

Special Issue: Hidden Gems in Communication Studies**Gems of Social Influence: Our Twentieth Century Discoveries**Edward L. Fink ^{ID} and Deborah A. Cai ^{ID}Klein College of Media and
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In September 2022, the editorial staff of *Asian Communication Research* asked scholars to prepare an article for this special “hidden gems” issue of *Asian Communication Research*. Our scholarship directed us to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where we learned the following usage from 1781 by W. Cowper on *Friendship* 7:

Every polish'd gem we find, Illuminating heart or mind.

So, with almost 250 years behind us, we knew our task: Examine the gems from the past century that have helped us discover models and methods for understanding social influence. The following examples are publications that have served us well that we hope will serve you, too. For each example, we provide the relevant articles, a brief biography of the authors (if possible), and a description of why we consider this example as a gem.

EXAMPLE 1. LaPiere, R. T. (1934). Attitudes vs. actions. *Social Forces*, 13(2), 230–237. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2570339>

Richard T. LaPiere (1899–1986), a social psychologist, earned three degrees at Stanford University: his A.B. and M.A. in economics, 1926 and 1927 respectively, and his Ph.D. in sociology in 1930. He studied at the London School of Economics and Political Science (1927–28) before joining the Stanford faculty in 1929. He retired as professor emeritus of sociology in 1965.¹

LaPiere (1934) tested a key notion about attitudes: Does what people say reflect what they subsequently do? But his study is sublimely better than that. LaPiere asked caretakers of hotels and restaurants if they

¹ Biographical information for authors is taken from Google Scholar, Wikipedia, and other sources.

would accept “members of the Chinese race as guests in their establishment” (p. 233). Starting in 1930, and for the following two years, Lapiere took a Chinese couple (a man and a woman) on a 10,000 mile trip across the U.S. twice. This trip was taken during a time when there was strong anti-Chinese sentiment across the country. At each establishment, he asked the proprietors, in the presence of the couple, if the couple would be accepted at the proprietor’s establishment; “In only one out of 251 instances ... did the fact that [his] companions were Chinese adversely affect” them (p. 233).

Six months later, a mailed questionnaire asked the proprietors the same prior question: “Will you accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment?” The outcome: 92% of the restaurants and cafes said no, and 91% of the hotels and the like said no.

LaPiere vividly showed that the attitude did not match the action. Being present in person compared to being an idea on a questionnaire yielded very different results. LaPiere’s study taught two lessons: Americans were prejudiced against Chinese, and what people say is not always the same as what they do. These two lessons, and the directness by which LaPiere teaches them to us, make this study a gem.

EXAMPLE 2. Zborowski, M. (1952). Cultural components in responses to pain. *Journal of Social Issues*, 8(4), 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1952.tb01860.x>

Mark Zborowski (1908–1990) was born into a Jewish family in Ukraine. In 1921, his family moved to Poland, because they disapproved of the Russian Revolution. After being imprisoned in Poland for his political activity, he eventually moved to France, where he studied anthropology at the University of Grenoble. From the early 1930s until the end of World War II, he worked as an agent for the NKVD, an arm of the Soviet secret police. But in 1945, once the war ended,

his academic career took a turn when he began working with Margaret Mead at Harvard University.

Zborowski’s approach to social influence is markedly different from LaPiere’s. Zborowski compares how people from different cultural backgrounds respond to pain. His study included observations and interactions with male patients in a veterans’ hospital in the Bronx, as well as with their doctors, nurses, family members, and friends. He divided his sample of 103 patients into four groups: “Old Americans,” Jews, Italians, and Irish. “Three groups—Jews, Italians, and Irish—were selected because they were described by medical people as manifesting striking differences in their reaction to pain” (p. 19). Old Americans were white, at least third generation born in the U.S., who did not identify with another ethnic or foreign group.

