Shifting Voices, Oppositional Discourse, and New Visions for Communication Studies

By Linda L. Putnam

This address, delivered at ICA’s 50th anniversary conference, calls on the association to take stock of where we are and how we should come together. It reviews 3 periods in the field’s recent past: fermentation, fragmentation, and legitimation. Then, drawing from several of Bakhtin’s notions of dialogue, it summons scholars to come together by engaging in alternative modes of discourse—ones that center on multiple and shifting voices and oppositional discourse. It advocates using the construct of voice rather than paradigms, theories, and academic divisions, to develop complementary ways of understanding. In particular, it calls on the field to take inventory of multiple and shifting voices in reviews and critiques of the literature, to connect with each other through exploring shifting concepts and theories, and to engage in joint actions in ways that embrace and preserve differences.

It is indeed a pleasure to present this address at this moment in our history, the celebration of ICA’s 50th anniversary. This conference, poised at the beginning of a new millennium and situated in this beautiful, tropical environment of Acapulco provides an opportunity to take inventory of the field and to present ideas for building relationships among our theoretical and topical specialties. On our 50th anniversary, it seems particularly important to take stock of, not only where we are and where we should be going, but also how we should come together to shape new visions of the field. Given that we have entered the age often called “the communication millennium,” in which society at large recognizes that communication, information, and media drive the nature of social life, we need to situate ourselves to address the complex and diverse social problems that call for our expertise. We need to be positioned to promote our field in the many academic and public agendas that are surfacing in this age of communication.

In taking inventory, I focus my analysis inwardly on the field itself—the ways we could embrace differences and generate creative energy from shifting voices.

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and oppositional discourse in our interactions. Although this presidential address could focus on other important issues in our field, for example, the application of our research to public policy or the development of a stronger interdisciplinary presence in the academy, it seems fitting at this moment to look inwardly at who we are and what we should be doing.

To provide guidelines for coming together, I present a cursory overview of some critical moments in our recent history—periods of ferment, fragmentation, and legitimacy—and then apply three constructs—multiple and shifting voices, oppositional discourse, and connecting—to advocate alternative relationships among scholars in the field. Given the setting of this conference, I also employ insights from Latin American scholarship to illustrate key issues in this address. Like every scholar, I embody a place to stand, one that reflects my own orientation to the study of communication. No doubt, scholars with other theoretical leanings would develop a different set of guidelines and recommendations. The guidelines that I set forth are drawn from Bakhtin’s notions of dialogue, as translated and applied to interrelationships among scholars in the field. In my analysis, I offer no panaceas, but I introduce some options for connecting the growing and diverse scholarship across our field.

**Turning Points and the Status of the Field**

Special panels at this conference have explored glimpses of ICA at different points in our history. These snapshots capture not only the development of the Association, but also the turning points in which new theories emerged, paradigms shifted, and new research agendas evolved. In our more recent past, we recall the mid-1980s as the time of “Ferment in the Field,” in which scholars engaged in heated paradigm struggles (“Ferment,” 1983; Dervin, Grossberg, O’Keefe, & Wartella, 1989). In some circles of our discipline, academic discourse centered on ideological feuds that evolved into self-perpetuating skirmishes, cast different perspectives as caricatures, and positioned alternative approaches as either-or choices (Corman, 2000; Dervin, 1993). With the use of such metaphors as battles, games, and ferment, discourse among scholars perpetuated the development of distinct academic camps.

The debates over positivist, interpretive, and critical perspectives often set up false dichotomies among pairs of constructs deemed essential for developing the field—agency versus structure, individual versus collective, and freedom versus constraint. These dualisms were also prevalent in alternative media research in Latin America through exploring dialectical tensions between authoritarian and democratic media or top-down and grassroots forms of communication (Huesca & Dervin, 1994). However, as Huesca and Dervin reported, in Latin American scholarship this ferment was rooted in the political context that was external to but integrated within the field. This approach of building constructs in opposition to the dominant political scene opened up alternatives that moved beyond traditional theories.
Looking back to the 1980s, the field gained momentum through taking stock of itself, exploring its limitations, and incorporating new theories and methods. Even though our paradigm debates today seem “far kinder and gentler with more mutual learning” than in the mid-1980s (Mumby, 2000), residues of this period remain on our landscape and require rethinking the field even more than before (Craig, 1993). Thus, although this ferment led to more sophisticated developments in communication, it fostered what Dervin (1993) describes as “dissent mythologized as tolerance” and it ushered in a new era of the field—fragmentation.

