

Flow of Communication between Government Agencies and Eskimo Villages

Author(s): GORDON SCOTT HARRISON

Source: *Human Organization*, Spring 1972, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 1-9

Published by: Society for Applied Anthropology

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44125110>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Society for Applied Anthropology* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Human Organization*

JSTOR

*Flow of  
Communication  
between  
Government  
Agencies  
and  
Eskimo Villages*

GORDON SCOTT HARRISON

*Gordon Scott Harrison is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, University of Alaska. This research was supported by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare under Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The author wishes to acknowledge invaluable help from his two research assistants, Miss Maggi Panek and Miss Liz Charles, both students at the University of Alaska. Also, the author is indebted to his colleague Thomas A. Morehouse for advice on the research project at every stage and the preparation of this article.*

*Abstract*

Eskimo villages in Alaska have extensive contact with governmental and quasi-governmental agencies from outside the village. Communication between these agencies and the villages tends to be *mediated* communication. That is, key villagers serve as communication go-betweens for the agency and village. These villagers, who are fully conversant in the English language and who have had, relative to other village members, broad acculturation experiences, mediate formally and informally between outside agencies and the local population. Formal communication mediators are the village council president and, to a lesser extent, his fellow council members. Informal communication mediators are usually local employees of one or more outside agencies. The former specialize in communicative contact with new agencies initiating village activity or established agencies that have irregular village dealings. The latter specialize in communicative contact with agencies that have been regularly active in the village for a considerable length of time. Communication mediation arises mainly from the need for interpretation of agency messages. But communication mediation also serves as an integrative mechanism for village society.

*Le flux de communications entre les  
agences gouvernementales et les villages Esquimaux  
dans l'Alaska rural*

Depuis la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale le gouvernement continue à prendre un intérêt extraordinairement croissant dans les Esquimaux d'Alaska. Les efforts de communication au moyen de la T.S.F. (ondes courtes), par lettres et au moyen de visites personnelles s'avèrent souvent infructueuses. Un rôle nouveau et prestigieux fit apparition dans la communauté des Esquimaux d'Alaska—celui d'un "médiateur de communications," expert en anglais et facile dans sa façon d'être "extérieure." Le recours à ce genre de médiateurs permet aux habitants des villages de sauvegarder leur vie privée et de maintenir la solidarité du groupe.

*La comunicación entre las agencias  
del gobierno y pueblos Esquimales*

Los pueblos esquimales en Alaska tienen amplio contacto con agencias gubernamentales y quasi-gubernamentales fuera del pueblo. La comunicación entre estas agencias y los pueblos tiende a ser comunicación *intermedia*. Es decir, los poblados importantes sirven como medios de comunicación para la agencia y el pueblo. Estos poblados, quienes dominan la lengua inglesa y quienes han tenido, en relación a los otros

VOL. 31, NO. 1 SPRING 1972 1

miembros de la población, extensas experiencias de aculturación, median formal e íntimamente entre las agencias exteriores y la población local. Los medianeros de comunicación formal son el presidente del Concejo del pueblo, y en menor escala, sus miembros del Concejo. Los medianeros de comunicación íntima son comunmente los empleados locales de una o más agencias exteriores. Aquellos se especializan en comunicación con nuevas agencias iniciadoras de actividades del pueblo o con agencias establecidas que tienen asuntos irregulares con el pueblo. Los últimos se especializan en comunicación con agencias que han estado activas regularmente por largo tiempo. La mediación de comunicación results principalmente de la necesidad de interpretar los mensajes de la agencia. Pero la mediación en la comunicación sirve también como mecanismo integrante para la sociedad del pueblo.

**T**HIS PAPER GREW out of a broad, behaviorally oriented study of communication patterns in Eskimo villages of rural Alaska. It was observed that the most important set of contacts Eskimo villages have with the outside world is not through the mass media but through governmental agencies.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, however, the flow of communication between government agencies and Eskimo villages was found to conform to a general pattern of communication flow associated with mass communications. That is, agency-village communication tends to be *mediated* communication: messages from government agencies are received by key members of each village community, interpreted, and transmitted to the wider community or otherwise acted upon in much the same way that "opinion leaders" or "gatekeepers" are thought to receive messages from the mass media, screen and interpret them, and selectively transmit them to the terminal audience.

