

Chapter 9

Communication Ethics Literacy and Counterterrorism: Reflective Practices as Creative Response

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ABSTRACT

Communication ethics involves practices that yield social literacy about what matters to persons and organizations. When applied to social artifacts, the literacy of communication ethics provides a lens for collecting, interpreting, and making sense out of data. The U.S. currently faces a unique threat as terrorism presents professionals with demanding challenges to national security. The challenges resulting from terrorism are both complex and dynamic. As professionals develop means to respond to threats, new challenges arise. Thus, efforts are ongoing in the fight against terrorism. In response to this challenge, this chapter begins with the assumption that communication ethics literacy can assist researchers in navigating the terrains of counterterrorism practices by broadening the scope of research and opening new avenues for creative response. Creative response, which, this work argues, is made possible by active and continued reflective communicative practices, prevents terrorism from achieving its aim of crippling persons to inaction through terror, violence, and fear.

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INTRODUCTION

What value does communication ethics bring to counterterrorism in this current moment? This driving question shapes additional considerations. For instance, how does communication ethics assist in navigating counterterrorism practices; and, how can professionals engage counterterrorism in reflection of communication ethics? In response to such questions, this chapter explores counterterrorism from the vantage point of communication ethics asking: can the literacy of communication ethics provide assistance to security professionals? This work attends to two grounding assumptions: (1) the literacy of communication ethics serves as an interpretive lens, allowing one to discover new hermeneutic openings for research and development; and (2) terrorism is foreground violence fueled by competing background goods—terrorism is an ongoing phenomenon with multiple sources. In summary, this chapter argues that communication ethics as interpretive lens offers what Arnett (2012) calls a *pragmatic first step* to navigating counterterrorism responses in the 21st century (p. 105).

Three sections guide this chapter: Section one, “Communication Theory: Communication Ethics as Interpretive Lens,” overviews the history of communication ethics literature and presents the interpretive possibilities of dialogic communications ethics. Section two, “Identifying New Challenges to Counterterrorism,” discusses the ever-evolving threat of terrorism. Specifically, this section explores the evolution of FBI counterterrorism practices as a catalyst of U.S. counterterrorism post 9/11. Section three, “Applied Communication Ethics Literacy and Ongoing Creative Response,” shows the value of engaging communication ethics in counterterrorism lay in sustaining creative response. Creative response, this work argues, is made possible by continued reflective and applied communication ethics practices, which prevents terrorism from achieving its aim of crippling persons to inaction through violence and fear. Together, these sections promote pragmatic significance in bridging the theory of communication ethics literacy with practical counterterrorism processes and procedures.

Terrorism presents a complex and dynamic threat; as professionals develop means to respond to threats, new challenges arise. Navigating counterterrorism responses in this moment requires that we recognize the limits of reality—we may never achieve security in the objective sense; however, communication ethics in this moment is shaped by our response to the challenges that call us. One can, in the face of such reality, respond to security threats in a way that opens rather than limits future possibilities for action.

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