Emerging as a dominant theme in the early 1990s, fragmentation refers not only to the isolation and segmentation of research arenas, but also to the splintering of basic concepts and theories into self-contained enclaves. In the 1993 special issue of *Journal of Communication* on the status of the field, Rosengren (1993) depicted the field as a landscape punctuated by “frog ponds” rather than rivers—each pond with its own species of plants and fish and with a striking absence of cross-fertilization. For example, he noted how audience research in the field had developed through splintering studies into five different traditions that rarely cited or talked with each other (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990; Livingstone, 1993; Rosengren, 1993). A similar critique could be levied at research on popular culture, media effects, communication networks, and communication campaigns. Thus, fragmentation divides our construct development and theoretical thinking into discrete subspecialties. Clearly, multiple causes have contributed to this fragmentation, including the lack of a core body of knowledge (Craig, 1993), the insularity of the field (Craig, 1993), overemphasis on context-centered research (Swanson, 1993), continued development of narrowed interdisciplinary specialties (Craig, 1993), lack of connections between substantive theory and empirical data (Rosengren, 1993), building the field through “sterile eclecticism” (Craig, 1999; Peters, 1986), and the practice of borrowing from other fields without a set of concrete objectives or foci (Craig, 1999; Gronbeck, 1999; Peters, 1986). Perhaps more problematic than the fragmentation itself is the tone of indifference and bland acceptance of the field’s response to this segmentation.

A concomitant and more recent issue in our history is the quest for legitimacy of communication studies (Jensen, 1993; Rowland, 1993). Legitimacy is both a political and an ontological issue in that we must be advocates of our field in local universities, national arenas, and international circles (Mancini, 1993). The concern for legitimacy has pushed us to articulate the scholarly focus of the discipline; strengthen connections with other fields; understand the realities of university politics; and position communication studies as central, important, and high quality (Shoemaker, 1993). This quest and the desire to make an impact in the world has also led to linking communication scholarship with public policy and integrating our specialties with cognate disciplines. Certainly, our presence in interdisciplinary circles has enhanced the image of the field and called attention to communication research and scholarship; however, it also intensifies and reifies fragmentation through developing more sophisticated specializations. Moreover, it diverts attention away from another important concern—finding ways to build and organize our own theories rather than relying on modes of thinking borrowed from other disciplines (Gronbeck, 1999; Shoemaker, 1993).
The ontological basis of legitimacy often centers on the question of "whether the field is a discipline or not" and "whether it should or could be a discipline," with its own view of society, key constructs, and modes of explanation (Deetz, 1994). The concept of a discipline, as Shepherd (1993) notes, arises from ocular metaphors—what is "our View" of communication inquiry and what is "our Eye" on being and existence. This metaphor rooted in modernism leads us back to the quest for a universal paradigm or for developing a foundation for the field, activities that stand at odds with our diverse conceptions of communication and with the fluid postmodern world in which we live. For a number of scholars, communication is antidisciplinary in that discourse constitutes the very essence of being and society (Carey, 1989; Shepherd, 1993; Streeter, 1995). To address these concerns about disciplinary status and to develop modes of explanation rooted in social problems, we need alternative ways for the field to come together.

A particular type of discourse characterizes each of these eras. In the fermentation period, debunking opposite positions and engaging in polemics contributed to an illusion of unified perspectives and specialties. At one time, we acted as if all critical theorists shared similar assumptions and looked alike. Although we have moved past this illusion, we continue to use discursive patterns that promote closure, peaceful coexistence, or cold war pluralism as ways of relating to diverse paradigms and subspecialties. In general, the dominant mode of discourse in the fermentation period relied on attacking differences rather than understanding or using them for constructive development (Mumby, 2000).

The fragmentation period, characterized by isolation and indifference, is moving away from silence as the dominant mode of interaction toward building bridges that seem comfortable or safe, for instance, studies of the Internet that draw from organization communication, technology, and mass communication, or research on images of gender in popular culture and mass media. In the period of legitimacy, our interactions have focused externally on ways to position the field in the university, national, and international circles. Although important as a mode of discourse, attention to external communication without a concomitant focus on interrelationships among subareas of the field contributes to continued fragmentation. Each of these modes of discourse limits our ability to embrace differences. They push us to choose among struggle, mutual coexistence, or isolation, and make it difficult for us to engage in collaborative action. We need to adopt another type of discourse, one that privileges multiple and shifting voices and that embraces diversity rather than seeking to eliminate, ignore, or integrate opposing views.

