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2019, the Authors

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Editorial Notes

This issue of the Communication Studies Prison BA Journal (volume 2 fall 2019) reflects some of the learnings and accomplishments of students enrolled in the Communication Studies BA Program at Lancaster Prison. The Prison BA Program helps currently incarcerated students to explore new aspects of their identities that have been silenced or erased while building skills as communication scholars. It is an undertaking that is supported by the commitments and values of a large number of colleagues throughout our university, the College of Arts & Letters, and the Communication Studies Department. As a collaborative community we are dedicated to developing academic excellence as a pathway for student success. This issue reflects our efforts to develop innovative teaching as we build grassroots community and cultural connections, while providing opportunities for the dissemination of voices for social justice. I am especially grateful to the two student editors, Selene Castillo and Clifton Gibson, for pouring immense amounts of time and labor, passion and intellect into the selection and editing of works published in this issue.

-- Kamran Afary, assistant professor, faculty adviser

Witnessing such unique journeys of these smart, critical, and hopeful students while editing this issue of the journal has been an enriching experience for me. This work has also given me much more clarity about the opportunities and freedoms I have as a non-incarcerated student and deeper motivation to be an active participant in social justice movements. I wish for this journal to have a positive and humanistic impact on the thoughts of students, scholars, members of society, and legal entities.

-- Selene Castillo, graduate student, student editor

Journaling for me has always been an opportunity for inner exploration of my experiences and a gateway to possibilities. So,

when I was offered the chance to work as an editor on the compiling and editing of this issue of the Prison BA Journal, it was a no brainer. Having been recently released, after serving 25 years behind electric fences and under the watchful eyes of assault rifles, I am honored to assist in sharing snippets of stories that are riddled with trauma, tears, laughter, and insights of life behind bars. As I waded through the testimonies, my heart, head, and soul battled-back feelings of sorrow and pain. Although I am grateful for my second chance at freedom, I am saddened that friends are still incarcerated. Editing their pieces was a humbling experience.

-- Clifton Gibson, undergraduate student, student editor

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Reflections on interpersonal communication,
Introduction by Dr. Kamran Afary

The writings selected here for publication are based on prompts and exercises from Denise Solomon and Jennifer Theiss' *Interpersonal Communication: Putting Theory into Practice* (Routledge 2013). These exercises allowed the students to experiences catharsis in performances as they explored parts of their identities that are often silenced or erased. As their instructor, I was privileged to witness a prison classroom become a rare space of exploration and comradery, a space to process traumas and to build new resiliency skills. They are a testament to the exploration of key concepts in interpersonal communication while developing a dialogue on healthy relationships and practicing a form of restorative justice --in captivity!

At a time when the "outside" world is adrift in political crises and moral confusion, it is an honor to witness the collective clarification of values and principles taking place inside the prison walls. Integrating communication studies concepts with narrative and performance modalities can be a form of prison activism for empowered citizenship. It can provide avenues of enlightenment and empowerment while offering a powerful argument for abolishing the dehumanizing environments created by mass incarceration and the prison–industrial complex.

I am grateful to my students for sharing this work of self-liberation and for joyfully creating a safe "playspace." I also want to acknowledge the creative editing by two students, Selene Castillo and Clifton Gibson, who grouped the writings based on common themes, selected passages, produced short summary headings introducing each section, and came up with creative new titles for each piece.

Let's continue the work of breaking down the "mind-forged manacles of unfreedom"!

Reflections on defining interpersonal communication

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students begin their journey towards an understanding of interpersonal communication through the different relationships they experienced in different stages of their lives, inside and outside of prison. Some of the terms they explore are: relational messaging, direct and indirect messaging, as well as Low- and High-Context communication.

Bonded by our words, by David E. Ruiz

At prison, interpersonal communication is an important factor among the prison population. One of the teachings that is commonly passed around between prisoners is, "mean what you say and only say what you mean," let your yes be yes and your no be no. I, personally, value knowledge; however, knowledge is futile without wisdom and understanding due to the reason that if we have the knowledge, plus the experience (wisdom), it gives us insight (understanding) of the life's lesson we have encountered. The environment in which I am currently in is extremely segregated from society, therefore, communication is highly repetitive. I see people crossing paths with the same people, with the same schedule, for the most part, every day. Something that I noticed is that we, my friends and I do not like high-context communication. We prefer to be direct and straightforward, yet we use it all the time. One thing that we actually appreciate and demand from each other is honesty; like my celly says, "no one likes a liar." It is true that the word of a person is highly valuable among prison co-cultural groups. The people I coexist with value uncertainty-avoidance and low-context communication on top of that we value assimilation to the prison culture as survival; many of us might have discovered that trait in us, many may not have discovered it, yet. On the other hand, prison is just not populated with prisoners, but also correctional officers that, in contrast to the co-cultural groups' assimilation to each other's environment, they have their own expectations. For example, they prefer high power distance; since they are the dominant group within our

segregated environment. The correctional officers tend to use high-context communication to give indirect messages to the prisoners of degradation and disrespect. The way we coexist with each other is a compromise among my colleagues and me. But concerning the correctional officers, the communication differs from ours, yet there is always an exception. There are correctional officers that are empathetic to the prisoners, but always to an extent.

Walking the line: Social interactions amongst staff and inmates, by Deon Whitmore

Over this past week, I have experienced several interactions that all require different social rules. I will start with my encounters in the workplace as an employee. My supervisor tries to maintain a friendly work environment; she allows me to give my input to help serve the greater good. I work in culinary so my job descriptions are very flexible; although this relationship seems open there are social rules to abide by. I am to remain professional at all times regardless of the situation. I am to address her by last name only anything other than that could be considered over familiarity. My supervisor job is to make sure general population is fed, now lighting the mood so we all feel comfortable and safe is her own way of supervising. There is definitely a line drawn, to confuse our work relationship for anything other than that can break social rules. Second, the people I associate with in my classroom, the mood is normally lighthearted and positive being that we are all here to learn. Bringing any form of negativity inside this environment will not go unnoticed. Profanity, hostility, or disrespect towards any individual in this setting will break our circle of serenity. I try to bring positive energy to contribute to our learning process that is one of the many social rules we follow inside this classroom. In contrast, socializing with my peers on the recreational yard, social rules tend to be pushed to a breaking point where it seems almost nonexistent and still it seems appropriate. You do not have to worry about being professional or the right things to say. The social rule in this environment is to be yourself no one is judging or grading you, so what you would not do any

other time is socially acceptable in this setting. Lastly, the interaction with my wife is humbling. In order for a relationship to work there has to be understanding. Being open and considerate to others' thoughts and feelings is expected making this to be a part of the social rules. Yelling or any kind of disrespect are distinct communication skills we encourage each other not to use. This concludes my report.

Where do you stand now? Catching up with old friends, by Larry L Torres

About a month ago, my friend Mark, who I had not seen in over a year, arrived here at this institution. I really looked forward to being able to catch up with him. In the beginning there was a lot of uncertainty towards how I could best communicate with him. I wanted to make sure that I communicated with competence and included a good balance content and relational messaging. I had to be mindful to not monopolize the conversation due to my eagerness. There was a lot that we needed to discuss, things like music, when he is paroling, and about this yard. This place is a lot different from the prison culture we are both used to, so I wanted to help him adjust. When we finally met up, I made sure to bring him my music collection and some old metal magazines. That took care of a big chunk of content so that we could discuss things on a relational level. This was to best gauge what would constitute competence in our conversations. I needed to know what was appropriate, and what his needs were, so that I could communicate with effectiveness and efficiency. The culture on this yard has helped me a lot, and I wanted to know if he was open to hearing about it. If not, then we could just catch up, talk about music and hangout. By listening to him I was able to discern that he wants to change. This offered insight into what we would talk about moving forward, Afterwards, I was able to reflect on all that we had discussed. A lot of the uncertainty was removed, and so was most the content meaning. I felt that I had achieved my goal of assessing his needs and not overwhelming him with too much information all

at once. Since then it has been a lot easier to just hangout and be friends.

Culture:

Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Culture

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students identify the multiple cultural groups that encompass their identities. Life can be difficult and communication in an environment like prison can be especially challenging. Students in this chapter discuss terms and concepts such as: ethnocentrism, subcultures, diffusion, speech community, and social rules.

