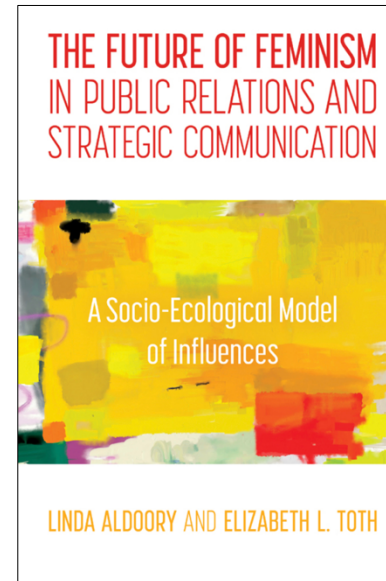


Linda Aldoory and Elizabeth L. Toth, **The Future of Feminism in Public Relations and Strategic Communication: A Socio-Ecological Model of Influences**, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021, 238 pp., \$95.00 (hardcover).

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In *The Future of Feminism in Public Relations and Strategic Communication: A Socio-Ecological Model of Influence*, Linda Aldoory and Elizabeth L. Toth employ a new categorical scheme to both analyze and critique current public relations literature through a feminist lens and spark a dialogue about directions for future research in the field. The authors' three goals with this book are: 1) Offer a comprehensive review of the existing literature that addresses feminism, gender, and race, as well as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) practitioners and other underrepresented and marginalized groups in the field of public relations; 2) analyze and critique the factors that have constituted meaning about those concepts and groups and how they have influenced research and practice in the field; and 3) spark a dialogue for change and future directions of research. Their novel socio-ecological model is visually represented as five concentric circles, each relationally influencing the levels within it as both an inhibitor and facilitator of the inner levels' goals. Each level in the model is further explored in subsequent sections of the book, all tying back to a feminist critique of current research and, subsequently, the public relations industry.



Among the existing literature, Aldoory and Toth begin by acknowledging the limits of their own work, which they note detrimentally focused on the "singular unit of analysis of the individual practitioner and on a dichotomous concept of gender" (p. 4). Their previous work, and that of much of the body of existing research, focuses on an individual, straight White woman and her experiences of discrimination and oppression when navigating the public relations industry; relying on primarily cisgendered, heterosexual, White female practitioners in sampling limited the understanding of racial dynamics, sexuality, and intersectionality in the field and placed the burden on few scholars to explore the "invisible practitioner." Much of the existing research would fall into a single level of Aldoory and Toth's socio-ecological model: the individual practitioner level, which is influenced by all other categories but only exudes influence onto itself. The lack of diversity in lived experiences in this area of research further reinforces the marginalization of practitioners of color; additionally, there is an unspoken assumption of heteronormativity within the field that is exposed when critiquing current research through the lens of queer theory.

The authors also include dialogue with researchers outside the United States to evaluate and refine their model and the fundamental understanding of feminism in public relations, as they

acknowledge that the United States is not as advanced as other international contemporaries in a holistic approach to public relations research through an intersectional, feminist lens. From feedback gleaned from these conversations, Aldoory and Toth adjusted their model to invert the professional and organizational levels, as practitioners are inherently influenced by their employers but may not choose to join professional associations that would, in turn, hold influence over them in terms of values and ethics presented by such organizations. This is a crucial difference from Shoemaker and Reese's (1996, 2014) hierarchy of influence for the journalism industry, which Aldoory and Toth used as a basis for creating their socio-ecological model (p. 8). While journalists are more in tune with the ethical guidelines governed by associations like the Society of Professional Journalists, public relations practitioners are more connected to their organizations than overarching professional associations.

The outermost circle of the socio-ecological model is dubbed "ideological" for the social norms perpetuated by economic and political systems, including discrimination and marginalization on the national level through public policy. Within this group are the concepts of intersectionality, how people's different identities overlap and combine to create their unique experiences and challenges, and hegemony, or the domination of general ideas of particular ideologies. The overarching power of social norms interplays with intersectionality to expose marginalized groups' struggles and create social justice issues. The ideological level of the model seeks to understand and explain human behavior and, in this case, the behavior rooted in the experiences of marginalized people. Ideological-level research has the potential to solve broad-sweeping issues of inequality within society by analyzing and critiquing the assumptions of authority and representation among communities.

The "organizational" level consists of the characteristics and structures of organizations and their culture, policies, and practices related to gender, race, and class norms. While research shows significant advancement for women in the field, that advancement explicitly benefits White women in Western countries. Women of color and LGBTQ practitioners outside of the gender binary are marginalized. Organizational research through a feminist lens has also identified institutional sexism in organizational structures, policies, and practices; for example, workplace inflexibility specifically inhibits women from advancement opportunities. Improvements in work-life integration and family-friendly workplaces would dismantle some sexist organizational policies and benefit women in public relations. Aldoory and Toth note that organizations should be critiqued as political arenas representing power struggles and inequity reinforced by workplace norms and culture.

Among the existing literature on industry organizations for the "professional" level, Aldoory and Toth find that exclusionary and marginalizing norms and the disadvantages of practitioners with intersectional identities are rarely addressed. Several prominent public relations organizations and societies are discussed, including the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Association for Women in Communication (AWC), and the PR Council. Citing papers by Rakow (1989) and Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2000), Aldoory and Toth compare masculine and feminine descriptors within the codes of ethics and value statements of the different organizations, such as efficiency, rationality, individualism, and competition as masculine values of large, impersonal organizations like PRSA and IABC and feminist values of altruism, fairness, loyalty, and tolerance in the AWC and PR Council's statements of integrity. Aldoory and Toth point out that public

relations associations influence their members and act in members' best interests but rarely advocate for the industry.

Following the discussion of each level of influence and the existing research throughout, Aldoory and Toth explore the potential future directions of feminist scholarship in the public relations industry. In particular, they highlight a need for further research into the issues facing the LGBTQ population within public relations and further exploration of class, power, voice, and identity in the field. They posit that their model can be used as an analytical tool to explore how the public relations profession is bound by race, gender, and class and why discrimination, disparities, and marginalization continue to exist within the field, as reinforced by social, professional, and institutional norms.

Aldoory and Toth are forthcoming throughout the book on its limitations, particularly in their myopic view as cisgender, heterosexual White women and the hegemonic ideology they bring to their work from their own life experiences. They also recognize that issues discussed throughout the book could fall within several levels of the model they put forth, noting that the overlap between levels could be explored as a topic of study. The book is a helpful guide for anyone exploring research on public relations and strategic communication through a feminist lens, mainly those interested in furthering their understanding of the challenges facing women in marginalized groups, be it race, class, sexuality, or other intersectional identities. Additionally, Aldoory and Toth's novel model of classifying and analyzing research into five levels of influence allows readers to further critique future scholarship in the fields. With more than 270,000 people in the United States identifying as public relations practitioners (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), there is a critical need for further research and practical applications for reducing sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and more to make the field more equitable for all. Aldoory and Toth's book and specifically, their novel socio-ecological model, serve as a valuable starting point to analyze and critique existing research and shape future scholarship to expose inequities and create a more equitable future in the field of public relations.

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