**An Alternative Mode of Discourse**

One construct that offers the potential to improve dialogue across the field is the notion of voice. Drawn from critical theory and feminist literature, voice refers to a stance or a position from which to speak (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). It embodies who can speak, when, and in what ways. As a metaphor for communication studies, this construct calls attention to unique perspectives that are often ignored, silenced, or misunderstood. It highlights the way voices become distorted
through power relationships embedded in ideology and domination and ways to gain access to and create opportunities for participation. An important contribution that voice makes to our field is revealing the invisible aspects of social arrangements or the ways that some voices become privileged and others are marginalized.

The area of cultural studies has made significant contributions to embracing the significance of voice in the field, particularly in studies of ethnicity, race, and gender (Carey, 1989; Grossberg, 1993; Grossberg et al., 1992). Latin American studies have focused on voice through the mixture of cultures in the Americas (Atwood & McAnany, 1986; Freire, 1983) and the role of popular culture in political struggles and strategies for communicative action (Barbero, 1996). Multiple voices also refer to bodies of knowledge that bring international and intercultural perspectives to communication theory, research, and practice. Voice as a construct also refers to different targets for research—audiences, constituents, and stakeholders. It embodies the field’s efforts to understand whose interests are served in any given research project—the academy, the state, grassroots users, the public, or the corporate elite.

Multiple and Shifting Voices
The construct of voice reframes the notions of paradigm, theories, and perspectives rooted in ocular metaphors and reified boundaries (Mumby, 2000). By casting the field as multiple voices rather than incommensurate or fragmented perspectives, we can pursue complementary understandings through blurring boundaries and engaging in collaborative activities. This approach to the notion of voice differs from pluralism and from treating the field as a congregation of voices. The idea of voice in the literature on fermentation and incommensurability casts the field as a “Tower of Babel” in which scholars are unable to listen to, to connect with, or to understand each other’s words (Jackson & Carter, 1991, 1993; Kaghan & Phillips, 1998; Miller, 2000). In contrast, Bakhtin’s use of multiple voices stems from his concept of a polyglot community in which the copresence of diverse voices reveals different dialectics and knowledge claims (Bakhtin, 1981). The belief that the field is comprised of multiple voices that are incongruent, yet overlapping and blurred at the edges, is not particularly novel. However, adopting multiple and shifting voices as a metaphor for the field urges us to use this construct to develop complementary ways of understanding rather than to perpetuate pluralism and intellectual apartheid. Multivocality, then, is more than an aggregation of voices; it is not simply a way of “putting our heads together” or pooling our “specialties” in joint projects. It involves engaging, mutual understanding, and appreciating differences.

Moreover, the concept of multivocality is NOT another form of solipsism, in which researchers are guided by whims, or relativism, as exemplified by the phrase, “let a thousand flowers bloom.” The metaphor of voice challenges the belief that all knowledge claims are valid. Embracing multiple voices entails evaluation and choice, but these actions occur “within a point of view” and in accordance with plausible and defensible interpretations. Criteria and conventions for rigor and internal consistency vary across perspectives and should be preserved as features.
of multivocality (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Engaging in a dialogue embraces and privileges different forms of understanding.

Multivocality, then, hinges on two features: (a) engaging one another through connecting knowledge claims and (b) understanding shifts in voice across different arenas of the field. Engaging means directly addressing the issues of convergence and divergence in complementary ways, and shifting voices refers to the movement of concepts and ideas to and from the center and extremes of the field. The concept of shifting voices, then, parallels Bakhtin’s notion of a cacophony of voices as the forces that pull continually at extremes through their intersection in an utterance (Stewart & Zediker, 2000).

As an example of this process, Gronbeck (1999) depicted the field’s movement from linear transmission models to social construction of meaning as a shift spurred by tensions in the field, emergence of new voices, and reactions to the sociopolitical practices of the time. Thus, shifting voices grew out of discourse that continually pushed and pulled at both the center and the margins of the field. As another illustration, the shifts toward interpretive and cultural views of organizational communication in the early 1980s involved pushing and pulling from the mainstreams of managerial practice to the extremes of anticorporate biases (Putnam, 1983). The pushes and pulls within the centers and the extremes of these knowledge claims not only shifted voices, but also revealed horizons that were not present in the initial deliberations. Specifically, a nonmanagerial set of voices, now evident in the current studies on self-organizing systems, feminist perspectives, and participation, surfaced from the shifts between the center and extremes of embracing both pro- and antimanagerial perspectives.

