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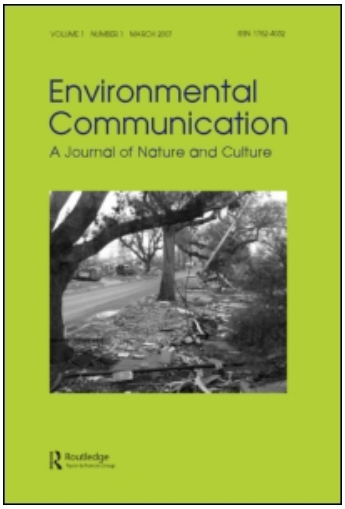

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PRAXIS FORUM

From Environmental Campaigns to Advancing the Public Dialog: Environmental Communication for Civic Engagement

Robert J. Brulle

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This essay examines the claims of environmental identity campaigns regarding the issue of climate change. Identity campaigns are based on the idea that more effective environmental messages developed through the application of cognitive science by professional communications experts can favorably influence public opinion, and thus support legislative action to remedy this issue. Based on a review of the sociological and psychological literature regarding social change and mobilization, I argue that while this approach may offer short term advantages, it is most likely incapable of developing the large scale mobilization necessary to enact the massive social and economic changes necessary to address global warming. Specifically, theoretical and empirical research on the role of the public sphere, civil society and social movements shows that democratic civic engagement is core to successful social change efforts. However, identity campaigns focus on a communications process that centers on elite led one way communications, which falls to allow for any form of civic engagement and public dialogue. This undermines the creation of a democratic process of change and reinforces the professionalization of political discourse, leading to a weakening of the mobilization capacity over this issue of global warming. The essay concludes with

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the outlines of an environmental communication process that aims at enhancing civic engagement and democratic decision making.

Keywords: Social Movements; Environmentalism; Public Participation; Environmental Communication

> For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. (Lorde, 1984)

The scientific evidence on the state of global warming shows that the situation is now dire, and we are very near to, or exceeding critical climate thresholds that are irreversible for more than 1,000 years (Solomon, Plattner, Knutti, & Friedlingstein, 2009, p. 1704; United Nations Environmental Program [UNEP], 2009). The alarming projections of global warming consequences stand in stark incommensurability with the available proposed solutions (Huesemann, 2006; Russill, 2008, p. 147). This situation calls for moving beyond incremental actions based on short-term pragmatic considerations and toward the development of widespread global actions that are necessary to deal with global warming (Beddoe et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2007). It also includes a rethinking and reorientation of global environmental efforts to develop a more efficacious political practice that can rapidly accelerate the pace and scope of social change (Blühdorn, 2000, p. xiii). Environmental communication is one important part of this process.

In this paper, I argue that the approach detailed by ecoAmerica and Lakoff detracts from this effort. Identity campaigns, like those they advocate, are based on the idea that more effective environmental messages, developed through the application of cognitive science by professional communication experts, can favorably influence public opinion, and support legislative action to solve global warming. Because their environmental communication approaches are based exclusively on cognitive science, rhetoric, and psychology, they lack any contextual basis within a larger theoretical structure of the role of communication in facilitating large-scale social change processes. This theoretical deficit leads to the development of climate messaging strategies that support short-term pragmatic actions that fit within economic and political imperatives, but fail to address meaningfully the ecological imperatives defined by global warming. Additionally, the professionalization of political discourse upon which these approaches are based actually reinforces existing relationships of power and institutional dynamics. These factors lead to a weakening of efforts to increase political mobilization over the issue of global warming, and thus undermine the capacity for significant social change. Thus, while identity campaigns may offer short-term advantages, they are most likely incapable of developing the large-scale mobilization necessary to enact the massive social and economic changes necessary to address global warming. The paper concludes with a discussion of a possible alternative communications approach that can foster civic engagement and democratic social change.

