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COMM 101

Final Paper  
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Interpersonal communication has gained great attention over the span of the past several months due to the pandemic. Society started to gain value for social interactions after being distanced from them, and quickly substituted them with virtual forms to satisfy their craving of social communication. One prominent platform for virtual interaction is Zoom, and it has gained lots of respect for helping the public stay connected while remaining physically distanced. Despite Zoom being a quality stand-in, many aspects of the normal, physical communication have been lost, and therefore, have altered the perceived interpretation of interpersonal communication greatly. Personally, I have been a witness and have experienced the differences firsthand through a Zoom family reunion which occurred on November 26<sup>th</sup>, in celebration of Thanksgiving. The event was a virtual translation of a typical Thanksgiving in my family, but this time it hosted my extended family living in all parts of the nation rather than just immediate family that lived in the Midwest. The Zoom reunion consisted of sharing updates on everyone's life and health, playing games such as charades, and splitting into breakout groups so the younger cousins could watch a movie together while the older members continued talking and enjoying their time. In this paper, an analysis of our Zoom family reunion, reveals that verbal and nonverbal communication in the form of dialogue and behavior offers insight into a variety of discords in gender communication and beliefs.

When the event was being scheduled, a poll was sent out in a family group chat to ensure that the group preference was abided by, and that everybody's time could be respected. The majority of the members chose 8PM CT and mentioned to join the meeting on time so that everyone could enjoy the most out of the event. Coming from a South Asian background, my family follows a **polychronic culture** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.93). In a polychronic culture, individuals do not view time as something unbelievably valuable, and therefore do not believe in having tight schedules or plans. Rather, they focus on enjoying the moment they are in and cherishing it to the best to make it memorable. This was clearly visibly when I joined the meeting because only a handful of my family was present, and that mainly included the younger generation because we follow a **monochronic culture** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.93). In a monochronic culture, people view time as a scarce supply that needs to be guarded. Thus, people tend to be very punctual and plan things ahead of time to ensure that the most is being achieved from the time they spend. With almost all the elder members being immigrants in my family, the polychronic culture was still present in their character, and they all joined the meeting 10 to 15 minutes later.

Another aspect of South Asian culture is that it values patriarchy. Similar to how the younger generation in my family tends to be more modern and the older generation is more traditional, my cousins and I do not believe in maintaining a patriarchy as much as our parents and grandparents do. This was clearly translated in dialogue between my uncles and aunts during the meeting. During a conversation, one of my uncles stated, "It's nice to see all of the ladies actually talking with us and not washing the dishes". In response to the patriarchal statement, one of my cousins remarked, "Don't you ever wash dishes at home?" and my uncle

responded, "Not when I have a wife", and joined the rest of the uncles laughing. This conversation was normal for all of my aunts and grandmothers on the call but offended many of my cousins because it depicted the struggle of **intercultural communication** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.88). Intercultural communication can be defined as how members of different cultures communicate with one another and the disputes they encounter during their interaction. Clearly, in this situation, many of my cousins who were born and brought up in the United States did not grow up with the patriarchal mindset and viewed the role and responsibility of a female equal to that of a male. On the other hand, many of aunts and uncles who all grew up in India, experienced the environment of a traditional household where the role and responsibilities of a female were very distinct from those of a male. Therefore, this belief was portrayed through the conversation between my cousin and uncle on the call. **Chiang's research** on intercultural communication (as cited in Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.88) studied interactions involving international teaching assistants and concluded on how it resulted in linguistic and cultural issues similar to my family's Zoom call as well. This example reiterates the purpose of this paper on how verbal communication through dialogue can offer insight into dispute in beliefs.

Continuing with the topic of culture, I noticed another difference between the culture that my cousins and I grew up in compared to that of my uncles, aunts, and grandparents. South Asians are known for being collaborative and group centric, while the younger population of the United States is known to be independent and self-goal oriented. This idea was translated through preference of what activity to do on the Zoom reunion. The first option was to play a game of charades with every person on the call, and the second option was to divide

into age groups and pick activity based on individual groups. While all of my older relatives picked the group game of charades, all of my cousins preferred to split into individual groups so that they could do what they wanted separately. The choice preference of charades reflects the collectivist culture of my elders. In a **collectivistic culture** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.91), people place great value on having a group identity and coming together with one another to help each other out or celebrate traditions collectively. This culture is very prominent in South Asia because the people prefer to come together and celebrate festivals as a group, and never like to leave anybody out. This mindset was prevalent in the elder members of family because they all grew up in that South Asian, collectivist culture. On the other hand, the preference of my cousins reflected the nature of an individualistic culture. In an **individualistic culture** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.91), people like to mind their own business and focus on their own goals since independence and personal space is valued greatly. Since the independence culture of most youths in the United States was instilled in my cousins and I, we depicted that side of us by choosing to split up into individual groups to do our own thing. In the end, our family decided to play one round of charades collectively, and then allow for us to split up into groups so that we can choose our own activities. This difference between the two types of cultures echoes how nonverbal communication in the form of behavior offers insight into various beliefs and preferences.