The concept of communication mediation between agency and village not only points to a new aspect of Eskimo village communication behavior and Eskimo village external relations, but may also have some pragmatic utility for field administrators faced with practical communication problems. Virtually every governmental agency with responsibilities in rural Alaska has had in the past or continues to have a "communication problem" with the remote villages. Ineffective communication between agency and village may be largely accounted for in terms of the mediated communication concept.

### *Contemporary Eskimo Villages*

Eskimos are one of three Native groups indigenous to the state of Alaska.<sup>2</sup> The rural Eskimo population inhabits the coastal regions of western and northern Alaska. This population is divided between those who live in the regional trade and administrative centers of Dillingham, Bethel, Nome, Kotzebue, and Barrow, and those who live in approximately 110 small villages (between 100 and 400 persons) scattered along the rivers and bays of the coastal areas.

Modern technology—in the form of such things as transistor radios, electric percolator coffee pots, and mechanized snow vehicles—coexists with many traditional lifeways in the Eskimo villages. Local dialects are still predominantly used in everyday conversation, although probably a majority of rural Eskimos have a working knowledge of the English language. Subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering are still important sources of food, and together with welfare payments cover a significant portion of minimum family needs. Full-time wage employment for villagers is rare, and during the harsh winter months unemployment approaches 90%. During the summer months commercial fishing, canning, construction, and fire fighting jobs become available for short periods outside the villages and unemployment falls to approximately 25%. Village housing is grossly substandard and health conditions are extremely poor.

Eskimo villages in Alaska are unconnected with road or rail networks and are heavily dependent upon air transportation. Virtually every village has at least one high frequency (short wave) radio link with a regional center or larger village. Telegrams may usually be sent and received by short wave radio via regional centers. Telephone service to the villages is unknown except for an occasional community that can arrange radio-telephone patches through the rural Alaska telecommunications system built to service remote Air Force radar installations. Most villages have scheduled mail service at least twice a week, but flying, like short wave radio transmission, is highly dependent upon weather conditions, and both can be interrupted for weeks at a time.

Contact and acculturative interaction with Euro-American culture have characterized Eskimo communities in Alaska since the late years of the nineteenth century. Contact tended to be sporadic and limited in scope, and acculturation relatively unadvanced, prior to the Pacific phase of the Second World War, when military construction, conscription, and other defense related activities in remote Alaska initiated a process of rapidly accelerating contact between rural Eskimo

villages and the outside world. Today dozens of state and federal government agencies as well as quasi-government agencies interact extensively with even the most remote Eskimo villages. Prominent federal agencies active in rural Alaska include: the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Public Health Service, Economic Development Administration, Office of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Forest Service, Federal Aviation Administration, Corps of Army Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. At the state level are found: the Department of Education, Rural Development Agency, Department of Health and Welfare, Department of Labor, Department of Public Works, Department of Fish and Game, Alaska State Housing Authority, Local Affairs Agency, State Boundary Commission, and others. Quasi-governmental agencies include: the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Alaska Legal Services, Community Enterprise Development Corporation, Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, Alaska Native Industries Cooperative Association, and others.

### *Methodology*

Studies of village communication patterns reported in the social science literature have tended to rely on survey research methods (Blair 1960; Chu 1968; Damle 1956; Deutschmann 1963; Donohew and Singh 1969; Kirabayaski and Khatib 1958; and Rogers 1966; compare Axinn and Axinn 1969, in which hired observers recorded communication behavior, and Van Stone 1958, in which data collected through participant observation were analyzed with a theoretical model developed elsewhere). Our research experience in rural Alaska has shown that rigorous interview and questionnaire techniques are entirely inappropriate in native villages, particularly Eskimo villages. Fear, suspicion, and hostility toward Whites, overt as well as covert, are so prevalent, acculturation levels within and between villages so uneven, and English language skills so underdeveloped that formal survey techniques do not yield reliable data on enough questions to make their use acceptable. This research project was based on the general methodological assumption that village research is most productive if participant observation and informal survey methods are combined. There were three components to this research:

1. Field work conducted in the summer of 1970 by two Eskimo students from the University of Alaska in their home villages of White Mountain and Kasigluk. These research assistants kept detailed diaries of verbal communication activity in the

village for one month, interviewed formal and informal village leaders, and studied village exposure to the mass media. The assistants were well paid and worked from a familiar, structured research schedule that guided their collection of easily accessible data.