Adjusting intercultural communication in the homogeneity of prison, by David Lee

Being in prison can limit how individuals express their culture and heritage. Prison life limits how you dress, what you eat, who you socialize with, and has a big impact on your values, beliefs, and customs. This drastically influences how people express their culture. Because of the nature of prison, and how it can limit the way people express their culture, assimilation is common, and cultural differences are not as recognizable as they are in the "real world". In society, cultural differences can be obvious by having brief interactions or simply by looking at people you may notice major cultural differences. However, in prison those same differences are not as obvious. In Prison, cultural differences still exist, but they may be minor and are not always as obvious as they are in society. Because of this, I cannot specifically remember the last time I interacted with someone who had a very different cultural background from me. On a day-to-day basis, it is not uncommon to meet people who have different cultural backgrounds or who may share the same cultural background as me, but still have different values, beliefs, or customs. However, not all of these interactions are necessarily significant. The most significant memories I have of interacting with people from different backgrounds, are usually because in those interactions there was a language barrier that affected the way we communicated. When interacting with people who do not speak the

same language as me, I have found that speaking slower, or using more hand gestures and body language has been effective in communicating. Society, many different technological devices exist that aid in communicating with people when there are language barriers, but in prison minor adjustments such as speaking slowly, and listening carefully is necessary to help communicate effectively.

The three jewels: My path to balance behind bars, by Ninh Nguyen

I used to identify myself as just Vietnamese-American as my cultural background, but after reading Chapter Two I realized that I am part of many cultural groups. I am now used to identify my cultural background as Vietnamese-American, Buddhist, Prisoner, and a Cal State LA student. For each one of these cultural backgrounds, there are certain values, beliefs, and customs attached to them that influence my thinking, feelings, and livings. As a Vietnamese-American, I value family more than myself and there are certain expectations of how I should conduct myself at home and when I speak to my elder relatives. For examples, it is considered disrespectful to start eating before my parent's start eating at meal time and to talk back to them or elder relatives even when I believe or know they are wrong. In such situation, I just listen and nod politely. And I should always be the first to acknowledge someone who is older than me at a greeting as a sign of respect, addressed their titles like aunt or uncle with their names, and not look them directly in the eyes because that is considered a challenge. In regard to Buddhism, I practice compassion and meditation as a way to become a better person. As a Buddhist practitioner, I belong to a Buddhist community or Sangha as one of the Three Jewels of Buddhism: The Buddha, The Dharma, and The Sangha. At our weekly meeting, we have certain cultural rituals at the beginning and ending of the meeting like three prostrations to the Buddha to show respect, humility, and give 'thanks to the teaching. In addition, members of the Sangha greeted with palms together with a slight bow, which we don't do

outside of the meeting. Lastly, as a member of the Cal State LA class, I have noticed
how the cultural of the class has changed since we first started. There is no more racial separation between us and everyone looks relax in class. It appears that everyone left that prison culture at the door when they walked into class. We addressed each other by our first name instead of prison nickname.

Ethnocentrism: the bane of prison programing, by Justin Hong

Ethnocentrism, whether it is in subtle or more obvious ways, is very apparent in the prison culture. Throughout my incarceration, prisons have been often divided by "Races" in which the color of your skin often determined what social group you were a part of. These social groups were not as simple as bunches of friends hanging out together, but operated more so like a gang in that it came with their own social rules and consequences if those rules were broken. This separation of people often bred prejudice and disdain for those who did not share the same ethnic or cultural background.

Attitude of gratitude, by Terry Bell

As a Cal State LA student, we feel that everything we do in the name of the university is a way to show our appreciation to those that helped put this program together, and those that keep this opportunity moving forward by teaching us, and seeing to it that we are treated as human.

Identity:
Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Identity

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students reflect on their roles in society, as they reveal the multiple labels that helped shape their characteristics and ideologies. With deep and personal stories, students explain how they negotiated their identities through periods of trauma. As they navigate these difficult testimonies, they utilize terms and concepts like: self-reflexive act, social roles, identity adaptation, assimilation, and negotiated identity

Self-reflexivity Act: looking within to get out of prison, by Dara Yin

I decided to become a college student, it for all the wrong reasons. I just wanted to graduate to have a diploma in my file so that hopefully I would have a better possibility of being released from prison. Upon entering college, I discovered that I enjoyed learning new things, that there was so much in the world that I did not know. My observation of self, allowed me to see how I treated others and how I wanted to be treated. This act of self-observation is called "Self-reflexive Act."

After understanding myself more clearly, I started to see the social roles that I performed on a daily basis. My role as a student became defined with my professors and classmates. The behaviors that came with this role were being disciplined when completing assignments, being accountable to pass on information to other students, paying attention in class, and keeping a friendly environment within the experience. My cohort created an open environment of safety, security, and lightness that allows all of the students and the professor to feel comfortable and free. Within my social role as a student, I also have a social role as a fellow inmate. I think this dynamic actually helps me in my student role as well ..., because I am relatable to the other classmates and the set of behaviors that I show helps allow all of us to have while learning.

Social comparison is another tool that I have learned to use as a student. There are so many talented classmates in the room. I admire Justin's capability to recall information, Deon's enthusiasm, Aminifu's confidence, and Aaron's honesty. Through comparing myself to them I am able to gain insight into traits that I would like to have. This has a lot of influence on my self-concept. As a student these social comparisons have helped me work harder and participate more in class. I was very afraid to ask questions when I first started the Cal State LA BA program, I was afraid I would ask a question that made me sound dumb. I have now discovered as a college student that I am smart, innovative, disciplined, and that I am a unique thinker.

Being a student made me an active listener, by Robert Pratt

When I started the Bachelors program. I had never written an academic paper before. I learned how, by asking for help, something that I couldn't for most of my life. I also learned how to be a better student by active listening. I pay attention when people talk about ways to do school. I learned that I can speak in public. I have always been good one-on-one, but, flustered in speaking to groups. The practice I did in class made it easier. I am better at organizing and prioritizing to meet deadlines, and have always been a horrible speller, and through spellcheck I have learned that nothing has changed.

My search for true identity, by Baleegh Brown

My self-esteem boosted from my involvement in the streets as my social role among my peers was respected. Ultimately, this identity I adopted led me to prison. About three years into my incarceration, I realized the lifestyle in which I lived was not conducive to my being and didn't exemplify my true identity. I discovered the essence of my being and what my true purpose of existence is. This feeling of enlightenment drove me to want to be a scholar, so I emphasized my identity as a student and began to educate myself through college courses self-help classes and

personal readings. As a result, I've become a better son, brother, student, and over all human beings.
ne, but, flustered in speaking to groups. The practice I did in class made it easier. I am better at organizing and prioritizing to meet deadlines, and have always been a horrible speller, and through spellcheck I have learned that nothing has changed.

Healing inside prison: shedding negative feelings about myself, by Jeff Ayers

I believe my self-esteem is for all purposes average, but healthy. It took me the majority of my life to arrive at that point. I was bullied in school from the age of 6 up until I dropped out of high school at the age of 17; although, the physical and verbal cruelty continued until I was 20. Being the unwilling recipient of so much unwanted negative attention made me believe there really was something wrong with me, because why would they beat me up and call me names if there wasn't? None of the "normal" or popular kids were ever picked on, so obviously I was the misfit, the mutant, who deserved the abuse I endured. At one point, it was so bad that if a day went by without me getting beat up, spit on, called names, shoved, my glasses taken, punched, kicked, or anything else, I felt particularly low because I thought I wasn't even worth the trouble of bullying anymore. Needless to say, my self-esteem wasn't the greatest. Ironically, it would be a prison environment where my self-esteem would finally start to heal and approach something resembling normalcy. Ironic because in the violent atmosphere of prison, for the first time in my life nobody wanted to pick on me. Without the constant abuse, I was able to shed much of my negative beliefs about myself and grow into a person with if not high self-esteem, then at least a person with healthy self-esteem. While it may fluctuate depending on the circumstances, I'd rather have my self-esteem be healthy rather than fixed and poor as it was for the first part of my life.

Negotiating my Identity, by Derric Burbie

My identity changed dramatically from the ages of 18-25, partly due to my outlook on life, but mostly due to my change in environment. At the age of 20, I was arrested, so my identity changed from being a "free person", to being an incarcerated person. This change was not only dramatic due to my new classification and status, but due to my new environment, and the seemingly finality of my circumstances as now being incarcerated person with a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. Previously, I was an eighteen-year-old college student majoring in pre-law, so the shift in my identity definitely represented a major change in my life, both in how I saw myself (self-concept), and in how others viewed me (perception). I developed a negotiated identity that consisted of three different identities: (l) how I saw myself, (2) how others around me saw me, and (3) the stereotypes associated with being an incarcerated person. These identities at times were consistent with one another, but for the majority of my life, through the ages of 18-25 I experienced a strong and prevalent identity gap because my inner self did not match my outward appearance and actions. I was not only mentally changing in my thinking and outlook; I was trying to survive in an atmosphere that was not conducive to my well-being. In my effort to navigate my environment, my three identities alternated control of my life in order to ensure my sanity and existence. I had to adjust my view of myself from being a college student, to being an incarcerated person, and not let that label solely define who I was as a person. I constantly had to redefine myself in other people's eyes through use of my words and actions (enactment layer of identity) in order for other people's perceptions of me to match my personal layer of identity. My emerging adulthood years were full of growth, change, and adaptation, and as such, I learned how to negotiate multiple identities in order to thrive and survive while undergoing developmental changes in age, and physical changes in environments.

