

Book Review

**Jaffe, C.I. (2016). Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society (8<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning. (352 pp., \$23.50-\$149.95).**

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The United States is undergoing a “diversity explosion,” characterized by profound demographic change. Census projections indicate the nation will become “minority white” by 2045 (Frey, 2018). Higher education is also becoming increasingly diverse. A study conducted by the American Council on Education (2019) found students of color made up 29.6 percent of the undergraduate population in 1996, increasing to 45.2 percent by 2016. Communication centers play an integral role within the changing landscape of higher education, serving as crucial resources for the support and retention of diverse and underrepresented student populations. It is imperative for communication centers to foster a culturally sustaining pedagogy by incorporating instructional materials that affirm the experiences of multiple cultural groups and challenges students to think critically about the complexities of human difference.

Jaffe (2016) presents *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society*, originally published in 1994, as “the first public speaking textbook to focus on diversity” (p. xv). The author draws upon the Western rhetorical tradition, while incorporating concepts and examples responsive to multicultural society. On one hand, the text realizes its goal to emphasize the intertwined relationship between culture and public speaking. On the other hand, the text provides a restrictive representation of diversity, remains centered in Western

cultural systems, and falls short of responding to exigencies of diversity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society* mirrors the organization of other public speaking textbooks, however each chapter includes content addressing diversity. There are several overview chapters, unique to the text, that refocus the practice of public speaking through the lens of cultural diversity. Chapter one, “Introduction to Public Speaking and Culture,” explains how diversity complicates public speaking and introduces a cultural perspective to help students become “more rhetorically sensitive,” which the author defines as the ability to adapt to diverse social situations (p. 3). The chapter details how culture affects public speaking and how public speaking affects culture. Chapter three, “Ethics in a Diverse Society,” presents a range of societal responses to diversity and foregrounds multivocality as an ethical imperative. There is a collection of process-oriented chapters, with topics ranging from topic selection to delivery. Finally, there is a set of chapters related to different genres of speech, including: informative, persuasive, and occasional speaking.

A major strength of the text is the incorporation of a range of concepts related to intercultural communication that typically receive little, if any, attention in basic public speaking courses. The author explains how those concepts inform the practice of public

speaking. For example, the author introduces Hofstede's cultural taxonomy in the first chapter, drawing distinctions between individualistic and collectivist cultures, expressive and non-expressive cultures. Throughout the text the author revisits these concepts in terms of public speaking. For example, in the second chapter the author describes how individualistic and collectivist cultures perceive plagiarism differently. Later in the text the author explains how these cultural categories influence the practice of argumentation and persuasion. The author, by incorporating these concepts, frequently urges students to consider public speaking within an intercultural context.

The book has several critical limitations. First, the text implies an outdated representation of diversity. An explicit definition of diversity is not provided, but examples throughout the text highlight a form of diversity chiefly defined on the basis of ethnic and national identity. For example, presentation norms in the United States are contrasted to those in Nigeria. Western cultures, like the United States, are juxtaposed to Asian cultures, such as China. The examples are often so broad that they flatten diversity by neglecting intragroup difference. The text would benefit from a focus on intersectionality, which would attend to the interconnected and overlapping nature of cultural identification. The text, because of its repetitive attention to ethnicity, does not sufficiently address contemporary diversity concerns of race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. This text might not feel inclusive to a multilingual, first generation, multiracial student that identifies as Latinx, African American, working class, and gender nonconforming.

Second, the text remains centered in a Western cultural system. For example, in

three short sentences the reader is introduced to public speaking across various ancient cultures: an Egyptian manuscript, *The Precepts of Ke'gemni and Ptah-hotep*, which offered guidelines for speaking; a medieval Arab scholar, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Qzawini, that defined eloquence in three parts; and the Chinese scholar Lao-Tzu's attention to rhetoric. This is followed by an extensive description, across four pages, of Cicero's five canons of rhetoric. The text fails to challenge the assumption that public speaking pedagogy should be grounded in Greco-Roman foundations. As communication studies reckons with its racist underpinnings (Chakravartty et al., 2018), it is imperative for authors to correct this imbalance and produce instructional materials that go beyond the exclusive rhetorical tradition.

Third, many of the cultural examples come in the form of "Diversity in Practice" text boxes that are marked with a distinguishing symbol. The boxes are not incorporated into the primary text and seem to be an afterthought. Visual formatting of the page sets apart and places boundaries around difference, which has an othering effect. Subsequent editions, to be more inclusive and decenter the Eurocentric approach, should strive to incorporate more examples of diversity in the primary text.

Finally, the text offers little encouragement for students to put diverse forms into practice. For example, Chapter nine, "Organizing Your Main Points," emphasizes how reasoning patterns differ among cultures. A four-part organization pattern used by tribal elders in Madagascar and circular patterns of Kenyan speech are illustrative examples. The chapter still advises students use typical organization patterns, reinforcing the centrality of Western forms of reasoning. Neither does the text invite students to reflect upon their

own cultural identities and how those inform their communication style. More could be done to enable students to sustain and affirm their own cultural identities in public speaking.

Institutions of higher learning have a responsibility to prepare students to communicate effectively across different cultures. *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society* fulfills its promise to illustrate the reciprocal relationship between culture and public speaking. The text could be a starting point for instructors interested in bringing ethnic diversity to the forefront of public speaking pedagogy. The text would be a useful resource for instructors who would like to put public speaking classes in conversation with sections of intercultural communication. Few public speaking textbooks focus as extensively on cultural diversity. *Public Speaking in a Diverse Society* (Waldeck et al., 2017) is one exception, which seems to offer a more contemporary approach to inclusion and nuanced consideration of the multiplicity of cultural identification. The choices instructors make when selecting a textbook matter because they include and exclude, create boundaries between “us” and “them.” *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society* remains centered in Western culture and offers a limited rendition of diversity, which does not adequately respond to contemporary concerns. Insufficient attention to race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability in the text could undermine student’s sense of inclusion. There is more work to be done to craft a public speaking textbook that would foster genuine diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## References

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