

The Mine Next Door:

Turning Points in Corporate Social Responsibility Communicative Practices

Tuesday, April 14 | 12:00–1:00 PM | In-person (SCI 323)

The Mine Next Door peels back the veneer of corporate public relations to expose the jagged edges that define the boundaries of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Minnesota’s Iron Range. With five years of ethnographic and archival research, Amy O’Connor was able to interview over seventy people, including miners, retired miners, community members, elected officials, and representatives from Cleveland-Cliffs Inc. In addition to illuminating the everyday lives of Minnesota’s taconite miners and community members, she compares the corporate narratives of CSR with these lived experiences to reveal how CSR boundaries are co-constructed, contested, and consequential. In this rare ethnographic account of iron ore mining in the United States, O’Connor shows how turning points—whether macrolevel (e.g., capitalism, governmental policy, and regulation) or microlevel (e.g., miner experiences, local culture, company proclivities)—create CSR communicative practice boundaries that are influenced by culture, history, and geography. The permanence and precariousness of the mining industry offers a unique opportunity to show how corporations, workers, and communities both collaborate and clash. The Mine Next Door argues that to understand CSR communicative practices, we must move beyond the staid, homogeneous CSR reports and glossy public relations documents to reveal the messy and contradictory moments of decision wherein corporations and communities determine where a company has power and responsibility.



Dr. Amy O’Connor is an associate professor and fellow in strategic communication and corporate social responsibility (CSR) at the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her research explores how corporations and stakeholders communicatively co-construct the meaning and practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR). O’Connor’s research approach is grounded in the belief that the value of CSR is constituted through communication, subject to institutional level pressures, and is relationship based. Her research is guided by the seemingly simple, yet persistently complex, question “what responsibilities do corporations have to the commons?”