Oppositional Discourse and Embracing Differences

The concept of oppositional discourse refers to the practice of valuing and embracing differences simultaneously, without casting them as rigid polarities like theory versus practice, agency versus structure, or culture versus individual. Rooted in dialogue, this practice seeks to uncover contrasting positions and to respect the integrity of different knowledge claims. Oppositional discourse begins by embracing the tensions that arise from difference and probing the contradictions and paradoxes between and within them, ones that point to shifts in voices and new understandings. It centers on the ironies, surprises, and paradoxical twists that evolve from the way opposites function interdependently in particular circumstances. For example, in structuration theory, the view that communication is produced by and simultaneously produces structures grew out of paradoxical relationships between structure and agency in the duality of control (Giddens, 1979, 1991; Poole, Seibold, & McPhee, 1996).

A second example of oppositional discourse and shifting voices surfaces in the development of alternative media studies in Latin America. Initially conceptualized in opposition to the dominant culture (authoritarian versus democratic, centralized versus decentralized, and industrial versus artisan), media studies in Latin America struggled to develop both theory and practice simultaneously (Huesca & Dervin, 1994). Through embracing tensions between the global and the local and...
between process and product, voices shifted through revealing how the lines between the oppressors and oppressed blurred. Specifically, reception studies demonstrated that media audiences actively participated in their own oppression, that liberating groups used dominant media for counterhegemonic purposes, and that pluralistic and democratic media frequently employed oppressive content. Thus, the dualisms rooted in media structures and practices collapsed as multiple and shifting voices emerged and reconstituted popular culture that were texts subject to multiple interpretations. These shifting voices evolved from using points of contradiction in cultural practices for communicative inquiry and action. New insights and theoretical developments emanated from the ongoing interplay of oppositional discourse that worked from and built upon these shifting voices.

Oppositional discourse also arises from simultaneously accepting and rejecting unity while embracing diversity. On the one hand, some scholars contend that we should bring the field together through finding common ground, developing consensus, building coherence, and transcending differences (Berger & Chaffe, 1988; Corman, 2000; Craig, 1999; Rogers & Chaffee, 1993; Wiemann, Hawkins, & Pingree, 1988). On the other hand, other researchers readily dismiss the idea that the field will ever achieve a form of unity (Miller, 1983). In particular, O’Keefe (1993) acknowledges that the field has never embraced a single overarching intellectual tradition nor has it advocated that communication scholarship should be a unitary enterprise. Multiple approaches have always been the strength and excitement of our interdisciplinary roots and our concern for praxis.

Focusing on the distinctiveness or uniqueness of the field has also produced problems in the quest for unity. As Beniger (1993) observes, communication differs from other fields. Other fields coalesce around unique understandings of particular constructs, for example, political science with its focus on power, economics with its emphasis on scarce resources, psychology with its attention to the individual, and sociology with a concern for social structure. Our uniqueness, however, is direct in that the field of communication exists in what we study. Thus, unity by definition does not stem from simply concentrating on a select topic or social problem.

Thus, in its purest sense, we reject unity, but we also seek it through acknowledging that fragmentation and diversification have their limits. That is, continuing in the direction of pluralism and theoretical proliferation poses problems as the field splinters into rapidly developing subareas without any connecting threads. At the level of practice, the lack of connections across the field makes it difficult to respond to issues except from within our very narrow terrains. Continued efforts to fragment and diversify also make us comfortable within our own specialized enclaves while other fields make the influential, broad-sweeping statements on what we know the most about—communication studies.

How do we begin to embrace both unity and diversity? How do we promote a different type of discourse across the field, one aimed at involving multiple and shifting voices, preserving oppositional tensions, and making significant connections? How do we choose in which arenas to make connections, and how do we engage in this process?
Connecting and Coming Together

In the next decade, the field needs to make a concerted effort to connect our many voices—divisions and interest groups, specializations, perspectives, ethic and cultural stances, and research methods. The aim of this process is not to produce a core body of knowledge or a unified paradigm. It is not simply to make contacts in the field; rather it suggests a genuine effort to enlist other scholars in exploring differences and understanding shifting voices. It calls for a conscious effort to build paths that lead to and from autonomous groups. Although engaging in this process is imbued with its own set of contradictions, we need to move past these concerns and develop alternatives for coming together. What are some ways that we can connect through identifying shifting voices and embracing oppositional tensions?

