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Editor's Essay

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Alva Myrdal (1902-1986) was a Swedish feminist, mother, wife, and social scientist whose contributions to sociology were examined by Hedvig Ekerwald. By reading Ekerwald's (2000) work, I learned much about Myrdal. Myrdal served as director of the United Nations Department of Social Affairs, director of the UNESCO Department of Social Sciences in Paris, and in various posts and positions in the Swedish government including being a member of the Swedish Parliament, an ambassador to India, as well as one of first female ministers in Sweden despite her career being delayed and at times overshadowed due to gender roles and expectations. Myrdal also was awarded the Albert Einstein Peace Prize (1980) and Nobel Peace Prize (1982).

Although she was not without controversy, I believe Myrdal is salient to the work of public interest communications (PIC) because she used her unique perspective and experiences as a researcher, mother, and wife to enact change. Through her research she took what was very private, such as the division of home labor, work-life balance, and child care and made the topics public through debate, dialogue, political agendas, and policy. Therefore, I concur with Ekerwald (2000) that Myrdal's work is an "inspiration for finding solutions for societal problems" (p. 351) because Myrdal used clear arguments, careful analysis, broad experience, a range of theoretical perspectives, and scientific thinking to command people to consider different points of views to initiate change. In this issue of the *Journal of Public Interest Communications*, the authors' work seems to center around the question, "What happens when we make the private public?" By analyzing Myrdal's research style, we can further probe and investigate this important question.

Myrdal reformulated problems to allow for examining them from new and different perspectives (Ekerwald, 2000). One way to give light to new perspectives is through transparency. Austin et al.'s article allows readers to view the types of transparency social media

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afford us to view advocacy, emotion, risk, and political discussions at all levels of intimacy from the personal to the societal. Similarly, when boundaries are broken, situations are seen in new ways. Rupprecht's piece delves into how new experiences can allow students to find a new mindfulness. When distraction and familiarity are stripped away and students are active in shared reflection, Rupprecht states that students were more conscious of purpose and connection. Reformulating issues also can help us to define what is no longer acceptable. These beliefs can begin as personal but then can be shared publicly in communities and greater society. Although Boatwright and White remind us that the collection of big data is not inherently bad, they also speak to the need for better protection of social media user data and more transparency in how we use data. In order to move the conversation on gun violence, Austin et al. urge advocates and health and crisis communicators to design better messages by understanding the types of messages and platforms used by different social media users. These authors all demonstrate how information that once might have been privately shared now has been pushed into the public realm.

Myrdal also recognized that there are dichotomies inherent in questions (Ekerwald, 2000). For example, does car-free mobility expose youth to other dangers? What implications does global engagement allow for understanding, but also exploitation? Why is corporate surveillance acceptable while government surveillance is not? Looking at these polarities may also help readers to consider changing expectations as we move from the private to the public. Through the Backpack Journalism program, students share their personal experiences via documentaries, which help those students and those who view the films to develop empathy, connection, and understanding. These outcomes are most likely shaped by the changed experiences of the documentarians. Likewise, thinking about these dichotomies, people are forced to take ownership of their actions or inaction.

By exposing vulnerabilities, we can build strength when we move private opinions into the public realm. Austin et al. warn how social media users tend to engage in echo chambers while avoiding engagement with those with divergent views and implore public health and advocacy organizations to find new ways of communicating with social media users based on this knowledge. Boatwright and White contend that although people need to be more aware of the privacy they give up when using free services, it is also time to hold social media companies accountable for communicating clearly about data collection, use, and storage. By finding ways to improve youth experiences with public transportation, Shafer and Macary argue that if we want to see less dependence on cars as a means of transportation, communicators need to invest in strategies to encourage youth to see these advantages so the youth of today become the active citizens and voters who support such initiatives. When the private concerns of individuals and organizations are brought to the public agenda each concept grows strength because people join voices to find solutions.

Finally, Myrdal saw the importance of bringing the literature of several fields together in order to form a more complete picture (Ekerwald, 2000). She comprehended the need to break down the silos that exist around knowledge through reinterpreting research and expanding areas

of new exploration. In my opinion, PIC sits squarely in this realm. We can see how Boatwright and White brought research from legal, ethical, and policy perspectives to PIC. Austin et al. bridge PIC with public health and crisis communication. Rupperecht demonstrates how PIC can join with journalism, theology, and education, and Shafer and Macary show PIC's connections to transportation and psychology. This interdisciplinary approach takes knowledge that might have been viewed as exclusive to one field of study and makes it open and available to scholars in other disciplines, yet again making the private public.

To answer the question, "What happens when we make the private public?" I think we must be cautious and consider what is the cost of losing our privacy. We must have enough information to make informed and reasoned decisions about what we do and what we do not want in the public realm. We also must have the choice to release information and data when and how we see fit. When, and if, we do decide it is permissible to share personal information and data, we should remember that Myrdal implores us to find meaning in what is relevant and relatable. By doing so we allow the shift from private to public to enact change for the public good rather than for private gain.

Ekerwald, H. (2000). Alva Myrdal: Making the private public. *Acta Sociologica*, 43(4), 343-352.
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