2. Personal experience of the author as an outside contact agent in several Eskimo villages during 1969 and 1970. This experience was acquired during extensive travel and field work in the course of an evaluation of two rural development programs supported by the federal Office of Economic Opportunity.
3. A review of ethnographic and other published data on contemporary Alaska Eskimo village life. In addition to numerous scholarly articles on all aspects of Eskimo acculturation and community life, there are excellent monograph-length accounts of village society in the five modern Eskimo villages of Napaskiak (Oswalt 1963), Kaktovik (Chance 1966), Wainwright (Milan 1964), Gambell (Hughes 1958), and Point Hope (Van Stone 1962).

Each research activity yielded different sets of data. Yet evaluation of the data showed that each set overlapped and reinforced the others to such a degree that it could be assumed that similar communication behavior existed in all of the villages encompassed by the research. On the basis of our sample of villages—perhaps a tenth of the total number—findings are discussed in reference to a “typical” Eskimo village, although individual villages not studied may have evolved strong local variations of the patterns noted or developed different forms altogether in dealing with agency communication.

### *Agency-Village Communication Patterns*

**MEDIATED COMMUNICATION.** Communication from government agencies to rural Eskimo villages is communication from one culture to a vastly different culture, and this is the main conditioning factor of the agency-village communicative relationship.<sup>3</sup> Behavior of the white world of governmental agencies as it is seen by villagers simply does not conform to the rational scheme of things that has been defined by the conditions of village life in a harsh, barren environment. Few rural Eskimos in Alaska have had the continuing life experiences which permit comprehension of most modern bureaucratic activity—activity that only acquires meaning in a totally foreign milieu. An understanding of the agency-village communication

relationship begins with an appreciation of this village perspective on agency purpose and functions.

Confusion over agency purpose and functions is less likely to arise to the extent that the agencies deal with matters perceptively relevant to village life. Regulating the commercial fishing season, for example, or hiring a fire fighting crew for work outside the village are not in themselves confusing functions. However, only a small proportion of agency interaction with villages relates in this fashion to immediate concerns of village residents.<sup>4</sup> Because the agencies are so ubiquitous and, in general, their behavior and expectations so incomprehensible from the perspective of village life, each member of the village cannot and does not attempt to interact with them on an individual basis. Communicating with the agencies becomes a specialized community task assigned to members or institutions of the village specially equipped to perform it.

In Eskimo villages of rural Alaska, effective agency-village communication is mediated communication. That is, communicative interaction between agencies and villages as a whole is not direct. This communication takes place through village mediators who receive agency messages, interpret them, and respond in what appears to be an appropriate manner. If the message is one that many villagers have a direct interest in knowing, the communication mediator will transmit it to the community via the oral, intravillage communication network.<sup>5</sup> For their part, villagers expect to hear directly or indirectly from the communication mediator any agency information relevant and important to everyday life in the village. Also, villagers turn to the mediator for answers to their questions which fall within the purview of "his" agency.

The basic pattern of mediated communication between government agencies and Eskimo villages is analogous to the "two-step flow" model of communication developed by mass communication theorists. This communication model posits the influential intervention of key individuals between mass communications and the terminal audience (Katz 1960; Allen 1969). In the case at hand, key individuals intervene between specialized, instrumental agency communications and the target rural Eskimo community. In the way that "opinion leaders" are hypothesized to sort out and interpret messages from the mass media for people less directly attentive to media information, village communication mediators sort out and interpret messages from governmental agencies for other villagers less directly attentive to agency communications.

It should be pointed out that the phenomenon of mediated communication, or "opinion leadership," with respect to the mass media is not a regular or

significant occurrence in Eskimo villages. Even though most villagers are exposed to commercial AM radio broadcasts, and acculturated villagers receive newspapers and magazines by mail, information received through the mass media is totally irrelevant to village life and does not become a topic of general interest or concern and therefore not a topic of village conversation.<sup>6</sup>

**FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMMUNICATION MEDIATORS.** Communication mediation between agency and village is both a formal and informal process. Formally, communication mediation is performed by the village council, a local body whose primary function is one of providing an institutional link between outside government agencies and the local community.