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The Dynamics of Social Change

Sociological theory has identified the institutions of civil society as the key site for the origination of large-scale social change.[1] Civil society is constituted by voluntary institutions that exist outside of the direct control of both the market and the state. This independence is the key to the capacity of civil society to serve as a site for the generation of social change. It puts civil society at the center of the renewal and transformation of social institutions (Habermas, 1996, p. 365). The institutions of civil society constitute a critical communicative link between citizens and government. The formation of social movement organizations enables individuals to join together with other members of their community to participate meaningfully in their own governance (Rochon, 1998, p. 137). This link between individual experiences and social movement organizations "ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions" (Habermas, 1987, p. 140). By forming and advocating alternative worldviews, social movements can expand the range of ideas we can consider, and thus assist in the successful adaptation of existing social institutions to changed conditions (Calhoun, 1993, p. 392). The effective introduction of these alternatives into the public dialog requires the operation of an open public sphere. The public sphere is where social movement organizations can identify problems, develop possible solutions, and create sufficient political pressure to have them addressed by constitutional governments (Habermas, 1962/1989, 1998, p. 250).

Thus, a participatory structure is a key component in large-scale social change efforts. Through participation in collective decision-making processes, citizens acquire the necessary technical and cultural knowledge to make a meaningful contribution (Barry, 2002; Light, 2002). Participating in deliberative collective decision-making processes involves a process of moral development away from a narrow individualism and toward a more encompassing notion of morality (Webler, Kastenholz, & Renn, 1994). It also enhances civic participation and motivates further political action (Jacobs, Cook, & Carpini, 2009, pp. 83–117).

However, existing economic and political institutions limit actions within a narrow range. As the modern social order developed, the market replaced the co-ordination of production and exchange via traditional action and barter. Similarly, administrative state power developed as a means of ensuring the operation and stabilizing the effects of the economic system. Productive activity became coordinated through the steering mechanisms of money and power carried out in the institutions of the market and the state (Habermas, 1991, pp. 50–261). The political and economic institutions constrain policy within parameters defined by their key imperatives. For the market, this imperative is the necessity to maximize return on investment through continuous economic expansion. For the state, it entails providing security, ensuring economic growth, and maintaining its political legitimacy (Schlosberg & Rinfret, 2008, p. 270). Accordingly, environmental actions that impinge on any of these imperatives will not be fostered within the dynamics of the market or the state. As a result, rather than transforming economic and political institutions to meet ecological limitations, this dynamic forces environmental policies to fit into the

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maintenance of existing institutions (Bernstein, 2001, p. 178; Blühdorn, 2000, p. 30; Brulle, 2000; Torgerson, 1995, p. 15). This greatly restricts the range of possible policy considerations, such as global governance or moving from an economy centered on status consumption to providing for human satisfaction. In contrast, because they are based in communicative action, the institutions of civil society constitute a means to identify and propose actions to resolve social and environmental problems, unhindered by the limitations of institutions based in either the market or the state (Habermas, 1996, p. 381). This relationship defines a need for a broad-scale effort to mobilize civil society to foster social change.

Symbolic systems also play a major role in the maintenance and change of social order. Erving Goffman first developed the study of these cultural worldviews from the well-known perspective of "frame analysis." For Goffman (1974, p. 21), frames are "schemata of interpretation that help actors reduce socio-cultural complexity in order to perceive, interpret and act in ways that are socially efficacious." By sharing a collective worldview, participants in a social order engage in a common language game. This language game defines a regularized practice that constitutes a social institution (Bittner, 1974; Brown, 1990; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994). The discursive frame defines the "fundamental categories in which thinking can take place. It establishes the limits of discussion and defines the range of problems that can be addressed" (Wuthnow, 1989, p. 13). Accordingly, frames are collectively shared worldviews that define a field of interaction (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 72).

