On the Media Interviews Kristof

December 14, 2009 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof was interviewed for the December 11 edition of NPR's On the Media. Most of the interview focuses on an article titled "Nicholas Kristof's Advice for Saving the World" that he wrote for *Outside*.

The deck sums up the article very well: "What would happen if aid organizations and other philanthropists embraced the dark arts of marketing spin and psychological persuasion used on Madison Avenue? We'd save millions more lives."

Here's an excerpt from the interview with insights on media coverage of HIV/AIDS and the concept of advocacy journalism:

OTM: Before you had your public relations revelation [as described in your Outside article], what do you think is the greatest opportunity that you missed?

Kristof: Writing about AIDS. I was often frustrated that I'd write about AIDS in Africa and, you know, it just disappeared into the pond without a ripple. And I think that, in retrospect, if I had managed to, along side all the horrors of people dying young, if I'd found some examples where success is possible, I think that maybe those columns would've had more effect.

OTM: You said that you flinch when you get called an advocacy journalist, but when you sit down to write a column, what is it that you're trying to achieve?

Kristof: Well, I'm advocating. (Laughs.) But I'm reluctant to be called out on it. My career was as a reporter and there's an uncomfortable tension there because one of the reason's that I became a journalist is, frankly, that I wanted to make a difference. And yet, at the same time, there is sometimes a perception that an advocate is somebody who goes out and finds evidence to buttress their pre-existing convictions. And that's why I flinch.

OTM: But you can tell the truth and still want to spark a particular action.

Kristof: Yes, absolutely. That is one of the great perks of journalism. There are a lot of problems in the world and that we carry a spotlight. What I want to do is shine my light to illuminate that problem, but I don't want to tinker with the evidence. I just want to galvanize people by showing them what is out there.

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