Prior to regular contact with the western world, Eskimo communities did not have a formalized system of leadership or an institutionalized system of government. In those times the extended family was the basis of community life, and both leadership of this group and social control within it and among other extended kinship groups was affected by informal mechanisms. A leader in aboriginal times was a man respected for such things as his physical strength, his courage, his hunting and fishing abilities, and his wisdom. Anti-social behavior was controlled by various physical and social sanctions.

The United States acquired Alaska from Russia in 1867, and by the turn of the twentieth century institutionalized local government began to appear in Eskimo villages. Impetus for this development was supplied by a local missionary or federal school teacher, who, as a quasi-official and official representative of the federal government, sought to inculcate the virtues and practical skills of democracy in the yet "uncivilized" Eskimos. However village government was structured prior to the 1930's, "the role it played in village life was largely nominal . . . the new village authorities remained hardly more than facades behind which the communities, especially those in the more isolated regions, carried on their activities exactly as before, hardly affected by the democratic notions enamelled on their surfaces by governing whites" (Jenness 1962:22). Down to the 1930's, interaction between federal and territorial government and the villages was done exclusively through the local school teacher or, in the absence of a school teacher, through a missionary (Jenness 1962:21-22; Befu 1970:31).

In the mid-1930's Eskimo villages, together with many Aleut and Indian villages throughout Alaska, began to acquire new councils with a more utilitarian purpose. These new councils, the first governing

authorities established in Eskimo villages to be legally recognized by agencies of the federal government, were established under provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934) that was extended to Alaska by special legislation in 1936. Although the new governing councils were granted by their constitutions a variety of police powers over the village residents, the *raison d'être* of these councils was to provide a legal and organizational focus for locally-run stores, canneries, and relending programs which depended on credit from a revolving fund financed by the IRA.<sup>7</sup> In channeling economic assistance under the IRA and subsequent legislation through village councils newly created for that purpose, the federal government set the main direction for the functional development of these bodies: they were to provide a channel for interaction between outside governmental agencies and the local community, superceding the school teacher in this task to the extent that local conditions permitted.

As the scope and intensity of agency-village interaction expanded after the Second World War, the role of the village council as an institutionalized link between villages and the outside world became firmly fixed. Qualification for council membership, and especially for council president, ceased to relate to traditional village activities. Because familiarity with white culture and fluency in the English language were the main assets for effective communication with outside agencies, they became the central requirement for village leadership in the modern world.<sup>8</sup>

Village councils continue to play the role of communication mediator between agencies and the local community they represent. However, they no longer do so exclusively. Now councils serve as formal points of communicative contact only when a new agency initiates contact with a village or when an established agency interacts with it irregularly or for divergent, unrelated purposes. In cases of regular agency-village interaction, communication mediation is usually the informal responsibility of individual villagers.

As an agency develops a regular relationship with a village, it will tend to shift its point of communicative contact from the council president or council to a resident of the village who will "specialize" in the affairs of that agency. When the shift is completed, communication with the village funnels through that person, or communication mediator, even when messages are intended for individual members of the community. The effectiveness of this informal arrangement of communication mediation depends on the regularity and amount of agency interaction with the village. Generally, villages that have had the longest

regular contact with government agencies tend to have the most effective communication relationships of this kind. Similarly, in a single village it is the agencies that have been regularly active there the longest that have the most highly developed specialized channels of mediated communication.

Individual villagers who serve as communication mediators are likely to do so incidental to performing other specialized agency tasks in the village. Health aides, welfare aides, postmasters, and maintenance men for agency equipment, for example, are local agents of outside agencies who often have received special schooling for their jobs. These people are most knowledgeable of agency purposes and functions, and they are therefore best equipped from the point of view of both agency and village to decode and interpret agency messages for other villagers.