Social order is made up of multiple discursive frames, each of which defines a unique field of social practice (Benson, 2000, p. 13; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Because discursive frames are embedded in and define social institutions, they are always embedded in power relationships, and authorize certain actors and perspectives while neglecting others. These embedded discursive frames take the form of unique "field frames" or political constructions that define appropriate and inappropriate practices in a given area. Field frame analysis focuses on the network of interactions, and the political and cultural struggles among institutional actors that are either challenging or stabilizing a particular field of practice (Ferguson, 1998, p. 598; Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003).

To understand the social processes by which field frames are changed requires a consideration of the role of critical communities and social movements that form a vital link in the creation and advocacy of "alternative field frames." Alternatives to the dominant field frames originate in critical communities, which Rochon (1998, p. 22) defines as small groups of critical thinkers "whose experiences, reading, and interaction with each other help them to develop a set of cultural values that is out of step with the larger society." These alternative field frames display a unique "sensitivity to some problem, an analysis of the sources of the problem, and a prescription for what should be done about the problem" (Rochon, 1998, p. 22). These alternatives and their dissemination by a movement are a critical condition for the collective perception of a social problem, creating an alternative map of the social world around which individuals can collectively mobilize. Social movements then play an important role in the advocacy and acceptance of these alternative discursive

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frames. Specifically, social movements seek to spread familiarity and acceptance of the alternative discursive frame, and to generate political pressure to implement institutional change based on this new worldview.

Thus, the key to the realization of power in society is through the ability to define what constitutes the common sense reality that applies to a field of practice. Accordingly, as Pierre Bourdieu (1985, p. 729) notes: "Knowledge of the social world and, more precisely, the categories that make it possible, are the stakes, par excellence, of political struggle, the inextricably theoretical and practical struggle for the power to conserve or transform the social world by conserving or transforming the categories through which it is perceived."

The creation and advocacy of an alternative field frame by critical communities and social movements provides a source of authority from which to challenge the hegemonic worldview (Wuthnow, 1989, p. 555). This challenge takes the form of a political struggle to de-legitimate and to de-institutionalize the hegemonic frame, as well as to establish the dominance of an alternative frame. It is at this point that the struggle over political actions takes the form of social movement actions carried out by committed populations in identifiable organizations (Touraine, 1977, pp. 25–26).

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These symbolic struggles take place through unique rhetorical forms. To maintain the hegemonic frame, defenders adopt a managerial rhetoric (Cathcart, 1972, 1978, 1980). This rhetoric is defined as "those rhetorical acts which by their form uphold and reinforce the established order or system" (Cathcart, 1978, p. 237). It identifies the central theme of the social order, and attempts to convince individuals that it is the best and essential way of organizing society. "It takes the form of a rhetoric that embraces the values of the system, accepts that the order has a code of control which must not be destroyed, while at the same time striving to gain acceptance of that which will perfect (or restore to perfection) the system" (Cathcart, 1978, pp. 239–240). This rhetoric is one of piety, "a system builder, a desire to round things out, to fit experiences together as a unified whole" (Burke, 1954, p. 74). By projecting the world as an orderly system, the apparent completeness and adequacy of the dominant symbolic discourse is amplified (Lessl, 1989).

The advocates for the challenging frame adopt a rhetoric of confrontation. Part of this strategy is the employment of a rhetoric of discontinuity that justifies a need for a dramatic change in society due to the problem situation and the need for action (Griffin, 1966, p. 460; Jablonski, 1980, p. 289). This alternative worldview must define a new narrative of society (Stewart, 1980, pp. 298–305), which involves a redefinition of society's past, present, and potential future and reconstitutes individuals in a new symbolic reality. Finally, new courses of action are prescribed through a refocusing of the cultural content of existing symbolic systems. This process creates new social obligations based on an alternative social reality. Challenges to the existing hegemonic field frame begin with a rhetoric of negation, dissent and corrosion, proceeding to a rhetoric of conversion, and then the realization of the incarnation of the desired state in material reality: "They begin with Guilt and the dream of salvation. They end with the achievement and maintenance, of a state of Redemption" (Griffin, 1966, p. 461). An effective rhetoric of change critiques the

current situation and offers a Utopian vision of where the society needs to go. It is this combination that fuels social movement mobilization and social change.

