased in the last 25 years and creates a pattern of consumerism and brand preferences in children as young as two years old. Moniek Buijzen, Esther Rozendaal, and Simone M. De Droog (“Food Marketing and Child Health”) add specific research-based evidence to these claims, examining the role of marketing techniques “such as brand characters and advergames” (p. 121, italics in original); the latter refers to “a custom-built online game in which the brand or logo forms an integral part of the game” (p. 122). Such marketing affects children’s diets and family eating habits. Interestingly, Buijzen, Rozendaal, and De Droog point out that this kind of marketing also works to promote healthy eating habits among young children.

The second part of the yearbook presents studies of participatory communication for health and social change. A subset of the larger area of communication for social change studies, the concept seeks to involve children and adolescents in discussions of their own health.

Rafael Obregón and Angela Rojas Martínez (“Communication and Health of Children and Adolescents in Latin America: Toward a Child- and Adolescent-centered Approach”) present two case studies of health communication approaches in Colombia. They situate their work in a theoretical discussion of the communication for social change literature as well as in facts about health concerns, paying attention to gender issues in health communication. Among the several recommendations in their conclusions, they include:

- “it is essential that decision makers decisively promote the creation and strengthening of local social communication networks, and coordination with global, national, and regional networks with the purpose of facilitating not only the flow of accurate and reliable information about health services... but especially effective coordination and participation mechanisms that ensure better health and well-being of children and adolescents.”
- “it is also critical to promote monitoring and evaluation mechanisms about existing health programs... [that build] on participatory processes that allow for the identification of indicators that reflect children’s and adolescents’ perspectives
and complement health outcomes indicators” (p. 146).

In a similar vein Johanna Stenersen (“Body Political and the Mediated Body: Young Women in Nicaragua Talk about Sexual and Reproductive Rights”) reports an ethnographic observation of young (13–19 years) Nicaraguan women learning about and discussing “issues related to sexual and reproductive health” (p. 152). She notes the impact of media texts such as telenovelas and the larger social context of government, religion, and family, but also identifies the impact of “socio-economic backgrounds and levels of social control” on “how the informants experienced media and the ways in which they would use different media and communication technologies” (p. 160).

Three other case studies—from Nepal, South Africa, and China—complete the collection. Arvind Singhal (“Youth, Media, and Respectful Conversations about Health: Lessons Learned from an Exemplary Project in Nepal”) presents an analysis of “Saathi Sanga Manka Kura (Chatting with My Best Friend),” a long-running (11 years) radio program addressed to a youth audience. Designed to be interactive, the program encourages young people to write, text, or post on social media platforms key questions or topics about which they seek information. Program staff respond to all such requests and choose four or five for the weekly show. “Each episode of SSMK combines music with drama and an open, honest conversation between its male and female hosts. SSMK encourages young people to break the silence and cultural taboos surrounding physiological and emotional needs and curiosities that come naturally with puberty” (p. 164). The radio program eventually led to a television program, also addressing life skills for youth. Singhal identifies several important lessons learned from the program, including the value of formative research, the provision of a safe space for discussion, and the value of locally produced media content.

The South African television program Soul Buddyz also emerged from a formative research consultation. Susan Goldstein (“Children as Agents for Social Change: Soul Buddyz and Soul Buddyz Club”) explains how the program targets the 8–12 year old audience and its concerns as manifest in the research (expressing emotions, dealing with parents, lack of aspirations, separation of races). The 26-episode series featured a group of children who met in a park after school; each episode addressed a health issue from the perspective of one or another of the children (“bullying, gun safety, HIV, or sexual abuse,” p.170). The children in the show tried to solve their programs, suggesting a model of initiative and empowerment to the audience. Broadcasting in nine languages, the program producers also distributed supporting materials. Subsequent evaluations indicated that the program “reached an unprecedented 67% of the children in the age range, having watched, listed to, or read Soul Buddyz material” (p. 170). Goldstein also presents the model of change that the producers developed as well as a summary of the research detailing four key areas of learning: knowledge, social conscience, social skills, and emotional health.

Bu Wei (“‘Talking about Violence with Children: A Case Study of Children’s Participation in the Communication Plan on Stopping Violence against Children in China”) builds on the United Nations Violence against Children report as well as on theories and practices of youth participation in addressing these issues. Bu Wei reports on a pilot project workshop for children in China which addressed four themes: “(1) Our rights; (2) Violence in our lives; (3) Children making changes; and (4) Communication plan” (p. 182).

The final part of the yearbook presents “Statistical Indicators on Children in the World.” These include demographics, economic indicators, education and media, health, child maltreatment, and labor.

The yearbook, Young People, Media, and Health: Risks and Rights brings together very important material on youth and media that goes well beyond most studies of influence, use, media literacy, and youth empowerment. The health data alone—perhaps known to specialists—deserves wider distribution and should become part of every media studies course.

Each essay has its own notes and bibliographic reference. The volume provides contact information for each of the contributors.

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References