Whereas Irish patients were described as stoical about pain, Jews and Italians were described as exaggerating their pain, but for different reasons: Whereas Italians expressed concern over the immediate experience of pain, Jews were more concerned about the meaning of the pain and its longterm significance for their health and the welfare of their family. Zborowski showed how the culturally-based family structure, the patient’s occupation, child-rearing practices, and the patient’s relationship to the hospital staff account for cultural attitudes and reactions to pain. Further, Zborowski described the misjudgments and attributions made by the medical staff about patients due to their expression or stoicism about pain. Those who complained less about pain, such as the Old Americans, were perceived as having a higher tolerance for pain than those who complained, even though tolerance for pain does not differ across cultures.

In LaPiere, prejudice is clearly present when he asked proprietors to accept the Chinese couple, but we do not learn of the cultural origins of the proprietors’ reactions. Zborowski details how cultural backgrounds predictably influence

attitudes and behavior, in this case notions and expressions about pain. Delving into cultural explanations that transcend generations and professions for differences in expression and interpretations of expression makes this study a gem.

EXAMPLE 3. Coleman, J. S., Katz, E., & Menzel, H. (1957). The diffusion of an innovation among physicians. *Sociometry*, 20(4), 253–270. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2785979>

James Samuel Coleman (1926–1995) was a mathematical sociologist. In 1949, he earned his B.S. from Purdue University, and in 1955, he earned his Ph.D. from Columbia University, where he was influenced by the work of Paul Lazarsfeld. He had a distinguished career at the University of Chicago and Johns Hopkins University.

Elihu Katz (1926–2021) earned his bachelors, masters, and Ph.D. degrees from Columbia University in sociology. In recognition of his distinguished career as an Israeli and American sociologist and communication scientist, he was the recipient of the Israel Prize for social sciences in 1989. He is best known for developing the two-step flow of communication and for his work on uses and gratifications theory.

Herbert Menzel (1926–1987) was a sociology professor at New York University. He was born in Czechoslovakia and came to the United States in 1939. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1947 and received a doctorate there in 1959. Before joining the faculty at N.Y.U. in 1965, he taught at Columbia University and Carleton College. He also held a master's degree from Indiana University. He was best known for his work on the diffusion of medical innovation.

With Coleman, Katz, and Menzel, we have a radical departure from both LaPiere and Zborowski. In this study, two methodological innovations were made. First, individuals were studied over time, specifically the time used

for an innovation to be diffused. Second, the participants are viewed either as members of a specific social network or as differentially integrated in friendships. Further, the social network—here composed of physicians—is divided into profession-oriented or patient-oriented doctors. The 125 doctors studied were general practitioners, internists, and pediatricians from four Midwestern cities.

The innovation here is the use of a drug labeled “gammanym.” To determine whether the doctors prescribed this drug—whether it was diffused—prescription records from local pharmacies were used (p. 254). The findings are significant:

Doctors who were mentioned by many of their colleagues ... used the drug, on the average, earlier than those who were named by few or none of their colleagues. (p. 256)

... these comparisons suggest that the process of introduction for those doctors who were deeply embedded in their professional community was in fact different from the process for those who were relatively isolated from it. The highly integrated doctors seem to have learned from *one another*, while the less integrated ones ... had each to learn afresh from the journals, the detail man ..., and other media of information. (p. 262)

Coleman et al. reported how sociometry and the interests of the physicians determined how communication spreads information, and, as a result, the use of gammanym spread as well. In large part, the development and application of sociometry initiated sociometry as a relatively new approach to studying and learning about social influence: Freeman (2004, p. 167) showed the amazing growth of social networks as illustrated by Otte and Rousseau (2002). This study taught the social scientific community how and why to use this powerful method, which makes Coleman et al. a gem.

EXAMPLE 4. Barber, B., & Fox, R. C. (1958). The case of the floppy-eared rabbits: An instance of serendipity gained and serendipity lost. *American Journal of Sociology*, 64(2), 128–136. <https://doi.org/10.1086/222420>

Bernard Barber (1918–2006) was a sociology professor at Barnard College, Columbia University, from 1952 until he retired 35 years later. He wrote many ground-breaking works on social structure and the sociology of science.

Renée Claire Fox (1928–2020) was an American sociologist. She earned her bachelor's degree in 1949 from Smith College and her Ph.D. in sociology from Radcliffe College, Harvard University in 1954. She was known for her fieldwork in the sociology of medicine.