However, an individual may be appointed by the village council or selected by an agency to act as a communication mediator for a limited period of intensive agency-village interaction. For example, many villages are currently seeking incorporation as municipalities under the state laws of Alaska. This process necessitates considerable correspondence between the village and an agency of the state government (the Local Affairs Agency) for a period up to a year. After much frustrating experience attempting to communicate with rural village communities without a local mediator, the agency began requiring as a first step the village council to appoint a single individual in the community who would receive and send all applications and other correspondence pertaining to the incorporation process and act as a general temporary go-between for the agency and village.

An essential element of the stabilization of an agency-village relationship of this kind is the coming into regular use of a single technique and style of communicative interaction. In the case of the Public Health Service, where instant and reliable communication between the village and regional hospital or clinic is critical, a short wave radio is installed in every village and a daily schedule of contact maintained (weather permitting). Other agencies have less pressing needs for instant and direct communication with villages and use communication channels already available to them (including the PHS and school radios where present). Village contact is typically maintained by mail, but agencies also use face-to-face communication frequently. It is not unusual for a field administrator to prefer personal conversation whenever possible, and travel budgets for agencies with responsibilities in rural Alaska are, as a rule, enormous. Whatever channel or combination of channels an

agency and village mediator settle on, the exchange of messages becomes a familiar and routine procedure for both.

The number of agencies that interact regularly with a village is, in general, a function of the size and economic complexity of that village. Bigger and more economically complex settlements have more regular and routinized agency relationships than smaller villages. The number of communication mediators in a village partly reflects the number of locally active agencies. It is not unusual for a particularly acculturated, talented, and energetic individual to be employed by more than one agency simultaneously (and be a council member or council president as well). These individuals play multiple communication mediation roles.

Local communication mediators, especially those with multiple roles, are generally important and respected people in a village, but their activity, like that of the village storekeeper, may be considered non-Eskimo by some and thus less desirable than achievement in more traditional village activities. Because communication mediation requires advanced acculturation relative to the rest of the community, a mediator is not likely to perform leadership functions in such traditional pursuits as hunting and fishing. Indeed, communication mediators, by virtue of their acculturation, their frequent contacts with the world beyond the village, their regard by whites inside and outside the village as the critical elements of their communities, and perhaps also their relative financial well-being (representing an agency locally usually entails steady remuneration in quite poor communities), are more likely than other villagers to be and to consider themselves culturally marginal. For the same reasons, however, these persons comprise or are the major component of the distinguishable, prestigious social class in each village.

Village communication mediators cannot be categorized in terms of age or sex. Council members are usually male, and the tendency is to elect younger and younger men. Yet a particularly well-educated or otherwise acculturated woman may serve on the council. Teachers' aides are usually women, and health aides are likely to be. Those jobs of agency representation, such as postal clerk, that require regular presence in the village for a few hours every day and involve modest remuneration are likely to be filled by women. In these cases, the male member of the family is free to hunt and fish in the winter and leave the village in the summer for lucrative, short-term employment. Formal education tends to be the avenue of acculturation for women, and females who play a communica-

tion mediator role are usually young, as women have begun only recently to take advantage of educational opportunities. Acculturated Eskimo males living in the village may have acquired their familiarity with white culture through education, but more probably through military service and work experience.

**SOURCES OF COMMUNICATION INEFFECTIVENESS.** The patterns of agency-village communicative interaction described in the preceding sections pertain to effective communication relationships. However, ineffective agency communication with native villages is a regular, frustrating occurrence in rural Alaska: a state agency notifies villages by mail that they qualify for funds from a state revenue-sharing program, but few villages complete and return the applications even though money for community projects is desperately needed throughout the rural areas of the state; a federal agency plans a survey of needed medical services in a village and writes the council president about the impending visit of a team of specialists, which arrives in the village and finds that no one knows who they are or what they intend to do and that half the local population is working in a cannery over two hundred miles away.<sup>9</sup> While the exact causes of a single ineffective communication could lie almost anywhere, some probable general sources of ineffective agency communication are suggested by the general patterns of effective communicative behavior identified above.

Agencies with regularized and routinized communication relationships with a village are not immune to problems, particularly at times of change in agency personnel or local representation when familiar and customary channels of communication might be disrupted. Because continuity of village experience with an agency promotes the smooth flow of information between agency and village, communication problems tend to characterize agencies that are beginning to establish regular contact with villages and those that contact villages infrequently or for diverse purposes.

