



**CLIMATE
CHANGE,
MEDIA &
CULTURE**

**CRITICAL ISSUES
IN GLOBAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMUNICATION**

**EDITED BY
JULIET PINTO
ROBERT E. GUTSCHE, JR.
PAOLA PRADO**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Moses Shumow cared deeply about making a difference with his research and teaching, and his sudden loss is devastating for all who knew him as a colleague, professor and friend. We would like to dedicate this work to the Shumow family.

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Foreword

As researcher of science and environmental communication, I often think about the current state of our climate crisis, how we got here, and where we go from here. We are at a moment of global crisis like never before, and the failure of political and government response at places across the globe is alarming. As international leaders ignore the evidence of climate change, or even worse, deny its existence entirely, we no longer have the privilege to disengage or wait it out. As we peer into our uncertain collective future, we need to pay special attention to the mechanisms and social institutions that led us here in the first place. The time is now to push for responsibility and immediate large-scale action commensurate with the risks we face.

What I have learned in my work on climate change is that it is impossible to uncouple humans from our environmental crises. All environmental issues are inherently social and political. At the very core, we're dealing with political and economic systems, designed by and for the advancement of the human race, where certain groups reap the systemic rewards of being in positions of power. As complex as our natural world is, our social nature is even more so. When we think we understand how to create social change, persuasion, or collective action, something happens and our understanding shifts. As I progressed throughout my doctoral training in the United States, my adviser would tell me, "You can never step in the same river twice," meaning no two situations are ever the same; History and forward motion are always in play, and so I have found it to be true. How do we move forward to collectively address the state we are in when the context is never quite the same? How do you find effectiveness for change when the risk, political actors, and social history are always unique? The chapters in this book address some of the key issues – ones of context, place, and power – that so critically influence the decisions we can and do make in our communities. The time is now to elevate our perspective to one of global awareness; if we seek to truly make an impact with our scholarship or practice, that is the only way we can move forward to work more effectively across our differences to find solutions.

There is deep value in taking a critical approach to this work. The impacts of global temperature rise are already visible: Increased spread of infectious disease because of drier winters and warmer summer temperatures, an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, massive threats of species extinction, and increased damage to food crops leading to food insecurity, to name just a few. What is often invisible, however, are the political, economic, and social structures that have systemically constrained some groups' ability to prepare and respond. Critical theory becomes helpful in exposing and upending those structures.

At the heart of the issues discussed in this book is social and political inequality. The effects of climate change are not equally dispersed across the global community. Citizens of developing countries or economically disadvantaged communities are disproportionately affected for a number of reasons. First and foremost is a lack of resources available to prepare and adequately respond to environmental crises when they happen. This is something we have seen in cases over and over again – Hurricanes in the United States; major flooding in Bangladesh; severe droughts in Afghanistan – and it often results in the even further destabilization of an already vulnerable population. At the scale that we are seeing these impacts, there needs to be both individual and political intervention.

As community members and individuals, we can take action. The first step is becoming the stewards of our own knowledge, seeking out credible and scientific information and using it to inform our own decisions. The next step is to start conversations within our own communities; to not shy away from engagement and the role of a player in these issues. Bring the issues into your home, church, work, and community discussion. The more we feel comfortable discussing the risks associated with these environmental crises, the more we can build capacity to respond. The last, and most critical, stage for action is holding our political leaders accountable. Policy change is possible and necessary, but it won't be an easy transition to cultivate. For policymakers to take the urgent action that is necessary, they need to hear from overwhelming numbers of citizens who will not stop making the case that political intervention on climate change is both a social and ethical duty.

It is my hope that the chapters in this book offer ideas and research that empower you to think about what stories we're telling in climate change communication, and more importantly, what stories we're not telling. As members of society where we all share the Earth's finite resources, we have a responsibility to one another to take a global perspective and a collaborative approach. This book is an important step in that direction and it's up to us to move the conversations started here into action.

Hollie Smith, Ph.D.
University of Oregon

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