The transformational power of education, by Risala Rose-Aminifu

I come from a long line of family educators, so I always knew that I would follow them and enroll in college. This context of higher education in prison is a unique opportunity for us all. The social roles that exists in prison get altered when you infuse education into the equation. Through higher education, our cohort seems to come together. Our own behavior is changed through a desire for educational growth and maturity. We all see each other as an equal and help to uplift each other's morale. Most importantly, I have learned that through hard work and determination, we can accomplish anything that we put our minds to. I have also discovered that I am smarter than I thought. Once I set a goal for myself, I tend to make that my priority. I have discovered that I have a passion for learning and I get excited at the opportunity of acquiring new life skills. To discover new talents that one did not previously think he had, is amazing. The transformative power of education on rehabilitation is refreshing, and inspiring.

Dealing with conflicting identities, by Bertho Gauthier

A form of disrespect of self is definitely present when one forfeits their freedom by coming to prison. That disrespect is no longer present in me. I go to all kinds of extents to remain disciplinary free because I respect myself and my freedom. Occasionally, my self-esteem does decrease due to being incarcerated. It is just something about the power of the jumpsuit an inmate wears. When most civilians visit a prison and see an inmate, they unwarily behave in a way that dehumanizes an inmate by avoiding eye contact, failing to greet an inmate in passing, and displaying an attitude of distrust by voluntary surveillance. In order to respond to this dehumanization, inmates typically use two types of defense mechanisms. One defense is, a method of adaptation by accepting and even expecting the dehumanizing devices stated above. On the other hand, other inmates reciprocate the dehumanization back to civilians by using nonverbal communication to decline any interaction with civilians which prevents possible rejection. I used both of these methods while incarcerated to settle the internal

conflict of my negative and positive self-concepts. In the end, my self-esteem is dynamic. Even though it may respond to various external stimuli, it can always be corrected internally with varying effort.

Layered Identities, by Gustavo Tamayo

If someone had to assume my identity for a day, they would have to adopt an optimistic worldview. Being that I am currently incarcerated in a maximum-security prison, there are other key communication behaviors this person would have to adopt as well. These communication behaviors consist of being observant and aware of my surroundings, respectful, strong-minded, physically active, patient, firm, a man of my word, spiritually inclined, and protective of myself. These communication behaviors are somewhat a means of survival and living as comfortable as possible around my criminal peers. Interestingly, these are communication behaviors of my role as a prisoner, yet they are somewhat consistent with other facets of my identity such as being a man, a son, a brother, an uncle, a dockworker, a Cal State L.A student, a friend, and every other role I play. My identity has been shaped and molded through my experiences and interactions, I have come to understand that my sense of self has to be as consistent and fluid as possible in all facets of the man that am and gradually becoming.

From being scared to being successful is just a belief away, by David E. Ruiz

I began my first semester in the fall of 2012 anxious, scared, nervous and highly antisocial. However, none of that kept me from submerging in the books and acquiring three A's and one B on my first semester giving me a 3.75 GPA. Then I discovered my incredible passion for learning and reading. I realized that I have the potential to become someone rather that the stereotypes that

have been placed upon those like me that assimilate to my life experience and circumstances. Eight years later, I am still in school pursuing my educational dreams, goals, learning things that I know are and will continue to be beneficial to me, and all humanity as life goes on. On top of the passion that I acquired for school and books, I realized that we all have esoteric capacities that enable us to become widely knowledgeable individuals. I also discovered that I have the "fire" that light the furnace of motivation and inspiration leading me to become enthused to pursue my education as a scholar. Unfortunately, it is not the same for all. Some people lack the inspiration and motivation to become someone that can make a change in society for those that are marginalized and discriminated. I refuse to sit down and watch the privileged continue using the less fortunate as steppingstones to become wealthier. I know that the best, and the only way, to create such change is by educating oneself.

Change is a choice, by Larry L. Torres

Between the ages of 18-25, I underwent an incredible amount of change due to my incarceration. I was arrested right before my 21st birthday so almost half of my emerging adulthood was spent out in society. At the age of 18 1 felt like an adult, and I thought that my future was already set. Within a year of graduating high school I was a father, out on my own, and working full time with my dad. I believed that my opinions about the world were already established. In the beginning I was enjoying the freedom of being out my own, and I felt like a man because I was also providing for my son. After a couple years, however, the novelty wore off, and I was confronted with the realities of the working class. At this point my ideology began to shift, and slowly turned to criminality, in part because I thought it was necessary, but also because of my disillusionment a-bee* the results of hard work. I saw myself doing things I never thought I and treating people in ways I never imagined. Then I came to prison and my new illusion was shattered. I felt like a helpless child at. 21. My entire future was now in the hands of a system I saw as corrupt, and hinging on the

decisions of a society I had grown to despise. Everything I thought I knew was now being challenged. My values and beliefs did not stand a chance, but rather than conform I doubled down. Society was rejecting me, so in response I became anti-social. My identity became dimensional. Any identity gaps were filled with delusion, my action became an exercise in self-interest, my way of surviving. The prison environment and culture provided me with all the excuses needed to become an expert in self-justification. Where I once had felt like myself with my family, I now felt like a fraud. My sense of identity had inverted. By the time I was 25, I had fully assimilated to prison. At that point there was nothing that I was incapable of in order to maintain my distorted ideals of adulthood. I spent about five years living an empty existence, until I felt something had to change.

Perception:

Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Perception

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students engaged in different practices of perception, from bodily experiences of their surroundings to critical cognition of others' perceptions of them. Students unpack the consequences of their actions, living with different people, and how those experiences influenced their development of a sense of self and their relationships. Students unpack and explore terms and concepts such as: stereotypes, expectancy violations, mapping, positionality, and maladaptive communication.

Living up to positive stereotypes, by Bertho Gauthier

In the beginning, positive stereotypes may appear to uplift an individual. A positive stereotype can be used as a foundation and later on customized. For example, children of musicians may be categorized as gifted just as their parents. This label can be used as a stepping stone for them to explore other fields within the music industry such as an engineer. However, what happens when an individual cannot live up to the positive labels and stereotypes placed on them? The answer maybe a phenomenon called identity crisis. Opening up with a personal example, I was kicked out the Marine Corps for drug abuse. Everyone was shocked because I had a bright future expected ahead of me just as all my predecessors did. Additionally, I had built a lifestyle for my family that I could no longer facilitate. I eventually began to commit robberies in order to live as well as I had while on active duty. I was caught quickly and my whole life went on a positive parabola that has not yet found symmetry. I am completely responsible for my criminal behavior. However, the rejection I feared is the same rejection felt when someone cannot live up to a positive stereotype. An unnecessary burden is placed on an individual because they cannot live up to someone else's standards and expectations. My advice to someone who is a victim of positive stereotyping, whether it is the

result of their actions or not, is to remain true to his or her self, and find constructive ways to achieve the outcomes or goals they desire.

Turn down the volume on stereotypes please, by Macio Lindsey

One "positive" stereotype that I call to mind is that Asian are good at math. This may be true in some cases, but not true in every instance. The downside of this so-called "positive" stereotype is that it categorizes all Asians in one group; good mathematicians. This is sure to place unrealistic expectations for those who believe this stereotype to be true. When people meet Asians who do not excel in math, they may have a tendency to look down upon those who do not meet these expectations. It may cause Asians who do not meet this flawed expectation of mathematical excellence to question themselves and begin to hold themselves as inferior to other Asians who meet these stereotypes. As individuals, when we have these beliefs and organize our thoughts and actions according to these perceptions, we deny ourselves of the full opportunity to have open interpersonal communication. We all have heard stereotypes about ourselves that others hold. Through personal experience, we know how these stereotypes create false expectations based solely upon our ethnicity and/or nationality. If we begin to treat people as unique individuals, we open our minds, lives, and experiences to the richness of their being, and only then do we begin to be a participant in healthy and meaningful interpersonal communication.