Thus, the above analysis of social change defines a process that is centered on the broad-scale mobilization of civil society and citizen participation. It also shows that there is a need to develop a messaging process that involves and enhances citizen participation. To enable large-scale social change, the rhetoric needs to take the form of discontinuity, followed by a rhetoric of salvation. Based on this perspective, I turn to an evaluation of the messaging strategies of Lakoff and ecoAmerica.

The Messaging Strategies of ecoAmerica and Lakoff

While there are some minor differences in their approaches, Lakoff and ecoAmerica are advocating very similar forms of environmental campaigns. ecoAmerica promotes a marketing-based approach to transforming public opinion based on specifically worded appeals to individual self-interest. Lakoff advocates a more identity-based approach, which appeals to supposedly "core progressive" values. Regardless of their different research techniques (focus groups versus cognitive science) or theoretical basis (marketing versus identity), both approaches have a common core in that they take the form of communications aimed at influencing public opinion in a particular direction. Examining the messaging strategies developed by ecoAmerica and Lakoff raises a number of highly problematic issues. Here, I focus on four of them.

The Questionable Link Between Environmentalism and "Core" Progressive Values

The messaging strategy developed by Lakoff is based on a supposed unity of core progressive values. Because he claims environmentalism is part of this progressive core, it therefore makes sense to develop inclusive communication campaigns. But is this really the case? First, it is important to note that there is a long and contentious debate within the cognitive science community regarding the scientific validity of Lakoff's approach.[2] These reviews argue that Lakoff's approach is an overextension of what is supported by cognitive science, and is, at best, highly problematic (Cooper, 2005; Flanagan, 2008; Green, 2005; Pinker, 2006). Additionally, Lakoff (1996, pp. 210–221) asserts, without evidence, that environmentalism takes two forms that correspond to the strict/nurturing parent metaphor and that there is a "unity" of progressive values within nurturant environmentalism. What constitutes this form of environmentalism is not clear. It is impossible to say with any empirical credibility that there is one form of environmentalism (Brulle, 2000; Brulle & Jenkins, 2008). Additionally, a number of other analyses present a more complex and different picture of the underlying structures of environmentalism (Beck, 1986; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Wolf, Brown, & Conway, 2009). Lakoff's supposed unity of progressivism and environmentalism is not supported, and it is even contradicted by several theoretical and empirical approaches. Centering an environmental communications campaign on the dubious notion of "core progressive values" is thus a highly problematic approach.

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Ecological Modernization and the Cooptation of Environmentalism

Both ecoAmerica and Lakoff develop their messaging strategies based on appeals to the pre-existing value systems prevalent within the population through the use of mass communication techniques. This greatly limits their messaging strategies. Accordingly, both Lakoff and ecoAmerica advocate for the adoption of a strategy of CO_2 reductions based on the idea of ecological modernization.[3] The ecological modernization approach is based on the idea that "environmental degradation can be addressed through foresight, planning and economic regulation; in particular, new technologies can be developed and utilized to enhance economic growth while simultaneously curtailing waste" (Schlosberg & Rinfret, 2008, p. 254). The approach of ecological modernization has been subjected to extensive scientific analysis. The net conclusion of more than a hundred empirical studies is that this approach does not work to reduce most pollutants, especially greenhouse gases. The major root causes of greenhouse gases and environmental problems turn out to be economic and population growth, magnified by open trade policy and foreign investment in developing countries.[4] Hence, on the fundamental question of how to remedy global warming, both ecoAmerica and Lakoff are wrong. Rarely does a scientific consensus speak so consistently against a political argument. Thus, while championing ecological modernization may be good politics and make for appealing messages, it is bad environmental policy.

