

Family Communication: Assignment #1

Siarra Orange Nielsen

Portland State University

## Abstract

What is the definition of family? I would argue that family doesn't have to be blood; instead, my definition of family involves members who are connected by affection and maintenance of long-term relationships. I believe that family consists of people who are married, adopted in, rear children together, who have joint finances, or who find their place close to that nuclear group. Together, family members create identity, protect one another, teach commitment, provide intimacy and participate in a transactional process meant to prepare members for their roles in the greater community. The proposed research questions are as follows:

1. At this point of your personal and academic life, what is your definition of a family? Please provide a comprehensive definition including who are the members. This doesn't need to be about your actual family, but rather, I am looking for your own definition of how you construct the notion of "family."
2. How do members communicate in your actual family? Keep in mind that communication acts do not only include talking, but also nonverbal communication. Give an example.
3. Give an example of a habitual family communication act and explain what the act means for the family. In other words, describe something that your family does (or did) habitually, and then analyze the act for its deeper meaning.
4. From any chapter in any of our text so far analyze your family from one of the theoretical approaches to communication. Provide an example from your own experience. Make sure that the example/s you give demonstrate the theoretical approach you intend it to.

*Keywords:* family, communication

At the end of a challenging day, when my heart doesn't feel full and I feel exhausted, I want to see my family. I want to prepare a meal with them, or relax on the sofa, or have a dance party. I want to go for a walk with them and talk about the plants we encounter or paint our nails together while listening to the latest single from Regina Spektor. The people who I consider to be my family fill my heart with positive energy. Family doesn't have to be blood, but instead my definition of family requires that members are connected by affection and maintenance of long-term relationships. Family includes people who are married, adopted in, rear children together, who have joint finances, or who find their place close to that nuclear group. Family members create identity, protect one another, teach commitment, provide intimacy and participate in a transactional process meant to prepare members for their roles in the greater community.

The members of my actual family mainly use nonverbal communication to express their thoughts and feelings. This comes across in many forms such as hugs, kisses, dancing around, and acts of service for one another. We tend to run high on emotions and as a result sometimes we don't use words at all with each other for days. We resort to communicating only through interpretation of each other's body language and Facebook posts. When we do talk with each other, our words are colored by passion. There is a difference between the way we talk to the members within our family and others not associated with our family unit.

Family takes care of you during times of intense struggle. I'll never forget this past week when a stranger stole my iPhone off Portland State Campus. I felt lost and scared and very frustrated. The thief not only stole my favorite Apple product from right next to me, but also my MAX pass which was saved on the Trimet app, my only means of connection to my safety network, my map of Portland, my GPS app, and so much more, all within seconds. That same night I ended up making my way to Washington State where my family lives. I visited my dad

because his smiles are cheerful and he usually can take my mind off my problems. My dad was heartbroken for me and asked to be packed up for a mall trip. We already know that family means we help each other and as it turns out, my father had dropped his phone in a puddle that same day and was also without a phone. My dad is disabled and without his cell phone he felt vulnerable and scared. After I signed him out of his care facility and agreed to provide all his medical needs, we went to the mall together. He paid for a new cell phone for each of us and also helped alleviate stress by smiling and taking action. He got my mind off my problems as I completed acts of service for him and as he took care of an issue that I was so frightened over. Family communicates love, even without words.

Looking back over the years at habitual communication patterns presented by my family, I notice a trend in the way we pay each other off. I feel like the way my dad uses money communicates that he loves us and he's sorry that he can't physically take care of us. Our dad has been physically disabled due to advanced Multiple Sclerosis for as long as my sisters and I have been alive. We have never known a healthy father who runs with us or teaches us how to play ball. Our dad loves to sit with us but he struggles to converse on topics that aren't stored in his long-term memory. He struggles to understand many components of reality and while he is the gentlest soul I have met to date, he will never be a physically strong person who can protect me from physical dangers. It's more than him just giving my sisters and I money when we plead our case to the family, there's an underlying message: I'm sorry I did not protect you girls, please forgive me. In analyzing my family's use of money as a means to communicate with one another, I sense that we are missing part of what's most important within a family; and that is the component of intimacy. We aren't as close as we could be because we have that issue of money looming over us. We know that we are tied together not only by love, but also necessity which

can lead to resentment. Family is a complex enigma.

My family, as it relates to the relational dialectics theoretical approach to communication, struggles with contradiction. According to the class lecture presentation on chapter 3, a *dialectic* refers to “a pull, tension, or contradiction between oppositions that we experience within relationships, including family.” While the members in my family long for autonomy, we desperately need each other at times. We cling to each other fiercely and we rely on each other’s resources during moments of immense stress. We long to feel connection to one another within our family because we know that when we need help, they will be the ones consistently there for us. More than that, we feel unconditional love for one another because of that sure knowledge. That connection marks our family with a seal of totality, as a relationship that operates as a whole.

Another component of relational dialectics is novelty vs predictability. The age old question: “*So... What do you want for dinner?*” comes to mind. My family can never decide if we want our favorite go-to dish or a new dish that we may or may not like as much. Like we learned from those chapter 3 lecture notes, “we want some patterned behaviors, but we want some change.” Our family units introduce us to relational dialectics and attempt to prepare us.

At the end of a great day, I want to see my family. I want to share my joys with them and tell them all about my studies. I want to show them the new dance routines I teach for my Zumba class at work and laugh when they do the moves better than me, a trained professional. I feel pride in my sister as she tells me about the after school business club she attends and in my dad when he tells me that he used an exercise machine that day for a full hour. I find the corners of my mouth smiling when my boyfriend rattles off law statistic after statistic. At the end of the day, I am who I am because of the people who are in my life; my family is what keeps me going.

Works Cited

Angeli, E., Wagner, J., Lawrick, E., Moore, K., Anderson, M., Soderlund, L., & Brizee, A.

(2010, May 5). *General format*. Retrieved from

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Bagley, Kenny. (n.d.). *Powerpoint slideshow*. Retrieved from

<https://d2l.pdx.edu/d2l/le/content/593325/viewContent/2623589/View?ou=593325>

Bagley, Kenny. (n.d.). *Powerpoint slideshow*. Retrieved from

<https://d2l.pdx.edu/d2l/le/content/593325/viewContent/2623591/View?ou=593325>