Barber and Fox focused on the process of discovery as illustrated by observing, questioning, and analyzing two scientists, one who was a professor of medicine (Thomas) and the other who was an associate professor of pathology (Kellner). This sample of only two scientists was extended by the experimental journey that each scientist followed: They both, independently, noted that injecting a rabbit with the right amount of the enzyme papain caused rabbits' ears to flop. Kellner used about 30–40 rabbits to test this surprising outcome. Barber and Fox called the process of discovery *serendipity*: essentially chance or luck, an idea discovered and popularized in sociology by Robert K. Merton, as described as follows:

It was in the 1930s that Merton first came upon the concept-and-term of serendipity in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Here, he discovered that the word had been coined by Walpole, and it was based on the title of the fairy tale, *The Three Princes of Serendip*, the heroes of which “were always making discoveries by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.” (Campa, 2008, p. 75)

Barber and Fox showed that Dr. Thomas experienced *serendipity gained*, whereas Dr. Kellner experienced *serendipity lost*. It seemed that science was and is not a simple path of discovery, but one with unpredicted twists and turns.

So, why is this paper a *gem*? Its conclusion gives us the most significant principle that we need as investigators:

Dr. Kellner pointed out ... scientific investigations often entail “doing something that no one has done before, [so] you don't always know how to do it or exactly what to do”:

Should you boil or freeze, filter or centrifuge? These are the kinds of crossroads you come to all the time It's always possible to do four, five, or six things, and you have to choose between them How do you decide? (p. 136)

Our students read Barber and Fox, and they are required to learn this key lesson: To try things that have never been done before. That lesson is most definitely a gem.

EXAMPLE 5a. Blumer, H. (1966). Sociological implications of the thought of George Herbert Mead. *American Journal of Sociology*, 71(5), 535–544. <https://doi.org/10.1086/224171>

EXAMPLE 5b. Blumer, H. (1967). Reply to Woelfel, Stone, and Farberman. *American Journal of Sociology*, 72(4), 411–412. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2775867>

Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) is an American sociologist and psychologist who is best known for his work in symbolic interactionism, a term he coined in 1937. His research was greatly influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead. Blumer earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Missouri (1921 and 1922, respectively) and his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1928. He spent the

first 25 years of his academic career at University of Chicago before moving to University of California, Berkeley, where he chaired its first Department of Sociology.

EXAMPLE 5c. Woelfel, J. (1967). Comment on the Blumer-Bales dialogue concerning the interpretation of Mead's thought. *American Journal of Sociology*, 72(4), 409. <https://doi.org/10.1086/224339>

Joseph Woelfel (1940–) is a sociologist who was born in Buffalo, New York. Woelfel earned his bachelor's degree from Canisius College in 1962, and he earned his MA and Ph.D. degrees in sociology from the University of Wisconsin. He is professor emeritus in communication at the University at Buffalo. He was instrumental in developing a theory of attitude formation called Galileo theory, and he created a multidimensional scaling program called Galileo to test the effect of communication on attitude change.

Based on George Herbert Mead's lectures, Herbert Blumer labeled Mead's work symbolic interactionism; Blumer was considered a pioneer in that approach. In his 1966 article, Blumer was invited to describe Mead's work, which attracted responses from other scholars, including the response by Joe Woelfel (1967). The debate between Blumer's 1966 piece, Joseph Woelfel's 1967 response, and Blumer's 1967 response in return represents scholarly persistence, scholarly frustration, and academic debate.

Woelfel's confrontation with Blumer is quite straightforward. He wrote that "Blumer says that Bales [one respondent] is 'ill-informed and misinformed on the nature of Mead's thought'" (p. 409), implying that, according to Mead, objects have an intrinsic nature. Woelfel then goes on to show that according to Blumer's interpretation of Mead, objects are human constructs and not self-existing entities with intrinsic natures. We find Woelfel's demonstration of the contradiction attributed to Blumer quite convincing.

And how does Blumer reply? In his 1967 response, he says "Woelfel would have us renounce the need of ascertaining the nature of Mead's thought ... on the quaint ground that any commentator ... can form his own version or object of it to meet his own empirical concerns" (p. 411). Blumer concludes that Woelfel's argument "constitutes scholarship at its lowest level" (p. 411).