*Taking inventory and distilling knowledge.* A beginning point for connecting our many voices is to engage in regular and frequent efforts to synthesis subareas of the field. In honor of our 50th anniversary, volume 24 of *Communication Yearbook* centers on assimilating the major developments in each division and interest group of ICA. Because the body of knowledge in almost every area of the field has mushroomed in the past decade, this task represents a major undertaking. Even though these reviews may not incorporate multiple voices or even engage in oppositional discourse, efforts to distill, compare, and contrast knowledge claims within domains of the field represent a starting place. These efforts provide a forum for exploring contradictions within and across areas, for gaining insights into emerging concepts, and for indexing multiple perspectives on topics of study. Taking stock of areas of the field also creates opportunities for translation and self-critique, activities that enhance recognition of contrasts as well as connections.

*Connecting through exploring mutual problems.* Another alternative for coming together is to explore common problems in theory building and research. One particular problem we share is how to situate communication elements in our research as figure or as ground. How do we choose to place certain features of communication—media, context, text, and audience—as central and pivotal while locating other features as background? How do these elements shift within and across particular subspecialties and paradigms of research? Cheney (2000) compares this process to a flashlight that illuminates certain parts of a dark room, relegates other parts to the margins of the light beam, and shrouds other aspects of the parameter. As light beams move, what is or is not illuminated shifts. What is seen brightly at any one time, however, is not all that is present in the room. Moreover, certain light beams and shifts in illumination may work better in some rooms than in others. Although we readily acknowledge that communication scholars approach the dark room differently, we rarely address how we privilege certain features of this process.

For example, Dervin (1993) advocates that communication scholars make “the doing of communication” primary in their research. This recommendation privileges process-oriented studies and treats other features of communication as ground. In contrast, other scholars advocate that the field foreground agency,
contexts, or effects. A dialogue about what we privilege and what we include and exclude in our theories of communication forms a way of making connections across the field. Although various epistemological stripes guide our decisions, we typically make these choices without articulating our implicit assumptions about the nature of communication.

In a similar vein, scholars in interpersonal and mass communication have forged connections through preconferences and publications dedicated to working within the other’s separate intellectual traditions (Reardon & Rogers, 1988). This type of endeavor serves as an exemplar for ways that multiple voices can come together and explore their academic relationships. This conference, with special panels on building a dialogue between Latin American and North American approaches to communication, also serves as a model for making connections.

A second area for coming together is to center on emerging concepts in the field. Evolving concepts that develop across areas of the field often signal shifts in voices. Definitions and orientations for studying them are muddy and blurred. No research arena can fully claim control or jurisdiction over these terms. These constructs are often the ones that scholars label as messy and ill defined. For example, the concept of communication framing, although once the domain of cognitive and interpersonal perspectives (Bateson, 1972; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), is now blurred within our field as applications have shifted to textual frames, frame analysis, and news frames (Durham, 1998; Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Putnam & Holmer, 1992). Rather than complaining about the fuzziness of this construct or ignoring the other specialties in which it is applied, scholars should come together to generate how different treatments of this construct can collectively contribute to theory building. That is, what can we learn about framing as a discursive process from the diverse and myriad treatments of it in our literatures? How can we connect to generate new theoretical developments from embracing these differences?

A third nexus for connecting within the field is to bring different discourses to bear on broad-based policy issues and social problems. Addressing a common problem within a cross-divisional team affords multiple discourses opportunities to embrace their differences through stimulating productive scholarship. The field offers an array of topics that are ripe for problem-centered research, for example, the role of political economy in the development of media and Internet policies, ethical issues in communication campaigns, and the role of democracy in organizational and telecommunication systems. Specifically, Bennett (1993) describes a multidivisional project on news coverage of political conflicts that led to the development of policy debate records. Scholars with different voices posed broad-based questions, embraced competing perspectives, and developed new insights through their collaboration. By studying important aspects of the same problem, scholars can connect in a grounded way to reveal insights about complex issues.