Couples' perceptions: from jailhouse to the Whitehouse, by Deon Whitmore

I will like to use the comparison of the former President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama, to current President Donald Trump and his wife Melania. These two relationships seem to be polar opposite of one another, If I was to draw a conclusion from initial impression of who was happy or unhappy, their physical characteristics will be telling. Let's start with Barack and Michele, I can't possibly think of a happier couple, every time their images

are captured you instantly notice the smiles on their faces. This is a clear indication of happiness seeing them in the presence of each other interacting. I could imagine having the job of commander in chief is every bit of the meaning stressful. He has to take on the responsibilities and make difficult decisions for the entire nation. This can be overwhelming but somehow finding the strength to smile says a lot. I think the Obamas have reached a level in their relationship where they are comfortable communicating to resolve any matter they might face. Being that they were parents first gives an idea that they know how to compromise for common goals. I will like to believe there's no one in the world they would rather be with than each other. Now in contrast to the Obamas, Donald and Melania Trump's relationship can draw a lot of blanks. Every time seen in public, they both have stern looks. Their body language is tense even when standing in a room next to each other. They hardly speak in public settings and the few conversations they might have; Donald Trump is doing most of the talking. These are the few occasions when they are seen together most of the time they are separated. I can't imagine that they have good communication skills in their relationships, Donald Trump has a sense of arrogance about himself that makes it hard to deal with. He might be difficult to reason with which may seem fitting for Melania who comes off a bit timid. It seems like they don't agree on much and have different style of communication. The age difference is also a big indicator in how they communicate with each other. I'm not certain of how each one's relationship truly is there is a possibility of how I perceived each couple can be the complete opposite. Since this chapter is focused on perception being an observer these are the conclusions I have drawn seeing them on a public stage

Sensory overload behind bars, Risala Rose-Aminifu

I notice my TV in the background, my radio is on low also, both me and my cellie's fans are on, the vent is blowing out warm air, and I have just cleaned up the cell. I can see clothes blowing on our clothes lines, from the fans. This is how we dry our clothes in

prison. The radio is playing jazz, and it is relaxing to me, as I type out my assignment. The smell of Tide laundry detergent is freshly in the air, because that's what I used to wash with. I can also smell somebody cooking lunch. It kind of smells like chicken, but I doubt that's what it is. Personally, I feel energetic because I worked-out this morning, took all my vitamins, and meditated. Other things that I perceive are: my digital clock next to my T. V., my cosmetics on my locker, my clothes on my bunk, and my parole plans stationed on my bunk, next to my clothes. Most of these things have nothing in common with each other. These are just some of the items in my prison cell at this very moment. My senses are used to seeing, hearing, smelling, most of the things that I described earlier. In prison, we live in such a small space, that sometimes all your senses get bombarded at once. The smell of someone using the bathroom, the smell of food and incense. Seeing someone get attacked, watching the c/o's cuff up someone. Hearing guys crying in pain etc. In here, character is made by the adverse conditions. From adversity comes triumph!!!

Prison assumptions can lead to maladaptive living, by Robert Pratt

Prison is full of couples, cellies. In prison you don't always get to choose who you live with. A friend of mine was celled up with someone he didn't like, creating an unhappy couple. He had negative attributions of the other. Because they didn't like each other they didn't talk to each other unless they had to. This lack of communication caused a maladaptive event. Although both were clean people the cell was dirty because neither one would clean. One of the guys tracked dirt in from the yard but, before he could sweep the floor he was called to medical. His cellmate came back and assumed the other guy had done it on purpose because he was a slob, internal and stable quality, and decided not to clean up after him. Then the celly who went to medical returned and saw the mess still on the floor, assumed the guy expected him to do all cleaning, another attribute. Instead of talking to each other they trashed talked about the other guy to their friends. You can always tell happy cellies, they make excuses for the other when they do

something that has unfortunate consequences. For instance, when the hot pot burned up because one cellmate leaves the cell without unplugging it first. The other just assumes something out of his cellie's control happened, like getting stuck on the tier, caused an unexpected result, adoptive attribution. Good cellies talk to each other and learn to live with their cellie's annoying habits.

Our foundational perception changes throughout a relationship, by Arthur Andrade

My experience of meeting the mother of my daughter illuminates what the textbook describes as the three stages of perception: selection, organization, and interpretation. I met Cindy, the mother of my daughter Christina at the Crystal Cathedral Church in Orange County where my y group and I were performing Bolivian folk dance. Cindy, also Bolivian, naturally gravitated toward my dance group and me. My confidence also attracted her to me. Our shared cultural values and interests in the same music and food created a sense of consistency. There was also a sense of inconsistency with norms in that it is not common to see Bolivian folklore being performed. My performance of Bolivian folklore created a bond for both of us. We interpreted the fact that we both grew up in a rare culture to mean that therefore, we must understand each other. We assumed we had a plausible foundation for our future relationship. Three years after we met our relationship ended. We did not really know each other because we did not even know ourselves. A sharing of understanding of something in a relationship is not a sufficient foundation. Culture is only a part of us. We are able to have our daughter understand the culture, but to mold her to know educational topics is more important. We are not together, but share our culture and daughter. WE understand that we may not be together, but we are essential to our daughter and she allows my family to bring my daughter for visits for which I am thankful. Perception played a role, especially early on in the relationship. But toward the end of the relationship, it was clear; perception alone does not necessarily make a foundation for a relationship.

Not all college students look the same: non-traditional students in prison, by David E. Ruiz

List traits that you think most people associate with "college students."

-high school graduate (for a freshman college student)

-an adult -nerdy

-immature

-Social activist

-white male (middle, upper middle class)

-dedicated

-law abiding citizen

-financially stable

-well read, but inexperienced in life

Most of the traits that I listed above are stereotypes that I had prior to experiencing college before my incarceration. Many of those stereotypes do apply to ivy colleges, however they are not applicable to me because I am not a white male; I am a Chicano. I come from below the poverty level. Yet, I am privileged in the sense that I brag myself to have a higher level of resilience compared to most college students my age, I am 25 years old and I believe that I am able to maintain an argument with the proper eloquence and articulation. Yes, I do have barriers that prohibit me from being able to pronounce words correctly. I have read enough to understand the pros and cons of stereotypes and stereotyping.

Some of the traits that I consider to be highly important is the ability to be empathetic to all human beings without any amount judgment. Being a college student is not just about being well read, but being able to internalize all the material that the professors are teaching. Something beautiful that I've learned through the reading of Ralph Waldo Emerson is that, "we learn to teach and we teach to learn." Also, being an ethical individual is a key trait that is

highly important for me, but with a friendly and compassionate complexion. The ability to learn is the most important trait for me because all the information and experiences we acquire are important for the upcoming generations.

The way that the college student stereotypes affect me is that I am not what people would refer to as a "normal" college student because I am an incarcerated student. I wear prison blues every day, I do not have the freedom that societal individuals have. Not many people have as much hope on me as people do on students on a campus on the streets. However, many people motivate me and state that they are proud of me. My mother, former high school staff, some friends, and God are among those that are proud of me. In the yard, people treat me different; they admire me for what I am doing because it is not easy to acquire higher level of education in prison, and even less if you're a lifer. Nonetheless, being in such position may provoke arrogance, which can ultimately be emotionally lethal to the blind. I was made aware by an individual I am close to, share with me that he felt as if I thought that I was smarter that everyone else. I told him that was far from the truth. And, that was a call for humbleness from me. In prison you may not see the stereotypes of what a college student looks like, however, you can easily tell the difference of an educated man from an individual that lacks a proper education. Somehow the college scholar stands out, and I think that that is one of the reasons why this yard in specific stands out, out of all the prisons in California.

Connecting to my senses in a concrete sarcophagus, by Larry L Torres

Looking around the cell I notice; laundry hanging in front of a fan, a guitar with a broken A string, batteries charging, tennis shoes and boots on the floor, and the food and hygiene items in the locker. Concentrating on my senses one at a time, I look out of the front window and see my friend Jeff and his cellmate Sam out in the dayroom. I look out of the back window and I notice that it is snowing again. The snow falls lightly. What I am hearing are, "

lush ambient nature sounds combined with Alpha-Theta Brainwave Frequencies" I'm wearing headphones and listening to a relaxation C.D. Now that I removed the headphones, I hear lush ambient prison sounds combined with intercom announcement frequencies. The fan hums as it dries my laundry. I smell the scent of my clothes as they dry, as well as hints of the buttered popcorn my cellmate is snacking on. The back wall is cooling my back as the heater warms the cell. The heater feels too hot. I feel the folded blankets that I use as a floor cushion to sit on. The lists are different because in the first there was no awareness of what I was perceiving. I simply registered dry facts about the contents in my cell. I was not really conscious of what I was perceiving. It was not until I stopped and investigated the bodily sensations associated with cognition that I began to experience my environment. Stopping and focusing on my senses one at a time created a space between my consciousness and my observation that was then filled with an awareness of how my body is reacting to the stimulation around me. The distance also allowed to be mindful of the thoughts that passed through my mind in association with the physiological responses. It was nice to be aware of what was happening because it all happens whether we pay attention or not. Paying attention empowers me to fully experience, otherwise it can feel like I am just going through the motions.