A major source of communication problems for agencies that must contact villages through local councils, rather than informal mediators, stems from the inadequacies of councils as agents of communication mediation. During the summer months many residents, including council members, leave their villages for outside wage employment, and during the winter months they are likely to spend considerable time away from the village trapping and hunting. When the council president is absent from the village, that village's formal communication link with the world of government agencies is broken. Where it is customary for village councils to rotate the position of president

every year or two, the council may function very unevenly as an effective communication link. That is, because an agency letter is received by the president does not necessarily insure that it is being received by the person best equipped to interpret it. Uninterpreted letters are, in terms of their communicative effectiveness, dead letters.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, a general source of communication problems for agencies initiating contact with a village is the expectation that their messages are readily understandable in the village. In the absence of prior meaningful village experience with an agency, it is unlikely that a message from it would be understood and appropriately acted upon by even the most acculturated council member.

Finally, a common source of communication ineffectiveness on the part of agencies initiating village contacts is their tendency to saturate a village with messages. These messages are likely to vary greatly in their inherent importance. They are likely to arrive through different contact points and by different channels. Some may be sent directly to the terminal village audience, circumventing the council or local mediator and therefore the intravillage communication network. In each case, incomprehension and confusion rather than effective communication results.

#### *Mediated Communication and Community Cohesion*

Communication mediation in Eskimo villages is occasioned by a community need for the interpretation of pervasive, often incomprehensible agency messages. Mediation becomes the responsibility of village residents who are knowledgeable in English and who, through military service, work experience, or formal education, have acquired a familiarity with "outside" culture that permits them to fit agency activities into a meaningful frame of reference. Communication mediators, whether local employees of an agency or council members, link their communities and its oral communication network with the outside world.

However, village communication mediators do more than structure a route through which their communities communicate with the world of government beyond it. By receiving, screening, and interpreting messages from an enormous number of outside agencies, these key villagers prevent direct agency interaction with the village at large and work to preserve the integrity of the oral, intravillage communication network. Communication mediation, in short, functions as an important integrative mechanism for village society.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the penetration of numerous modern bureaucratic agencies into rural Eskimo communities, these communities, as discrete social units, have maintained a remarkable degree of identity and unity vis-à-vis the outside world. Van Stone has observed the success with which Point Hope has maintained its unity and identity in the face of greatly expanded contacts with the outside world in recent years (1962:159-67). Milan notes that the modern Wainwright Eskimos consider themselves an "ingroup" vis-à-vis outsiders (1964:4). Chance states that extensive, post-World War II contact with the outside world has heightened rather than lessened community identification at Kaktovik (1966:81-88). Oswalt describes the extravillage contact at Napaskiak, but adds: "An enumeration of contacts with the world beyond the community suggests that the villagers are highly integrated into regional life which is not the case" (Oswalt 1963).

No explanation of Eskimo village identity and social unity vis-à-vis the outside world is adequate that fails to take account of the mechanism which prevents the most pervasive of outside contact agents (governmental and quasi-governmental agencies) from penetrating directly into every home and from circumventing and/or disrupting traditional intravillage communication channels. Communication mediation reinforces the oral, intravillage communication network, and it thereby works to maintain a high level of social interaction and intergroup communication in the community.

#### *Summary*

Contemporary Eskimo villages of rural Alaska have extensive contact with the outside world. Of special interest is the fact that this contact is not primarily through the mass media of communication but through governmental and quasi-governmental agencies. Communication between outside agencies and Eskimo villages is a two-step process analogous to the "two-step flow" model of communication advanced by mass communication theorists. Key village residents who are fully conversant in the English language and who have had, relative to other village members, broad acculturation experiences mediate formally and informally between outside agencies and the local population. Formal communication mediators are the village council president and, to a lesser extent, his fellow council members. Informal communication mediators are usually local employees of one or more outside agencies. The former specialize in communicative contact with new agencies initiating village activity or



established agencies that have irregular village dealings. The latter specialize in communicative contact with agencies that have been regularly active in the village for a considerable length of time.