Why are ecoAmerica and Lakoff so drawn to this perspective? Since they premise their messaging strategy on fitting in with pre-existing values, they have no ability to develop and promulgate new alternative worldviews. Additionally, ecological modernization is appealing because it eliminates the need for zero-sum solutions. In this view, capitalism can be readily modified to be ecologically sustainable and no changes in our style of living, consumption patterns, or basic institutions are needed (Buttel, 2000; Schlosberg & Rinfret, 2008, p. 256). This argument has obvious appeal to entrenched interests and to those who wish to avoid significant change.

Ecological thinking of the 1960s and early 1970s had emerged as the most important challenge to the hegemony of economic rationality. However, ecological modernization has been increasingly successful in "repackaging ecological issues as economic, technical and managerial issues, thereby overcoming the assumed incompatibility between ecological and economic thinking" (Blühdorn, 2005, p. 5). Rather than adjusting the market to its ecological limitations, ecological modernization adapts its political program to fit within market limitations (Bernstein, 2001, pp. 178–179; Blühdorn, 2000, p. 30; Torgerson, 1995, p. 15). This message also blocks considerations of whether ever-increasing economic growth actually leads to real improvements in the quality of human life (Scerri, 2009, p. 476). Thus, ecological modernization is essentially a discourse to ensure economic growth and to co-opt industrialism's environmental critics in the form of a managerial rhetoric. This leads to the development of climate messaging approaches that support short-term pragmatic strategies that fit with the imperatives of the economic and political

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systems, but fail to address meaningfully the ecological imperatives defined by global warming.

Elite-Directed Social Change and Public Disempowerment

To develop their messaging campaigns, both ecoAmerica and Lakoff engage experts in cognitive science and psychology. These experts identify core progressive values and then develop message campaigns based on these findings. In the words of ecoAmerica: "We help people make better personal and civic choices."[5] For Lakoff, now a consultant at the commercial political communications firm Fenton Communications, the goal is to "frame the issues so they speak to people's hearts and minds and change their behavior."[6] What constitutes better civic choices for ecoAmerica or Lakoff? Who defines what direction people should change their behavior toward? Both ecoAmerica and Fenton Communications work for clients who seek to move public opinion in a certain direction. This results in a situation in which communication experts define the "public good" in a way that meets the needs of their clients. In other words, professionals in messaging become the arbiters of "progressive values" and the public becomes simply an audience for the marketing of these ideas.

In neither approach is there any provision for facilitating a public dialog about what actually constitutes the public interest and how to bring that about (Brulle & Jenkins, 2006). These messaging campaigns consider only one strategy for dealing with global warming. This is characteristic of a spin campaign. It is not designed to provoke conversation and debate. Rather, it is designed to influence public opinion in a particular manner. In place of sustained dialog and interaction between citizens and their leadership, we are offered a one-way communication in which individual citizens are treated as objects of manipulation and control. One would think that democracy and self-direction would be "progressive" values. This approach contradicts the progressive ethos that ecoAmerica and Lakoff purport to champion.

Notably, Lakoff (2004, pp. 100–101) argues that this approach is not elite manipulation of public opinion. Specifically, he argues that his approach is not spinning, because spinning is the deceptive use of language to make something "sound good and normal" (i.e., what he claims ecoAmerica does). The difference between framing and spinning, he says, is that framers represent "what their moral views really are." In other words, Lakoff seems to be arguing that the right wing does not believe its own rhetoric, and so it generates spin; whereas, we progressives believe in ours, and so it is not spin. In a sense, Lakoff is still saying: "Speak your values, but by the way—use *these specific words* to be more effective." His argument that his approach is not spin is not convincing. Call it what you will, but if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's a duck.