Lost in Plain Sight, by Dara Yin

The day that I joined the gang my point of view was seen as this is my new family. I selected to only notice the attention that they garnered from people, and how I thought we all loved each other as family. That day was a day I made vows to the gang, such as give my life, support and represent the gang in the best way possible. I wanted to take the gang to the top. It was the first big decision that I made in my life and I tried my hardest to not fail. In the first step of perception, which is selection, I selected to only think about the good things that I would gain from in the gang such as reputation. love. and money. Personal relevance that it had on me was family. The older members spoke about the gang as a

family, one that I thought that I did not have. Once having this information, I then organized it just as the textbook says. I created a coherent map of what was told to me and how I would perceive it. My interpretation of that information was that this is the family that I always wanted, this is a family that wanted me. I made sense of my past abandonment and abuse. I used that trauma to fill in the blanks such as since I was an accident in my family's eyes, here in this gang I am the future for the gang. Now that the relationship has ended, I have organized and interpreted that day as a child that was seeking attention and that I would do anything for it. Just to be visible to somebody meant the world to me. I then was willing to destroy other's worlds to prove it. A lost child among lost people.

Language:

Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Language

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students reflect on the power of labels and how they helped shape their identities. There are many layers to character and identity development, throughout this chapter students focus on labels, reification, role modeling, and denotative and connotative language.

Denotative language versus connotative interpretation, by Derric Burbie

For me, words that are emotionally impactful are the ones that are used to disrespect and degrade. One word in particular is the "N" word. For me, that word represents disrespect, and disregard for my ethnic relevance, and its use as a slur is derogatory in nature. As a former active gang member, I have always marveled at how people I know would refrain from using certain words, or make up idioms to prevent utilizing certain words that their gang finds disrespectful, but consistently use words that disrespect their ethnicity. I began wondering whether that was because they loved their gang more than their ethnicity, or whether it had just not occurred to them what they were doing; perhaps it's both. Having negative connotations attached to words creates negative images when those words are used. This reification creates a negative self-concept, and the negativity increases when consistently reinforced through verbal uses. Having grown up in a time when the "N" word was used by other ethnicities as an insult, or by those within my same ethnicity who used it as "shock value", it amazes me how the "N" word is used on a regular and routine basis as part of everyday conversation. The denotative meaning has changed from the connotative meaning for most people who use the "N" word, which goes to show the evolution of words, and how definitions change from generation to generation.

How labels can affect our communications, by Risala Rose-Aminifu

Recently, I had my sentence of LWOP (life without the possibility of parole) commuted to 27-to-life, giving me the opportunity to see a parole board for release. Immediately, all my fellow prisoners started calling me short timer. This label has had a positive effect on how other people communicate with me. People have been cognizant of my recent blessing by the Governor, and have treated me as if I am going home soon. The reality of the situation is that I very well may be out of prison within the next eight months, which is refreshing in and of itself. People have been communicating with me differently, which is further proof that labels do indeed have an effect on how people communicate with an individual. I am now situating myself in the best position to be free. Labels are a powerful tool in communication.

Don't consume what others presume, by Samuel Nathaniel Brown

As a youth I felt that people actually communicated with me as if I was actually ugly, dirty, and basically nothing. As a teenager, I was labeled as someone who "didn't give a fuck". My peers communicated with me in a way that either indicated fear of me, respect, or a desire to live voyeuristically through me by directly or indirectly encouraging me to do the things that they would not dare do. The police labeled me as a "G Parkway nigger", a "thug", and a "criminal". As a result, that is exactly how they communicated with me. This treatment greatly contributed to me developing the "I don't give a fuck attitude". Prior to the police pulling me over and handcuffing me for no reason at all, chasing me, and attempting to force me to be an informant in a neighborhood that I was new to and basically knew nothing about — I had never had a criminal record. They labeled me and treated me in accordance with the labels that they placed upon me. In the spirit of reification, I responded to the labels as if they were an accurate representation of reality. Now that I am older and have seized control over my own thinking and behavior, I do not allow myself to be moved by

the labels that others place upon me. The most important part of the process is how I respond.

Labels are more than a descriptor, by Terry Bell

The label Inmate causes non-incarcerated people to communicate with me in a degrading way. This label signifies nothing but negative connotations. This label is detached from humanity, and is viewed as the lowest of the low, good for nothing, a waste of time, and every other negative phrase or word that you can think of. This label erases from the minds of others the fact that the incarcerated possess a heart, and emotions just like the remainder of humans. Arbitrary language is very influential.

Don't judge an inmate by their label, by Justin Hong

Labeled as an inmate, the way people communicate with me varies. There have been times when correctional officers are condescending and rude. Without knowing anything about me, they judge me based upon my label as an inmate as someone who is bad or dangerous and treat me as such. However, there are others like my Cal State professors who see my label as an inmate as more descriptive rather than defining. They treat me like a human being and my label as an inmate seems to not matter in the way that they communicate with me.

Tough time talking to those that are not thugs, by Dara Yin

In my lifetime I have been given many labels, prisoner, convict, gang member, trouble maker, aggressive, and anti-social. I think these labels have affected me tremendously in how people communicate with me. I think people are more closed off when they speak to me. I think most people think my intentions are not honest and true, as if I am up to something negative. I think that people try not to speak with me because they may feel as if I would challenge them in some way negatively. These labels in the past created reification, I responded to the labels as if they were all I can be and I could not change it. I then became my mission to be

the best possible label I could be. The label of gang member has hurt me the most, I chose to become one, the reification process for that label was intense for me. I tattooed my whole body in dedication to that lifestyle and my morals and codes of life became that of the gang code. Nothing surpasses that not society's lawn nor my own mother's plea. The effect of this created my anxiety of speaking to those that are not inmates or gang members. I tend to feel as if I am being judged. This fully keeps me from growing into a person through communication with all of society.

Non-verbal Communication: Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Nonverbals

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students write about how the subtleties of nonverbal communication speaks volumes, especially in an incarcerated environment. Some of the key terms and concepts they discuss are: Socialization, accenting, channels (kinesics, haptics, paralinguistic, proxemics, chronemics, and olfaction,), and micro-aggressions.

Touching boundaries to avoid conflict, by Robert Pratt

I don't normally get angry. When I do it's like a hay fire, burning in a flash, bright and hot then ending just as fast. I was a porter in a building and part of my job was to serve food during cell feeding. There is usually food left over, and when I can, I try to get extra for whomever wants it. One time a guy asked me to get some for him, I said I would if I could. I wasn't able to do it that day. When I was cleaning up after feeding the guy asked me for the food. I told him I wasn't able to do it. He didn't believe I couldn't do it and started yelling at me. He said my word was no good, that I was a racist, and a coward for not even trying. All of this was said while his door was closed, this is known as being a cell soldier. I'm not one to yell my business on the tier so I waited to get at him during yard release, one on one. As I waited for yard, he continued to throw his fit for everyone to hear, the doors were perforated, and the yelling had attracted a lot of attention. I don't like to get yelled at, or called a liar, especially in front of everyone. By the time the doors opened for yard I was very angry. When I tried to approach him, he kept maneuvering to keep a table between us. I assaulted him with the worst forms of verbal abuse I could think of and letting him know I was ready and willing to take it to the next step. Then a friend put his hand on my shoulder and said "come on dude, you don't want to do this, he don't want more, he is too scared". I pulled my shoulder away saying, "don't fucking touch

me. I don't like to be touched when I'm angry!" It did have an effect on me. I noticed that no one in our section had gone to yard. In fact, people were starting to group up, picking sides for what was about to happen. I was pulled out of the rant, and realized I should give him an out, to save everyone else from getting involved. I asked him what he wanted to do. He apologized, the tension started to ease and people began to go to yard. Although the touch had positive effect, it made me very uncomfortable and almost caused me to get into an altercation with a friend because of it.

Fighting emotions that are calling out to be embraced, by Rose-Aminifu Risala

As our class watched Allen & Zion's film, we were asked to write a one-page critique of the short film. Being I lost both of my children, I decided to write about my own daughter who was the same age as Zion at the time of her death. Little did I know that Elizabeth Malone would incorporate these writings into a play. At our first reading of this play, I found myself caught in a sea of emotions. I have never recovered from the tragic deaths of both of my children, though I fight to remain emotionally strong, reading about this brought back raw emotional sadness. I noticed my voice cracking up, I started to tremble and I began to sweat. These were sign of emotions revealing itself through my body's reaction. I thought that I could read about these events and not break down, I couldn't!! Even at this moment, my eyes are watering up, it feels like I have a lump in my throat, and I feel saddened. These are all signs that our bodies react to and change with our moods. When I am feeling happy, I tend to smile more, have a steady heartbeat and am relaxed. When I am angry, everything is just the opposite. As our textbook reveals; people express emotions through three regions of the face: the mouth, the eyes, and the forehead. We cannot hide our true feeling with body language.

