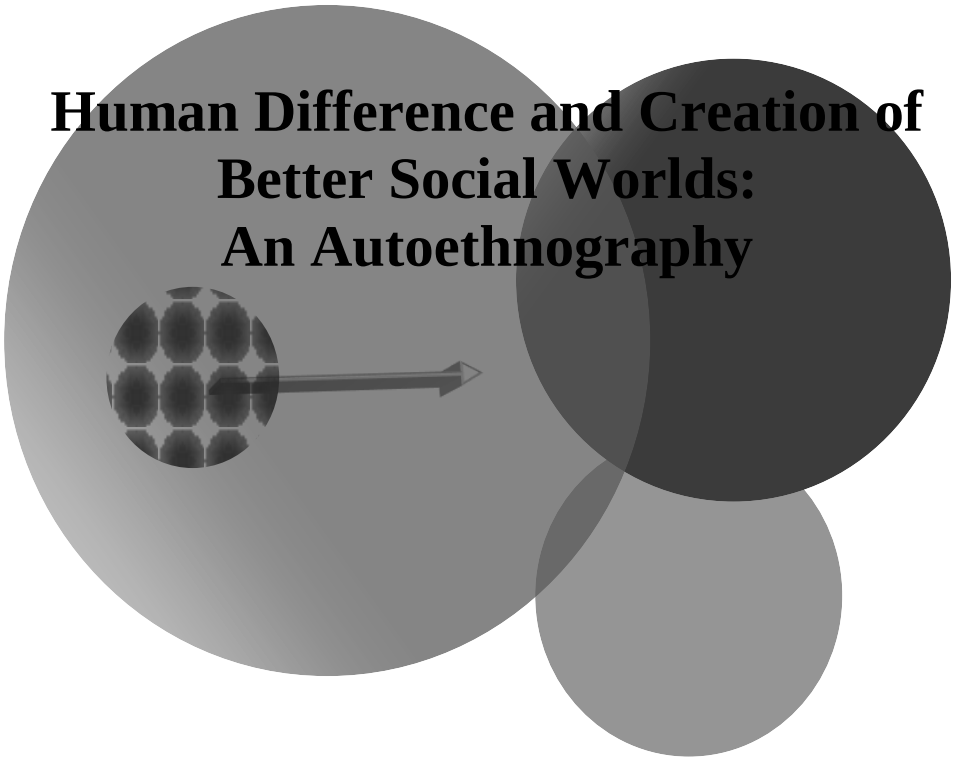
Human Difference and Creation of Better Social Worlds: An Autoethnography



Kathy Isaacson
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Tilburg University

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Promotores: prof. dr. S. McNamee
prof. dr. J.B. Rijsman

Overige leden van de promotiecommissie:
prof. dr. M. Gergen
prof. dr. S. W. Littlejohn
dr. J. Lannamann
dr. M. V. Larsen

Abstract

As facilitators of social change, communication practitioners aim to facilitate the creation of environments in which constructive communication can occur in ways that both honor difference and build mutual respect among participants. Difference is not regarded as an obstacle, but a positive resource for creativity and change. Continuous reflection on practitioners' skills, methods and processes reveals a fresh and compelling view of the path forward. By investigating the past forty years of research and practice in two fields, communication and conflict and social construction, autoethnographic reflections provide the basis for renewed commitments on the path forward taken by communication specialists. The first of those reflections follows the focus from dispute resolution through conflict management to the new World of Difference orientation—a format for understanding human differences and wondering how interacting humans orient toward those differences. The second reflection acknowledges the significance of people designing and creating their preferred futures. This direction for the facilitation of social change introduces design thinking as a foundation for processes to create better social worlds. Implications for these two reflections suggest a liberation from the constraints of labels such as "conflict," "problems," and "resolution." The resulting contribution to a communication practitioner toolkit contains the World of Difference orientation for managing human differences, and design thinking as a conceptual stance for the creation of deliberate and effective patterns of communication. Taking an autoethnographic look at the evolution of this orientation looks back at the two fields and forward at opportunities for better social worlds.