Communication mediation is occasioned in the first instance by the need for villagers to have agency communications interpreted for them. This need arises from the fact that agency purpose, behavior, and expectations are often incomprehensible to rural Alaska Eskimos—a native people whose physical and cultural milieu affords no clues to the meaning of agency activity. Communication mediation also functions as an integrative mechanism for village society. Communication mediators block the ubiquitous agencies from penetrating directly into the home of every villager. The circulation of all relevant agency messages via the oral, intravillage communication network insures a high level of intragroup communication and social interaction, and thus contributes in large measure to a strong sense of community identity and unity vis-à-vis the outside world.

#### NOTES

1. That this observation should somehow seem striking is the result of a general impression many of us have of the pervasiveness of mass communications, even in the remotest corners of the globe. This impression, among social scientists at least, may be the result of recent studies of cultural, social, and political change in the developing world that have singled out mass communication as a critical factor in the modernization process (Lerner 1958; Schramm 1964; Pye 1963). Even when these studies, or studies inspired by them, do not explicitly state that the main contact culturally traditional or transitional villages have with the outside world is through the mass media, they imply this is so by their selection of the mass media for purposes of study and failure to mention or explore other channels (Deutschmann 1963; Chu 1968; Stycos 1952).
2. The Native population of Alaska is approximately 55,000 or about one-sixth of the state's total population. Eskimos make up about one-half of the Native population; Indians, three-eighths; and Aleuts, one-eighth. These groups live in separate and fairly well-defined regions of the state: Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian Indians live in the Panhandle; Athabaskan Indians in the Interior, mostly along the Yukon, Tanana, and Kuskokwim rivers and their tributaries; Eskimos in the northern and western coastal regions; and Aleuts in the southern part of the Alaska Peninsula and in the islands of the Aleutian Chain (Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska 1968).
3. The character of agency-village communication relationships is conventionally thought to be set by insufficient and inadequate channels of communication leading into the villages (Legislative Council 1969; Pender 1970; Rural Alaska Development Group 1969).
4. It is hard to exaggerate the amount of agency activity that makes no sense from the perspective of the village. Two papers presented at the Twentieth Alaska Science Conference, August 1969, discuss agency irrationalities from the village level (Davis 1969; Jones 1969). The intensity of agency interaction with villages is suggested by a statement of a school teacher in a moderate-sized, remote Eskimo village in southwestern Alaska, that the guest room maintained by the school for visiting agency personnel had been used eighty times in the previous year, mostly by agency teams connected with local development projects.
5. That there is a highly developed intravillage communication network based on face-to-face contacts is perhaps the most striking conclusion of the data collected by my research assistants. For published accounts of intravillage communication that suggest but do not fully describe the system see Oswalt (1963:114-15), Van Stone (1962:100-01), and Chance (1966:48, 55, 84-85).
6. An exception to this generalization occurs at election time, when political campaign material and candidates deluge the village and radio stations broadcast political advertisements. Then political issues and personalities become the topic of informal conversation, and the opinions of respected, acculturated individuals (males) carry considerable weight in these discussions.
7. Actually, it was not necessary for villages to incorporate under the Indian Reorganization Act to qualify for loans from the revolving fund. Loans could be obtained legally by any native group whose charter was recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, most villages did seek incorporation under the IRA.
8. Van Stone (1962:163) writes: "The most obvious village leader is the council president, and in recent years the tendency has been to elect an individual who speaks good English and is an adequate spokesman for the village in contacts with the outside world." He also states (1962:106), "nearly everyone is aware of the value of having young councilmen who speak good English and are familiar with the white man's ways. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that the present council president is also the maintenance employee at the school and thus the go-between through which Eskimo-school teacher and Eskimo-government relations pass." Chance (1966:64) notes that effective village leadership in the modern world "requires not only a sufficient command of English, but an adequate understanding of those aspects of white society that have a bearing on community life in the north." See also Chance (1962:62-65, 89) and Hughes (1958:285-95).
9. In his study of the Eskimo village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, Hughes (1958:177-81) cites a typical example of the communication problem in rural Alaska: residents of Gambell felt cheated by high prices charged for goods in the local Native store and as a consequence greatly resented the store and its parent organization, the Alaska Native Industries Cooperative Association (ANICA), although ANICA officials had repeatedly pointed out by mail that the local village council possessed the authority to ignore suggested retail prices and set its own price list.