Prison Horseplay: a harassment issue, by Larry L Torres

There is actually a lot of touching that is part of life in prison. On average I am frisked by an officer twice a day. This I have gotten used to. Between inmates there is also a lot of horse playing that goes on, I don't mind this either. Sex play is what makes me uncomfortable, it involves a certain level of inappropriate touching. Granted it is intended to make a person uncomfortable, and it's supposed to be funny. I have never found the humor in it. This is something that I deal with on a regular basis. It is something that I find strange. Straight inmates touching another man, and calling them gay. I have never been sex played by a gay inmate. I have however, been groped by straight inmates. It makes me uncomfortable; I don't like being humiliated with a touch. Since I stopped being violent and aggressive, I don't know how to respond. Of course, people laugh and think it's funny, which makes it worse. It is another dimension of bullying. I feel small and weak when someone does it to me. Small and weak aren't ways that a person wants to feel in prison. My reluctance to engage in homophobic behavior also singles me out. The touching is problematic because essentially there is no way to deal with it. I get along with some of the people that do it and they genuinely believe that it is funny. My reaction and my reluctance only makes it more entertaining for the perpetrator. All in all, it is a difficult situation. It is made worse by being in prison, surrounded by other men. I don't like that I don't get to be around woman. The absence of a woman's touch makes this worse. I am reminded that I have no intimacy in my life. The closest thing I have to a loving touch from a woman I care about is, some guy walking up behind me groping me and calling me gay. I don't mind being touched. I grew up in a high contact household. I welcome a warm embrace from my friends. It is the violent sexual aggression and homophobic sexual play in prison that is problematic.

Powerless bodies against police enforcement, by Terry Bell

A situation when I was uncomfortable with a touch was the first time a male officer patted me down (searched me). Being rubbed on by another male, knowing that there is nothing I can do about it, made me feel powerless and violated. Then, he asked if there is anything in my pockets that could poke or harm him, while I was getting patted down, made it seem like if so, I would be in violation, although I was the one being violated. At this time in my life, I was not involved in criminal activities. I had just come out of Rite Aid with two of my female friends, and two of my male friends. Several police cars and SUV's pulled up on us and exited their vehicles moving aggressively towards us. While standing with my legs spread and my hands interlocked behind my head with the officer holding my hands in place, I heard a dog bark. I turned my head and saw an officer holding the dog on a leash. The officer that was holding my hands yelled at me saying, "Don't turn around, if you turn around again, I am going to slam your face into the ground". So, along with the undesired touching, was unwanted verbal threats in an aggressive tone. These were the circumstances that made this event confusing and problematic.

Emotions:

Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Emotions

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students share stories of how emotions play powerful roles in their lives. As they developed their coping abilities and expanded their education, they also became better communicators. Some of the terms and concepts that they discuss are: gender, gender norms, emotional literacy, and toxic masculinity.

Finding presence in prison, by Larry L Torres

Being in Prison turned my pessimism into a lifestyle over the last few years. I am involved in the Theatre Workers Project, and Wednesday was our day to perform. We had been rehearsing so much, and I was so excited about our final performance. Be that as it may, my past experiences with things not working out resonated with me. I tried to not think negatively, and view it as my past traumas currently affecting my perception. The worry, and slight sadness gnawed at me, not allowing me to fully enjoy the moments leading up to our big day. I encouraged myself saying that I was only causing my own suffering. In total, six people were left off the list. I felt foolish for trying to convince myself that things were going to work out. I was still in prison, after all. It was nothing intentional, just an oversight. I kept catching myself thinking "well, this is me. This is my life in prison.". Even when it's accidental things that don't go my way, I responded by remembering that this moment, and these feelings were not me. That I shouldn't identify with them and judge myself. My friends helped me feel better. We gathered in support of each other. We were eventually cleared to go and everything worked out great. That was what I had fought so hard to convince myself about. I was pessimistic and proved wrong, which is always a good thing. Granted, everything got off to a rough start, but I knew that even when things don't go perfect, they still work out. Especially when I'm surrounded by supportive friends.

Working with emotions, Risala Rose-Aminifu

I believe character is built upon how one chooses to interpret or handle adversities.

Releasing negativity by Samuel Nathaniel Brown

I was denied parole and that experience made me feel a plethora of emotions. I felt angry, sad, anxious, hurt, hate, grief, loneliness, embarrassment, envious, and depression. However, I did not allow any of these emotions to actually set all the way in. It is similar to the "catch and release" practice of fishing. I knew that these emotions were present and I allowed myself to acknowledge them and feel them, but I did not allow myself to wallow in them or allow them to seize control of my mind and negatively dictate my actions. I acknowledged them and channeled them into constructive outlets.

Stress relief and emotional release, by Derric Burbie

My views on when it is "normal" for a woman to cry, and when it is "normal" for a man to cry come from my view of people as a whole. I believe that people as a whole need to be able to express their emotions, so I do not find a difference in the appropriateness of either gender to cry. I, personally do not think there should be a difference between the genders regarding when it is "normal" to cry, because crying comes from emotions that are strong enough to produce a visceral effect in the form of tears. Having someone refrain from expressing an intense emotion (such as crying) creates stress within the person's body due to the emotion not being released. For some people, crying is cathartic, so for people who refrain from expressing their emotions and let things build up, like a volcano, the built-up stress erupts when released and the emotion is usually expressed in a negative manner. In America, men are usually taught to not express emotions, and hear slogans such as; "boys don't cry", or "real men don't shed tears". These teachings

lead boys to grow up repressing their feelings, and boys do not learn conducive ways to express intense emotions. Therefore, boys in America grow up without learning the benefit of shedding tears, and instead learn how to express emotions such as frustration, through aggression, and hostility. In America, these conflicting socializations lead to boys who grow into men that do not fully know how to express their emotions, and lead to girls who grow into women who do not understand the defect within men in regards to knowing how to accurately express intense emotions. Tears result from both pain and happiness, and both genders feel both emotions and should express the emotions without judgment, or scrutiny.

Being Reasonable about Unreasonable Decisions, by Justin Hong

More recently, I was denied release at my parole hearing. As I sat in the board hearing room, head down, listening to the commissioners read their decision, I felt overwhelmed with emotions. I was nervous, excited, and in an odd balance of pleasant and unpleasant feelings. However, when they read that they believed that I still posed an unreasonable risk to society, it felt like my whole world was collapsing around me. Everything I had hoped to do, being with my family, finally being free after 12 years, had suddenly come to a heart-wrenching halt. Grief and sadness hit me like a Mack truck. As I thoughts about my family and the devastation they would feel. The thought of being away from them for another two years (possibly more), I felt helpless and in utter shock. I remember the first few nights after the denial, I would wake up in the middle of the night crying. It was like my body was grieving before my mind could finally process what had happened. It was the strangest experience.

The day after my denial, I also felt shame and embarrassment, feeling like I let down a lot of people. I felt like a failure. Intellectually, I know this isn't true, however, it was still hard not to feel that way. There were also moments of frustration and anger; feeling like the decision was not fair in the sense that I know in my heart of hearts that I am not the person I once was. However, I also

understand their concerns and despite that decision, I have decided that their denial was a judgment of who I was rather than who I am today. The most encouraging and uplifting part of this whole experience was the support and role the people in my life played during this hardship. My mentors, friends, and family were very affirming and helped me find peace and strength in my circumstances. While I still fight bouts of sadness from time to time, there are many more moments of happiness and love that I experience through the moments I share with the people around me.

Listening:
Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Listening

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students talk about the skill of listening, the value it brings to their lives, and the relevance within their daily interactions. Some of the terms and concepts they utilize in their writings are: listening techniques (Pseudo, selective, and active,), listening styles (content centered, action centered, time centered, and people centered)

Message received, by Arthur Andrade

If I share personal information with a family member and they happen to forget, it can be inconvenient because we have limited time to communicate; however, we must understand that society, outside of prison is information overload. It is important we create a more cohesive dynamic with our family members to reduce messages to be lost and applied more efficiently. Sometimes, we have to relay messages to other family through family members—yes, this sounds complicated! If the receiver forgets, the initial family member (i.e. my sis) forgets, my Aunt does not receive the message. Keep in mind letters take about a week to arrive and Global Tel Link is a landline that we only get twice a day—for 15 minutes! This has to be expedited with tactical personalization, again it is honest and expressed, as opposed to not express.
It is important to make family members feel equally appreciated, to further reinforce the connection, so they can understand the urgency, personalizing is important. They are attending, interpreting, but remembering needs a thorough incentive. To reciprocate the dialogue. It is important to reciprocate the effort or as a previous chapter referenced the cooperative principle. They, in this example, family, evaluate the authenticity of your reciprocated interest. This will achieve a better channel of communication, strengthen your relationship and help communicate messages more effectively.

Dad says listening is a sign of respect, by Risala Rose-Aminifu

I have learned and inherited a great deal of knowledge from my father. One of the best qualities that I have learned from him was to be an active listener. He would demand that I look directly in his eyes when I spoke to him. This was to show respect for him, and a way for him to pay attention to me as I spoke to him. It is imperative that we all listen intently when someone is talking about a subject. This can be done by eliminating any physical impediments to listening or ask questions if the speaker says something you 're not familiar with. Doing these will make a good listener. Most of my college professors are also good listeners. They have to be because they need to assess whether or not the student is grasping the curriculum. If one is not a good listener, this could prove to be disastrous. You could miss out on something that could potentially save your life, or the lives of others around you.