Both Lakoff and ecoAmerica use a top-down approach, mobilizing supporters as if they were isolated consumers of ideas rather than citizens. This form of message delivery inhibits the development of a collective community consciousness and mobilization. This messaging approach simplifies the analysis of global warming and

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how to respond to it into thirty-second sound bites, thus substituting advertizing slogans for civic discourse. This Orwellian approach reaffirms the authority of political elites to set the dominant political discourse and to reduce citizens to passive message recipients. It also limits access to the public discourse to those entities that have the financial resources to access commercial mass media. Additionally, the adoption of advertizing techniques reinforces social atomization, in which it is imagined that individuals experience messages as individuals and not as part of broader communities. Citizens are called upon to take individual—not collective—actions; thus encouraging a passive civil society. This approach reinforces the tendency of mass communications processes to isolate and fragment social consciousness and disempowering the public (Barnouw, 1975; Beck, 1986, p. 32; Ewen, 1976; Schiller, 1973). As Gamson and Ryan (2005, p. 15) note:

> The central lessons to be learned from Lakoff's omission is that building an effective framing strategy is not merely about more effective marketing expressed through catchy symbols that tap an emotional hot button and trigger the desired response. The problem isn't that it doesn't work—in the short run; it may—but that its singular focus on finesse in individual framing undermines the goal of increasing citizens' sense that they can collectively change things.

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Framing Without Mobilization

The intellectual approaches of ecoAmerica and Lakoff are limited to cognitive science and psychology. This reductionist approach is limited to changing only cultural beliefs, as if they exist apart from existing political and economic relations. Pouring new rhetoric into the same system of structural relations will accomplish little. As the field frame perspective shows, the structure of power has to be changed as part of the process, and any rhetorical strategy that promises to be effective must link its rhetoric to a broader political strategy that includes grassroots organizing at its base. As Gamson and Ryan (2005, p. 14) note:

> By focusing entirely on the content of the message, while ignoring the frame carriers and the playing field, Lakoff falls into the pitfalls of the social marketing model . . . To counter the assumption that the frame will set us free, framing strategies must not just address the content of the message or the style of debate but attend to base building and challenge the contours of the non-level playing field in which the contest is carried on.

In the top-down messaging approach used by Lakoff and ecoAmerica, public opinion is created not through public debate but via mass advertizing techniques. So, rather than representing an informed decision, public opinion is reduced to popularity or acclamation of given policies as measured by polls, which are then utilized by elites in framing wars to gain political advantage. Not only is this process vulnerable to loss of credibility as soon as its manufactured nature is exposed (Habermas, 1996, p. 364; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009, p. 10), but also creates the need for continuous spin wars to maintain public support for a given policy in the face of opposing messaging campaigns. As Habermas (1989, p. 141) shows, this process

"simply serves the arcane policies of special interests; in the form of 'publicity' it wins public prestige for people or affairs, thus making them worthy of acclamation in a climate of nonpublic opinion. The very words 'public relations work' betray the fact that a public sphere must first be arduously constructed case by case." Social transformation requires social interactions and dialogue, not clever spin campaigns (Gamson & Ryan, 2005, p. 15).

Finally, following this communications strategy will further the professionalization of the environmental movement and lessen its political mobilization capacity. Although sectors of the environmental movement have relied on community organizing and grassroots participation, the overwhelming majority of environmental organizations are professional movement organizations that rely on professional staff to "speak for" rather than directly mobilize supporters (Brulle, 2000; Brulle & Jenkins, 2008). In these "protest businesses" (Jordan & Maloney, 1997), the professional staff uses direct mail and other appeals to raise funds from dispersed individuals, private foundations, and government agencies, which are then used to finance the activities of the professional staff. This situation creates social distance between the leadership and supporters of the organization and blunts the mobilization and political influence of the environmental movement. While much of this problem is self-inflicted by an environmental movement unwilling to engage citizens in a serious dialog or to engage in grassroots organizing, following Lakoff's or ecoAmerica's advice will worsen this problem.

