John Hannigan
<u>Environmental Sociology</u>

Chapter 3:

Social Construction of
Environmental Issues

1

How to fix the environmental problem:

In order to successfully "undo" the environmental crisis, we need to understand how it can and cannot be considered a crisis by the general population.

We have discussed this to some extent but now will look more closely at how people's opinions get created

2

Hannigan notes that:
"The environmental concern is not constant but fluctuating."

Why is this?

It varies based on the success of various "claims makers" ranging from scientists to industrialists, journalists, and environmental advocates

In other words, social constructionists shape the importance of the concern.

3

Hannigan's general arguments seem to rely on the belief that:

If the general public overwhelmingly believed there is an environmental problem that seriously threatens their safety, then they would support major efforts to fix the environmental problems.

Is it reasonable to make this assumption?

4

Assuming the answer is yes, Hannigan believes there are three major <u>focuses</u> that must be considered on the road to convincing the public there is a growing serious problem.

Any guesses what these are (what must people be focused on in order to believe there is a problem)?

5

▌ The <u>claims themselves</u>: complaints about social conditions that are offensive

▌ The <u>claims-makers</u>: those who construct the claims

▌ The <u>claims-making process</u>: is it legitimate? what is being addressed, are there other competing ideologies, what style is being used

6

Hannigan provides three stages or steps to follow in the process to convince the public of a claim and, in this case, "fix" the environmental problems.

Given what you know so far, what must be done in order to convince the public of a problem?

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1. Assembling the environmental data and clarifying the claim

2. Presenting the information to the public

3. Contesting or spurring debates to gain the attention of the public and make them aware of the environmental problem

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1. Assembling the environmental data and clarifying the claim

What needs to be done to make this happen (e.g., trying to convince people of the seriousness of the Pacific ocean garbage patch)?

▌ Collecting the environmental data that is the basis for the claim and demonstrates it
▌ Naming the problem/claim
▌ Clarifying where the data have come from, who collected it, and what their interests are in order to gain credibility

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Who should be involved in providing the environmental data that will be presented as evidence of the problem?

Scientists: geographers, climatologists, biologists

Less formally educated people who discover an environmental issue of concern (e.g., fishermen who noticed that as the acidity of the water went up, more fish were found dead—they reported this to scientists)

What problems might be found with the environmental data that are assembled?

▌ Conflicting scientific evidence (including cases where the same scientist collected multiple data and the data coflicted)

▌ Lack of clarity

▌ Ambiguity (multiple interpretations of the data)

2. <u>Presenting</u> the environmental data to the public

What must be done to get the public to <u>pay attention</u> to and <u>understand</u> the information/claims being presented?

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1. Present data in an <u>understandable way</u> using visual (photos) as well as verbal

2. <u>Legitimize</u> the data for the public, media, government, science (e.g., show why sources are non-biased)

3. Present information to the <u>media</u>

4. recruit effective <u>claims-makers</u> to present the data

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Who tends to be the claims-makers?

Scientists, political figures, media, public officials (e.g., a city's director of sustainability), educators, representatives of organizations

What organizations might claims-makers represent?

Examples: scientific associations, other professional organizations, interest groups, public agencies, environmental groups

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How diverse should the claims-makers be (e.g., should they all represent the same group or organization)?

A single claim, such as global warming, may have claims-makers from a variety of organizations ranging from non-profits to the EPA

What can go wrong during this "presentation" stage?

▪ Lack of public's understanding

▪ Attacks from dissenters including attempts to falsify the data presented, question the claims-makers truthfulness

▪ Low visibility/attention from public

▪ Declining novelty

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3. <u>Contesting</u> the environmental issues, i.e., seeking to draw attention to the issues that have been presented

Once we have developed the claim and we have presented the data, we need to find a way of <u>getting the public to pay attention</u> to the data we have presented.

In other words, once we have presented the data in places like the media, <u>what can we do</u> to get people to start discussing the issues we have presented?

1. Attempt to <u>command</u> the public's attention; perhaps use <u>dramatic events</u> (e.g., wreak of oil tankers) or polemical books (e.g., "*The End of Nature*" argues we need major changes)

2. <u>Emphasize the advantages</u> of solving the environmental issues including profitability (e.g., businesses are attracted to clean/sustainable cities so cities should give this their attention)

3. Highlight <u>moral</u> importance

4. Use the data to demonstrate the <u>seriousness</u> & <u>importance</u> of the environmental problem

5. Attempt to <u>stimulate media's</u> coverage of problems (maybe even pay to have info displayed).

6. <u>Defend the data</u> being presented

7. <u>Networking</u>, soliciting the support of others, organizations

8. Use language designed to have a <u>persuasive or impressive effect</u> on its audience (Hannigan refers to this as rhetoric)

With regard to contesting the issue, what can be done to move from discussing the issue to persuading someone (there are at least three ways)?

A. To persuade: Present data that supports the claim

How can data be presented in a persuasive way?

1. <u>Definition</u> (clarify) of the issue
2. <u>Examples</u> people identify with
3. <u>Numeric</u> estimates of the magnitude of the claim (i.e., facts)
4. <u>Understandable</u> and clear

B. To persuade: Show why the claim warrants immediate action

What might be done or said to achieve this?

1. Describe as emergency (<u>ticking time</u> bomb; will affect many)

2. Link to injustice and <u>innocent victims</u> (a moral issue)

3. Link to the past—show how problem is <u>getting progressively worse</u>

C. To persuade: Apply an appropriate claims maker "style."

Any idea what this might mean?

▌ Express the claim in sync with an intended audience (e.g., scientific style, legalistic style, subculture style)

▌ Link claims to popular issues and causes (e.g., biodiversity)

▌ Use dramatic verbal and visual imagery

9. (how to push your claim) <u>Present draft legislation to policy-makers</u> and encourage them to submit the legislation for approval that will subsequently become law

When preparing draft legislation for the policy-makers, what would you consider?

∎ The legislation you are proposing is <u>technically feasible</u> and based on verifiable facts and measurable

∎ Provide estimated <u>financial impacts</u> of the proposal. What will it cost and what are the financial benefits?

• Clarify the <u>moral justification</u> but don't get overzealous so that the legislation would alienate some of the policy-makers constituents

• If possible, present the proposed legislation immediately after an attention-getting event (e.g., oil spill); i.e., <u>timing</u> is important

• Draft legislation is written clearly

What are potential problems when presenting and contesting environmental data?

∎ Countervailing claims

∎ Issue fatigue of public

∎ Cooptation (claims-makers bought out by the other side)

PCC's Climate Change Report Explained (12:41 min)
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82dBcj_GaVU

***The Problem with Consumerism (10:21)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0ckvo2Z5BU

**The dirty secret of capitalism -- and a new way forward | Nick Hanauer (show first 9 min and then remaining 8 mins)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th3KE_H27bs

How We End Consumerism (11:45)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omcUaD8pxaY

**The psychological trick behind getting people to say yes (8 mins)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HctZg2aOPMw

Science Of Persuasion (reciprocity, scarcity, authority, consistency, liking, consensus)(12 min)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFdCzN7RYbw

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<u>What is an environmental refugee?</u>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MxZNr1j_gg

<u>Global Warming | #aumsum #kids #science #education #children</u>
<u>(7 million views, 7 minutes)</u>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqxMzKLYrZ4

Our Planet: Our Business (biodiversity)(show 17-20mins of 36)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdWQJq2OkJs

Our Planet | Frozen Worlds | 53 mins, FULL EPISODE | Netflix
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTQ3Ko9ZKg8

Climate Change - We are the PROBLEM & the SOLUTION
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D_Np-3dVBQ

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