10. Councils vary greatly in their communication effectiveness. Oswalt (1963:66-71) notes the general ineffectiveness of the council at Napaskiak. He also notes that "contact with the government agencies . . . is channeled primarily through the Bureau of Indian Affairs school teacher or . . . through the (white) trader" (1963:13). Oswalt's field work was done in the mid-1950's, and this situation has probably changed since then.
11. Park (1939), Breed (1958), and others have noted that communicative behavior tends generally to promote social integration.

#### REFERENCES CITED

- ALLEN, I. L.  
1969 Social relations and the two-step flow: a defense of tradition. *Journalism Quarterly* 46:492-98.
- AXINN, G. H., and N. W. AXINN  
1969 Communication among the Nsukka Igbo: a folk-village society. *Journalism Quarterly* 46:320-324.
- BEFU, H.  
1970 An ethnographic sketch of Old Harbor, Kodiak, Alaska: an Eskimo village. *Arctic Anthropology* 6:29-42.
- BLAIR, L. C.  
1960 Social structure and information exposure in rural Brazil. *Journal of Rural Sociology* 25:65-75.
- BREED, W.  
1958 Mass communication and sociocultural integration. *Social Forces* 37:109-116.
- CHANCE, N.  
1966 The Eskimo of Northern Alaska. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- CHU, G. C.  
1968 Impact of mass media on a gemeinschaft-like social structure. *Journal of Rural Sociology* 33:189-199.
- DAMLE, Y. B.  
1956 Communication of modern ideas and knowledge in Indian villages. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 20:257-270.
- DAVIS, N. Y.  
1969 A village view of agencies. *In Science in Alaska. Proceedings of the Alaskan Science Conference, College, Alaska.*
- DEUTSCHMANN, P. J.  
1963 The mass media in an underdeveloped village. *Journalism Quarterly* 40:27-35.
- DONOHEW, L., and K. B. SINGH  
1969 Communication and life styles in Appalachia. *Journal of Communication* 19:202-216.
- FEDERAL FIELD COMMITTEE FOR DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN ALASKA  
1968 Alaska Natives and the Land. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- HUGHES, C. C.  
1958 An Eskimo Village in the Modern World. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- JENNESS, D.  
1962 Eskimo administration: Alaska. Technical paper No. 10. Montreal: Arctic Institute of North America.
- JONES, D.  
1969 Agency-community conflict. *In Science in Alaska. Proceedings of the Alaskan Science Conference, College, Alaska.*
- KATZ, E.  
1960 Communication research and the image of society: convergence of two traditions. *In Communication and Culture.* A. G. Smith, ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- KIRABAYASKI, G. K., and M. F. EL KHATIB  
1958 Communication and political awareness in the villages of Egypt. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 22:357-63.
- LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF THE STATE OF ALASKA  
1969 Conference on the Future of Alaska, final report. Anchorage, Alaska.
- LERNER, D.  
1958 The Passing of Traditional Society. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.
- MILAN, F. A.  
1964 The Acculturation of the Contemporary Eskimo of Wainwright, Alaska. *Anthropological Papers of the University of Alaska, No. 11.*
- OSWALT, W.  
1963 Napaskiak. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- PARK, R. E.  
1939 Reflections on communication and culture. *American Journal of Sociology* 44:191-205.
- PENDER, J.  
1970 Communications in rural Alaska. *Anchorage Daily News, October 16.*
- PYE, L., ed.  
1963 Communications and Political Development. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- ROGERS, E. M.  
1966 Mass media exposure and modernization among Colombian peasants. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29:614-25.
- RURAL ALASKA DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
1969 Communications. Anchorage, Alaska.
- SCHRAMM, W.  
1964 Mass Media and National Development. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- SPENCER, R. F.  
1959 The North Alaskan Eskimo. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- STYCOS, J. M.  
1952 Patterns of communication in a rural Greek village. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16:59-70.
- VAN STONE, J. W.  
1958 An Eskimo Community and the Outside World. *Anthropological Papers of the University of Alaska, No. 8.*  
1962 Point Hope: An Eskimo Village in Transition. Seattle: University of Washington Press.  
1967 Eskimos of the Nusagak River. Seattle: University of Washington Press.