Active listening requires asking questions, by Dara Yin

In class I do not ask questions. When I am having a conversation with my peers, I do ask questions. As a college student, I am just gaining the confidence in my intellect. When it comes to asking questions in class, or more specifically in front of the class, I am embarrassed because I do not want to sound stupid. I do not mind going up to the professor after class and asking him/her to clarify something for me. I guess it is more my ego than anything. When I am talking with people in a conversation, I am able to ask questions. I feel it is more intimate, but honestly the more people in the conversation I again fall back out of the conversation from my fear of asking bad questions. Looking back in my life, I have had numerous fights behind asking a teacher a question in class and having another student mock me, or even later on in life when I would ask a question and get clowned by peers because it was such a dumb question. Through the text I read about active listening, I have used this skill in many conversations since I

learned about it through a coaching seminar. Appropriate and well-timed questions give off a great impression to the person that you are speaking with and says that you are paying attention. I really like the skill, instead of figuring out what to say next, hear out my partner completely.

Developing & Ending Relationships: Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Developing & Ending Relationships

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students openly write about the difficulties and beauty of relationships. Living behind bars creates continuous moments of relationship communication; whether with allies, strangers, or loved ones. This chapter within this journal explores the following terms and concepts: Norms of reciprocity, self-disclosure, relationship testing (secret test), and uncertainty reduction.

Communication norms: nourishing reciprocity, by Bertho Gauthier

I become anxious when I engage in a conversation that does not follow the rule of reciprocity. It makes me feel like either I offended my communication partner, or that more is expected of me in the interaction. I find myself trying to repair the damage I may have made, or retreat from the conversation. I can remember times in my younger days when I would make an unsuccessful attempt to make friends with a female. I would use an attention getter, then try to utilize the norm of reciprocity to nourish a meaningful conversation. Nevertheless, when the timed appeared right! I would take a risk during our interaction in order to show my interest in something more than just casual talk. By not matching my disclosure, my communication partner was signaling that she was not interested in pursuing a friendship. In some cases, I have tried to back track in order to preserve the interaction I had formed. However, communication is irreversible. On the other hand, I feel the need to gracefully walk away from an interaction when my communication partner discloses, or solicits disclosures that I am not comfortable sharing. For example, I get defensive when conversations are too invasive. Inappropriate statements made during an interaction can make me feel uncomfortable with

continuing a conversation as well. These norms of reciprocity violations destroy the life of a dialogue and can be precursors to the termination of a relationship. I recommend using social media or other online applications if one wants to experiment with the norms of reciprocity. Social media channels usually have personal information, such as relationship status, posted so that communication partners can explore other inquiries that would be more difficult face-to-face. Lastly, norms of reciprocity violations are tolerable online making the probability of damage repair high. Interpersonal communication is a skill. Like any other skill, it can be perfected through practice. Practice involves making mistakes from time to time.

From letters to visits in prison: A past relationship becomes present again, by Thaisan Nguon

In the Winter of 2016, I was surprised by a letter that I received from a person that I have not heard from in eight years. We used to be an item when we were fourteen years old and when we broke up, we remained good friends. After receiving her initial letter, it was not long until we started to feel those old familiar feelings of love, we once shared for one another. The friendship that we maintained so long ago after our break up was blossoming into a new love. The correspondence that we frequently shared through letter writing was a big factor that contributed to the change in our relationship. I discovered so much about her and craved to know more. Every letter she wrote me gave me better insight to who she was as a woman. There is something to be said about the intimacy of letter writing. It allows us all to shed our armor and present our true self. And with her, I loved discovering who she truly was. Another event, or contributing factor if you will, that helped elevate our relationship was our phone calls. Speaking to a person on the phone is a very big deal for an incarcerated person. I appreciate that event so much more now because it has been so limited to me throughout my incarceration. For incarcerated people, we are limited to phone calls that last for fifteen-minute intervals. In order to use the phone, we must sign up for a specific

time and depending on whether you have a prison job assignment or not, you are either allowed to use the phone once a day or once a month. For the first four years of my sentence, I did not have a prison job assignment, so I was restricted to only one phone call a month. That is why I am so appreciative of my fifteen-minute phone calls now. The previous contributing factor to deepen and strengthen our relationship is our visitation. Receiving visits from her adds a level of realness that only an intimate, physical touch can qualify. Hugging her, kissing her, and holding her hand feels like reading a thousand of her letters and talking a thousand minutes on the phone with her…altogether. Needless to say, I am quite enamored by her. I look forward to many more events that will allow our relationship to grow and strengthen.

Terminating a relationship can be healthy, by Larry L. Torres

About six months ago I terminated a relationship with a woman that I have known for about sixteen years. It had been almost thirteen years since we had communicated. We dated briefly before my incarceration, and afterwards we became good friends for a couple of years. We eventually went our separate ways. That was until last year when she contacted me wishing to be friends again, and perhaps rekindle our old romance. The problem was more than me not really having feelings for anything beyond friendship, she is also married. She is in an abusive relationship, and I felt empathy for her. In an effort to offer her support I told her that we could be friends. From the beginning, I was not comfortable that she wanted to hide our friendship from her husband. I also know him; he is an old acquaintance but because I knew her situation, I went along with it. I really invested myself in showing her support and trying to be a good friend. After a while though, it seemed like I was doing more harm than good. She kept expressing how she wanted more, and I started to feel like we weren't really communicating anymore. Any sort of intimate relationship with her was impossible, not just because I see her only as a friend but also because of external circumstances. She is married and I am in prison. It was not easy to terminate the relationship; I began by

expressing to her how I felt about the way she treated me, and that I wasn't comfortable hiding our communication. That I felt it was unethical, and contrary to my new way of life. I was also putting her at risk by being in contact with her. In the end, I did what I felt was best for me. I tried to manage any future threats by being as kind as possible. I let her know that I appreciate her as a friend. I told her how I'll always be grateful that she went out of her way to help my family locate my son, and that she has been one of the nicest, most caring people I know. I really do hope that she'll find peace and happiness. I just don't feel that it will be with me, which is why I terminated the relationship.

Testing, testing...relationships: secret test revealed, by Dara Yin

Someone testing me to see how involved I was in that relationship is called "secret tests". By definition it is covert actions designed to reveal information about a partner's involvement in a relationship. I Would be disappointed that the person would not trust in my credibility. It would make me feel as if the other person testing me was insecure and that they had trust issues in the past. I would not necessarily stop being in the relationship with them but I would definitely have a long conversation with them. This conversation would be about giving me the benefit of the doubt, trusting me, and what is it that I could do to make them feel more secure without me feeling weird about it. The three doubts a person can have about a relationship are self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty. Self-uncertainty is the questioning of your own involvement in a relationship. Partner uncertainty is doubts that your partner may have about the relationship. Finally, relationship uncertainty is your doubt about the nature of the relationship itself. I think that we all have gone through these doubts in our lives at a time or two. Trying to figure out should we stay in a relationship because of unhealthy reasons such as gang membership that requires you to risk your life all of the time or if your partner is not certain and you may feel that tension from them.

All it takes to help is to listen, by Justin Hong

Being a part of the Progressive Programming Facility, where self-help groups abound and diving into past experiences is the norm, I know many people who typically respond to my news or problems by talking about their own. While this can be helpful at times, making me feel understood and not alone, it can also become a problem when the other person begins to monopolize on the conversation. In that moment, instead of them sharing their past experience, I much rather would have wanted someone to just listen, be compassionate, and empathize through their past experiences without disclosing them to me. Sharing our stories with one another can be a powerful tool in developing empathy and community with those around us. Especially in an environment where private and vulnerable moments in our lives are usually hidden behind a hardened veneer. However, there is a line to be toed and trying to help someone by sharing your own experiences can become more about yourself rather than the person you are trying to help.

Intimacy:
Reflections on Interpersonal Communication and Intimacy

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students generously shared vulnerable stories of past romantic relationships, covering different styles of love. Expressing emotions in a healthy way while incarcerated, can be a daunting task. Students open up about their thoughts, feelings, and lives using the following terms and concepts to express themselves: infidelity (emotional and sexual), relational maintenance, attachment styles, trauma (emotional, mental, and physical), and the different styles of love.