Another cultural difference I noted during our Zoom family reunion is the way the people in my family place value on language or verbal messages. This was recognized through the nature of conversation between the elders and then between all of the younger cousins in my family. When my cousins and I were talking to none another, a lot of value was placed on

the message we said, and the words we used to convey it. On the hand, I noticed that when my elder relatives were talking to each other and then us, not as much value was placed on the message, but there was a greater emphasis placed on the relationship that my aunts/uncles and my cousins shared. This characteristic of our conversation justifies **Ting-Toomey & Dorjee's research** (as cited in Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.90) which concluded that cultures could vary in terms of being either implicit or explicit with their communication, which creates two types of cultures: high-context culture and low-context culture. When there was greater emphasis placed on the messages delivered during the conversation, it reflects the nature of a low-context culture. In a **low-context culture** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.91), the message is viewed as the most important factor. This logically made sense because the United States is known for following a low-context culture, and my cousins and I have all been born and brought up in the United States, so it is innate for us to have that nature. On the other hand, my aunts and uncles who all grew up in India, have always been raised to place greater value on the relationships that individuals share with each other over the message that is being conveyed, which directly characterizes a **high-context culture** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.90). In a high-context society, spoken words are much less valued compared the rest of the context such as the environment and the relationship between the conversationists. This contrast in type of society reveals how verbal communication in the form of dialogue offers insight into gender communication and beliefs.

The generational and cultural gap between my cousins and our older relatives dictated a lot about interpersonal communication. One drastic difference I noticed was in the language my elders shared compared to the words my cousins and I included in conversation. Whenever my

aunts, uncles, and grandparents talked, their language included many idioms in our mother tongue that my parents would find comical, but I would not understand. After asking my parents the meaning of certain phrases my elder relatives used, I learned that they were slang terms that were commonly used in their culture but not as prominent in the modern culture. Similarly, when my cousins and I talked, we use several phrases that our elder family did not understand. We used terms like “spill the tea” or “stop throwing so much shade”, or even, “stop being so salty” when we were talking with each other. While my cousins and siblings understood the meaning of such phrases, our grandparents asked what those words meant. This variance in what our generation considered the norm for our language versus what my grandparents considered the norm for their language reflected **speech (communication) codes**. Speech codes (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.95) are the various communication patterns which classify as the norm for a particular culture, hence making it odd for others. The language and phrases that my cousins and I shared was odd for my grandparents because that was not the norm for them, whereas the slang they used was the norm for them but vastly different for my generation. This difference in type of speech codes differentiated two groups of people or created two mini communities known as speech communities within my family. This idea was concluded by **Hymes and Philipsen** in their respective research (as cited in Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.95) which determined that cultures can be viewed and identified by their perspective of their communication or as speech communities. **Speech communities** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.95) are groups of people whose speech codes and norms distinctly identify them as a separate cultural unit. In my family’s example, there were two speech communities. One was made up of my cousins and I while the other was made up by my elder relatives because both

groups had their own interpretation of what was considered the norm and what was not. This example affirms again how verbal communication offers insight into gender communication and beliefs.

Another communication aspect I noticed during my family reunion on Zoom was **experiential superiority** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.114). Experiential superiority is when people choose not to attend to someone when they are speaking because they believe they possess more knowledge and experience compared to the person talking. This occurred between my dad and my aunts during our call. Many of my aunts are staunch followers of home remedies to cure certain illnesses here and there, but in this time of the pandemic, they decided to further their “expertise” and suggest ways they could cure corona with their home remedies as well. Being a physician, my dad did not take in all of the information that my aunts were sharing because he knew with his medical knowledge and experience, there is no way of curing corona with home remedies such as drinking lemon, honey, and ginger water. This example displays how nonverbal communication can offer insight to gender communication.

Continuing with topic of listening obstacles, I noticed certain of my cousins engage in **selective listening** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.113). Selective listening is when people choose to only listen to certain points and disregard others because they are not that significant to them. Many of my older cousins are in graduate school and were terribly busy with studying for exams during the extra time they had during Thanksgiving weekend. Therefore, a few of them were studying while on the call, so they engaged in selective listening by only responding to statements that were clearly directed to them and avoiding other remarks to focus on their

studying. The example of selective listening illustrates how nonverbal communication offers insight to gender communion as well as beliefs.

The final aspect of interpersonal communication which I noticed during our Zoom family reunion was **source distractions** (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.111). Source distractions include any obstacles to listening due to auditory or visual characteristics during a conversation. This was quite common during our call because it was normal for one of the family's internet connection to be low, or another family's message to lag and cause discrepancies when attending to what they had to say. Furthermore, since many of my grandparents also joined the Zoom call, and are not familiar with technology, they faced a lot of trouble learning to mute and unmute themselves when talking and seeing everyone's faces. This example reveals how verbal and nonverbal communication offers insight into gender communication and beliefs.

Interpersonal communication can enhance certain aspects to a greater extent when circumstances and situations change, and my family Zoom call was an ideal example of that. Despite being physically distanced, many aspects of both verbal and nonverbal communication were able to be transacted and identified through the communication event I expanded on. A variety of my family's cultural characteristics still got transacted through our virtual interaction and depicted how different yet similar conversations and communication can become when platforms are changed. Overall, I learned many components of interpersonal communication firsthand through my family's virtual reunion which revealed how both verbal and nonverbal communication in the form of dialogue and behavior can offer great insight on not only gender communication, but also the various beliefs people share.

**Works Cited:**

Duck, S., & McMahan, D. T. (2021). *Communication in everyday life: A survey of communication*.

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