It is well known that political mobilization campaigns are more effective and legitimate if they engage citizens in a sustained dialog rather than treating them as mass opinion to be manipulated (Habermas, 1996, p. 363; Rochon, 1998, p. 137). The importance of public participation in developing decisions that include concern about the natural environment has been stressed by numerous authors.[7] Broad-based civic participation cannot be brought about by expert advocacy. Instead, individuals need to actively participate in the creation and maintenance of their civic institutions. The way to institute democratic politics is to practice democratic politics. There is no separation of ends and means in this area. As Scerri (2009, p. 480) notes: "The task of putting public awareness of environmental issues into practice is inseparable from that of working to enhance political solidarity."

Communication for Civic Engagement

To mobilize broad-based support for social change, citizens cannot be treated as objects for manipulation. Rather, they should be treated as citizens involved in a mutual dialog. As Luke (2005) argues, the core problem with the current environmental movement is the narrowing of the public sphere and a restricted understanding of the public interest. Hence, he calls for a public ecology that could engage citizens in a collective effort to rebalance the economic and social order with human and natural needs. Additionally, the messaging strategies need to be integrated into broader efforts to foster political mobilization in support of social change. Specifically, Gamson and Ryan (2005, p. 15) advocate a participatory communication

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model that "involves developing an ongoing capability of people to act collectively in framing contests." This calls for a reorientation of environmental communication from identity campaigns to civic engagement. Following are three dimensions of this process.

From Identity to Challenge Campaigns

One of the most common assumptions in designing identity-based environmental communication campaigns is that fear appeals are counterproductive. As Swim et al. (2009, p. 80) note: "well meaning attempts to create urgency about climate change by appealing to fear of disasters or health risks frequently lead to the exact opposite of the desired response: denial, paralysis, apathy, or actions that can create greater risks than the one being mitigated." While the author goes on to qualify and expand this line of argument, this has been taken as an absolute in the popular press and much of the grey literature produced by nonprofit organizations and foundations.

However, the academic literature portrays a much more complex picture: whereas apocalyptic rhetoric has been shown to be able to evoke powerful feelings of issue salience (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 373), reassuring messages, such as those advocated by ecoAmerica, have the least ability to increase issue salience (de Hoog, Stroebe, & de Wit, 2007; Lowe et al., 2006; Meijinders, Cees, Midden, & Wilke, 2001; Witte & Allen, 2000). Additionally, apocalyptic messages do not necessarily result in denial. A number of empirical studies show that individuals respond to threat appeals with an increased focus on collective action (Eagly & Kulesa, 1997; Langford, 2002; Leiserowitz, Kates, & Parris, 2006, p. 437; Maiteny, 2002; Shaiko, 1999; Swim et al., 2009, p. 94). Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, and Leitten (1993, p. 248) distinguish between threat and challenge messaging: threat messages "are those in which the perception of danger exceeds the perception of abilities or resources to cope with the stressor. Challenge appraisals, in contrast, are those in which the perception of danger does not exceed the perception of resources or abilities to cope." If a meaningful response to a threat can be taken that is within the resources of the individual, this results in a challenge, which "may galvanize creative ideas and actions in ways that transform and strengthen the resilience end creativity of individuals and communities" (Fritze, Blashki, Burke, & Wieseman, 2008, p. 12). While fear appeals can lead to maladaptive behaviors, fear combined with information about effective actions can also be strongly motivating (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 376; Witte & Allen, 2000).

This shift to challenge campaigns also implies a shift to the use of melodrama. Rather than trying to create unifying messages within the limits that support market and political exigencies, melodrama can expand public dialog to move beyond ideological and limited frames. As Schwarze (2006, p. 242) argues: "Promoting division and drawing sharp moral distinctions can be a fitting response to situations in which identification and consensus have obscured recognition of damaging material conditions and social injustices." By critiquing ideological worldviews,

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melodrama can combat discourses of cooptation, reveal ideological mechanisms of control, and expand the range of options considered (Foust & Murphy, 2009, p. 162).