We see this debate as a gem because it demonstrates how one scholar can talk past another and ignore the value of carefully presented arguments. The gem to be found here is regarding the need to insist on logic and rationality and the need to ignore attacks that don't add up.

EXAMPLE 6. Walster, E., Walster, G. W., Piliavin, J., & Schmidt, L. (1973). "Playing hard to get": Understanding an elusive phenomenon. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26(1), 113–121. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0034234>

Elaine Hatfield (1937–; formerly Walster) is a psychology professor at the University of Hawaii. She been credited, alongside Ellen S. Berscheid, as the pioneer of the scientific study of love. She is currently a professor emerita in the psychology department of the University of Hawaii. She earned her BA in Psychology and English in 1959 from the University of Michigan and her Ph.D. from Stanford University in 1963.

G. William Walster (1941–) is an academic researcher from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has contributed to research on topics such as equity (economics) and equity theory.

Jane Piliavin (1937–) is a professor emerita of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She earned her bachelor's degree in Psychology (with high honors) from the University of Rochester in 1958, and her Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Stanford University in 1962.

Lynn Schmidt [No information available]

In 1973, Elaine Hatfield (then Walster) put together a team of researchers to study whether “playing hard to get” was an effective romantic strategy for women. Their article cited “Socrates, Ovid, Terence, the *Kama Sutra*, and Dear Abby” (p. 113), Theodota (p. 115), and Xenophon (p. 116), and their theoretical rationale included dissonance theory, learning theory, and Schachterian theory. With this remarkable cast of citations and theories, they started out seeming optimistic about their predictions about playing hard to get. But alas, it wasn’t so: Five of their experiments failed. However, the sixth experiment was successful:

It appears that a woman can intensify her desirability if she acquires a reputation for being hard-to-get and then, by her behavior, makes it clear to a selected romantic partner that she is attracted to him. (p. 126)

The overarching lesson reminds us of the lesson from Floppy-Eared Rabbits: Whether one is a physician or a social psychologist, serendipity combined with persistence fosters a path to discovery. Walster and her team had the chutzpah to continue (“Thus, we began again,” p. 116), and succeed. These are the gems that stick with us from this study.

EXAMPLE 7. Pacanowsky, M. (listed as Murdock Pencil; 1976). Salt passage research: The state of the art. *Journal of Communication*, 26(4), 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01932.x>

Michael Pacanowsky’s (1948–) is a communication scholar. He earned his AB in English from Harvard University in 1970, his MA in Communication at Michigan State University in 1975, and his Ph.D. in Communication from Stanford University in 1977. He was on the faculty at University of Utah and University of Colorado before becoming the Gore-Giovale Chair of Innovation at Westminster College (Utah).

His work focuses on the importance of strong organizational culture.

In 1729, Jonathan Swift anonymously wrote and published a satire entitled *A Modest Proposal (the short title)*. It provided mock solutions for the Irish elite who ignored the plight of the poor. Two hundred and forty-seven years later, Michael Pacanowsky, who was then a student at Stanford University, published *Salt Passage Research: The State of the Art*, a remarkable parody of classic studies in social psychology that might be viewed as suggesting that social psychologists have only foolish hypotheses or lack the ability to test social scientific theories. More profoundly, this so-called study may be telling the reader that social science is not doable.

On the one hand, we continue to find *Salt Passage* funny and insightful. Contrary to some beliefs, as demonstrated in this article, that social science is gobbledygook (see Flaherty, 2017, on John Roberts), we disagree. Our conclusion is that Pacanowsky’s study is a gem: It enhances the argument of social science as sound, useful, and meaningful.

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Notably, most of the scholars who wrote these gems have degrees in sociology, psychology, or anthropology, as well as communication, even though some of them joined communication departments. One of the notable features of these gems, therefore, is that they serve as an important reminder of the interdisciplinary roots of the study of communication and social influence.

We started with the 1781 notion of a gem: “Every polish’d gem we find, Illuminating heart or mind.” And we provide these examples that we believe do, in fact, illuminate our heart and mind: We read and reread these gems, and we use them to teach the next generation of scholars. We hope you find them useful to do the same.

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