Similarly, contributions of the Chicago School of sociology to the development of symbolic interaction evolved from assembling scholars with radically diverse perspectives to address social problems (Bulmer, 1984; Monahan & Collins-Jarvis,
1993). Their zeal for connecting and for deciphering the complexity of the links between interaction and social problems sparked an enduring set of theoretical insights. “A fundamental difference between the Chicago School and communication scientists today centers on the value of connectedness. The Chicago scholars were divided by their multiple perspectives but united by their common social interests” (Monahan & Collins-Jarvis, p. 156). Although the field is moving in the direction of connectedness, we need to pursue this agenda more systematically and vigorously in the next decade.

Engaging in oppositional discourse. Perhaps the greatest challenge in pursuing this agenda is changing our academic discourse. First and foremost, dialogue entails a respect and appreciation of positions that differ from our own (Pearce, 1989). Dialogical inquiry is not about persuasion, convergence, or coherence. It emphasizes joint action and coordination to protect and celebrate differences. It aims to preserve rather than eliminate or ignore the tensions surrounding such issues as representation, rigor, precision, and relevance. Scholars of dialogue recommend several criteria for oppositional discourse, including speaking in a “both/and” orientation, keeping the scholarly conversation going, seeking understanding, and highlighting reflexivity (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Krippendorff, 1989). Although these guidelines seem self-evident, they require an academic discourse rooted in curiosity, fluidity, and faith in the emergent process.

Scholarship on paradigm dialogues suggests other ways for connecting across the field (Schultz & Hatch, 1996). Drawing from Burke’s (1969) theory, Cheney (2000) notes how perspective by incongruity introduces value-driven questions and presents tentative and contingent responses that open up multiple voices. Perspective by incongruity also urges us to recognize our own limitations and take ourselves seriously in light of other orientations (Conrad, 2000).

Other alternatives include crossing, parallel development, and paradigm interplay (Schultz & Hatch, 1996). Crossing surfaces through collaborating across the field to investigate social problems, whereas parallel development combines perspectives to explore the same research question. Both options can promote dialogue, but they may also lead to homogenizing differences, creating a false sense of primacy among approaches, or violating tenets of quality and internal coherence for a given perspective. Hence, scholars need to be cautious with the use of options such as crossing, parallel development, and triangulation within the field.

Paradigm interplay involves living within the gray areas, keeping boundaries blurred, and holding answers in suspicion. It strives for simultaneously recognizing both contrasts and connections by moving back and forth between them while making connections and preserving differences. In this alternative, tensions between opposing perspectives shift and overlap rather than serve as anchor points for bipolar positions. Paradigm interplay, however, is hard to achieve in its own right, even with the use of guidelines for keeping boundaries blurred (Cheney, 2000; Mumby, 2000). Although these alternatives each has its own limitations, they present the field with options to the fermentation, fragmentation, and legitimacy modes of discourse that have dominated our terrain for the past several decades. They call us to question what a field is and how we should interact within it.
Conclusion

What a field offers us most of all is not a unified theory, a set of common constructs, or a coherent perspective. Rather, it serves as a means of discourse for the discovery and application of ideas. In our state of fragmentation, we have paid little attention to the development of this process and to the way we deliberate as a field. I am fully aware that the field is not going to become a dialogic community. However, we can use the criteria and principles of dialogue to foster alternative forms of discourse for what we do.

No doubt, the stance that I am taking violates assumptions embedded in postmodern views of dialogue. However, I cannot stand before you without being concerned about the way we collectively pursue our practice. Connecting requires some point of departure, even if we have different definitions and speak different academic languages. The importance of connecting is not to develop a common response to the question of who we are but to generate the highest quality work and the best ideas from our collective strengths. Coming together means that we learn from the rich diversity and vast perspectives in our field. Coming together means we find connections across the field that reveal new understandings and new visions for our work. To connect, we need to identify the shifting voices and blurred boundaries linked to our theoretical venues. Coming together means we should strive to engage in oppositional discourse through embracing both unity and diversity simultaneously.

We sit at the precipice of a very critical time in our history. As we enter the age of communication—one that extends beyond an information society—the knowledge and insights from our field have never had greater significance. The real issue for the next decade, however, is whether we generate the knowledge that embraces the breadth and depth of our field and can we bring it to bear on the social problems that we face. I urge us to accept the challenge of pursuing shifting voices and oppositional discourse.

References