Shifting the Process from One-Way Communications to Civic Engagement

What is needed is a communications process that promotes civic engagement and dialog (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009, p. 5; Spoel, Goforth, Cheu, & Pearson, 2009, p. 78). When individuals are provided with full information regarding a particular risk, and are then included in the development of responses to it, they are much more likely to engage in taking action than if given only limited information or responsibility (Jasanoff & Wynne, 1998). "These newer, more engaged forms of scientific citizenship are integral to the project of democratizing science and society relations by broadening public participation in policy deliberations and decision making processes" (Spoel et al., 2009, p. 51). Rather than just informing the public of and eliciting support for various elite policy positions, environmental communication needs to aim at developing messaging procedures that involve citizens directly in the policy development process.

There is also a large amount of research on public involvement in environmental decision-making that could be applied to this task (Gastil, 2008; Jacobs et al., 2009; Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgaard, 2006; Webler, 1995, 1999; Webler & Tuler, 2000). Individuals working in this area have developed and tested a decision-making process that integrates scientific analysis and community deliberation into a comprehensive strategy for environmental decision-making. Known as Analytic Deliberation, this process defines a democratic method for development of government policies that recognizes the link between social rationality and public involvement. It also provides techniques for integrating practical, normative, and esthetic concerns into a democratic decision-making process (National Research Council [NRC], 1996). This process has been verified and expanded in a number of reports on watershed planning (NRC, 1999c, pp. 240–253), environmental justice (NRC, 1999b, pp. 64–68), and valuing biodiversity (NRC, 1999a). The approach can help inform the creation of democratic environmental communication that builds civic engagement.

Envisioning an Ecologically Sustainable Society

Large-scale social change is based on the creation of a rhetoric of salvation. Thus, an effective rhetoric critiques the current situation and offers a Utopian vision of where the society needs to go. It is this combination of threats and opportunities, nightmares and dreams—that fuels social movement mobilization and social change (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001; Griffin, 1966, p. 461).

What is needed is a new social vision that engages citizens and fosters the development of enlightened self-interest and an awareness of long-term community interests. The current state of ecological degradation brings such a project to the forefront of the challenge to human survival. While humans make their own history, we usually do so in a manner that is unreflexive, unleashing forces that produce

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destruction and human misery. This unreflexive approach has now led the globe to the brink of ecological catastrophe. To prevent this threat from becoming a reality, we need to intentionally foster the reflexive capacity of global society to increase its social learning and transformative ability. To address environmental issues, we need to be able to have a broad-based democratic discussion to establish common goals.

The approaches advocated by both ecoAmerica and Lakoff do little to accomplish this task. In fact, they are fundamentally flawed, and thereby limit our responses to global warming to very narrow and most likely unworkable policy actions. Their approach also works against the large-scale public engagement necessary to enact the far-reaching changes needed to meaningfully address global warming. Extending Lakoff's metaphor, we need to move from relying on either of our parents, whether they are strict or nurturant. Rather, we need to leave home and learn to rely on ourselves as competent adults, responsible for our own actions and future.

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Notes

[1] There is an extensive literature in this area (Alexander, 2006; Barber, 1984; Calhoun, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003; Sztompka, 1993).
[2] For a summary of this debate, see Goldstein (2008).
[3] For a discussion of alternative approaches, see Brulle (2010).
[4] See, for example, Cavlovic, Baker, Berrens, and Gawande (2000, p. 40), Dinda (2004), Huesemann (2006), Jorgenson and Burns (2007), Jorgenson, Dick, and Mahutga (2007), and York, Rosa, and Dietz (2003).
[5] See ecoAmerica (2009).
[6] See Fenton Communications (2009).
[7] See Graham and Sadowitz (1994), Shaiko (1999), and Skocpol (2003).

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