Prison changed my love story by Justin Hong

I was once in a relationship with a beautiful woman named Jane. When we first began seeing each other, we immediately developed a closeness and our lives seemed to merge seamlessly. My activities became "our" activities, and her interests suddenly became my own. As we shared vulnerable moments of our past, we created new intimate moments of our own, and our future seemed to be one of mutuality and oneness. However, things changed when I became incarcerated. In the most desperate and vulnerable moment in my life, I entrusted her with my feelings and hoped that our relationship would endure. Through this adversity, we initially got closer and a stronger confidence was built in our relationship. However, as the months went by, I could feel a distance wedge between our affection that would soon become an ocean apart. As the visits dwindled and our conversations became more small talk than in depth, I felt myself closing off and protecting myself from impending hurt. When Jane finally told me that she was leaving me, not only my trust but my heart shattered into what felt like tiny shards of shrapnel digging into my chest. There was no more intimacy, closeness, affection, openness, or mutuality. What was once a "oneness," we became strangers seemingly overnight. It was one of the most painful heartbreaks

that I have ever experienced. While this is an incredibly painful memory where my trust in her was completely broken and as much as I blamed her in the beginning, I do want to say that she was not at fault. It was I who broke her trust in being incarcerated. She trusted me to be there for her and in her life and because of my decisions, I was the one who broke that connection. We no longer have a relationship and I haven't spoken to her in years; however, I do credit her with teaching me so much about love and what intimacy really is. Not the physical closeness two romantic partners share, but the spiritual and emotional closeness one can share hundreds of miles apart.

Negotiating intimacy inside prison with outside lovers, by Bertho Gauthier

I have been in love a few times. My most recent experience was with my wife after a turbulent year in 2014. Due to my incarceration, she was seeing someone else and it caused me a bit of emotional and mental trauma. When the smoke cleared, I found a new appreciation for my wife, with my pride destroyed I was humbled. I found myself infatuated with her, in what Hendrick and Hendrick would call a state of mania. My emotions were dominated by the type of phone call we had; if the phone call was good, I would be elated. However, if the phone call was bad or uneventful, I would feel depressed. Based on Hendrick and Hendrick's love style model, my wife's love style was in a state of storge. Storge does not do justice to the way my wife treated me during this time. Specifically, she would let down her friend wall on very rare occasions, which gave me hope, but broke my heart every time the friend wall was up. After a few years of this emotional roller coaster that my wife took me on, I eventually formed a defense mechanism by maintaining a low expectation of any form of affection. Our newfound understanding lasted until California changed a few key laws in the department of corrections, which allowed me to have 48-hour, overnight visits with my wife and son.

Love's many forms, by Dara Yin

I have been in love. In different types of relationships, covering intimacy with a girlfriend and being in love with the gang. The relationship with my girlfriend involved three different types of love. At times it was Eros love where it was just about beauty and sexuality. Then there were times where I felt Agape love, where the love I gave and received was compassionate and selfless. Finally, there was Storge love, where it was grounded in friendship and peaceful. These different love styles were interspersed throughout our relationship. Sometimes they were misleading such as when it was Storage love style coming from my companion and I misconstrued it as Agape love style. This sent the wrong messages to my brain and heart and led me to trying to return that love where she was just being nice. This made it awkward for her and also making her distant. Not being on the same page and love style all of the time made it a very rocky relationship. Being in love with the gang was the Ludus love. This was entertaining and exciting. The whole hierarchy and the games that were being played made it interesting and gave me self-worth in a negative way, it is spot on that the Ludus love is found to have the least satisfaction in relationships. can also relate it to Mania love which is dramatic, involving elation, and depression. The times where a friend died and how it became climatic from depression to drama on how we were going to respond.

Communication in Families: Reflections on Interpersonal Communication in Families

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students discuss cultural practices they learned through their families and social interactions. They shared stories of non-traditional family settings and the meaningful roles family members play in their identities. Discussing families can be a difficult task no matter where we are in our lives, but for prisoners it can be especially difficult because families are some of their only lifelines to freedom. Some of the terms and concepts discussed here are: Systems (sub, enmeshed, and disengaged), collectivism, and cultural identities.

We can't choose our relatives, but we can sure as hell choose who our family is, by Jeff Ayers

According to the textbook, family is defined as "a network of people who create a sense of home, share a collective identity, experience a common history, and envision a similar future." This was the case for me, my mother, and my grandmother. My father didn't play much of a role in my life after my parents divorced and my stepfather was as absent as my biological father was, so I grew up without much in the way of a male role model. I thought this was strange, being raised by my mother and grandmother without a father figure in the picture, until I started school. It was then that I learned my circumstances were by no means unique, that other kids also lacked one parent and had either grandparents or other family members fill in the missing role. Some of them even had two moms or two dads. I didn't learn the implications of what that meant until I entered junior high. Growing up without much in the way of contact with or even interest from my siblings meant I formed my own familial bonds with close friends. One example is my best friend from high school. We've been friends for 30 years and I consider her more of a sister to me than my two sisters related to me by blood are. Another example is my celly, we've known each other for 11 years and spent the last 10 of them living

together. At some point we stopped viewing each other as cellies or friends and more like the brothers we are. Forming familial bonds with those who aren't related to us is known as fictive or voluntary kin. I dislike this term because to me, it denigrates the relationship we have with our chosen family members. Remember the old saying about how we can choose our friends but not our relatives? I take it a step further and say we can choose our friends, we can't choose our relatives, but we can sure as hell choose who our family is. After all, isn't family "a network of people who create a sense of home, share a collective identity, experience a common history, and envision a similar future?" Why should that be limited to just people we're related to? Who's to say friends can't and don't forge bonds just as strong as those that connect people bound by blood? Because at the end of the day, isn't that what family's all about? Having that connection? I think it is.

The power of role-modeling, by Bertho Gauthier

My first teaching of culture came from the initial structure of family I was cognizant of. This family consisted of my grandma, uncle, mother, older brother, and two older sisters. From these family members I picked up my sense of culture and subsequent cultural practices including loving Jesus Christ, listening to hip hop and R&B music, as well as abusing controlled substances. As I reflect on the three cultural practices listed above, I can see how I picked up these behaviors. Ever since I could remember I've been with Jesus Christ. This is likely due to my family members accepting Him as a member of our household. I cannot think of one event in my life where He was not present. Practices such as family prayer sessions, church, and baptism only strengthen my relationship with Christ. Like my older sister's and probably my brother, I am a huge fan of hip-hop and R&B. If given the choice between music and television, I will always choose the former. Even to this day I don't engage in math-studio time without music in the background. Music is a cultural practice that gives me an escape regardless of where I am at.

This feature has come in handy while incarcerated. Conversely, one cultural practice my family taught me that could have been omitted for my own good is substance abuse. Drugs and alcohol were included in every family celebration. Additionally, I noticed that my family members appeared to be in a better mood while under the influence. By me making these positive associations, substance abuse became a key element of my adulthood which helped lead to my incarceration. In the end, initial family members can make considerable impressions on us. If you happen to be an initial family member of a child, be aware that he or she is watching you and possibly picking up habits that will alter his or her life whether good or bad.

Family views, viewed by me, by Andrew Kicking Horse McCarter

Although I, like everyone else, had a mom and dad, my parents divorced when I was very young and my memories of them are scattered in the recesses of my mind. I have memories of them both, but not a lot together and those are of the violent nature with the two going at it. My father crossed over into the spirit world when I was 8 years old and we moved from the rez to the great state of Texas. It was mom, my brother, sister, and I against the world it seemed until another entered into our world... the bottle! Mom became disillusioned with life, became an alcoholic, and soon was dragging different men into our home that she would meet in 'honk-tonks' and 'beer joints'. I would go with her to these establishments, to protect her and shoot pool. Soon, I became very proficient at the game, and was hustling these drunken specimens of men out of their hard-earned money. This was back in the 60's and it was not unheard of me pulling in a couple of hundred bucks on a good weekend. That was good money in those days. Then you marry into the picture that I was an Indian, growing up in East Texas in a good ole boy environment, being poor, and having a chip on my shoulder from the embarrassment about our family's economic status and you have a kid fighting almost daily, trying to save face in a world

that looked down upon him. Sissy was mature beyond her age so that was another factor with me having to protect her honor when the boys would jeer at her or make comments about her overdevelopment. Therefore, when you add up all of these impediments, my view of what a family looked like was far different than most. In fact, the only view I had which influenced my definition of family was what I saw on TV like 'Father Knows Best' or 'Leave It to Beaver' or 'The Donna Reed Show'. To me, this was what a family was supposed to look like, not some snot-nosed kid hanging out with his only parent in a beer joint or fighting after school at the monkey bars. Despite the hardships I endured as a kid growing up in East Texas, I feel today is even more of a hardship on children growing up in a world of technology, weirdos, and a fast-moving society at large. In fact, it is downright scary to me seeing the world as I see it today. I cannot even imagine the view a one-parent family has on being a family today, so maybe in my unnatural upbringing, I did not have it that bad. But then again, I am a convicted murderer.

Collectivism keeps us connected, by Ninh Nguyen

In Vietnam, there are three distinct regions: Northern, Central, and Southern. In addition to the national culture, the people of each region have developed their own accent and unique practices over the many centuries. Northern Vietnamese known to be formal reserved, and etiquette oriented. Central Vietnamese is very regal and reserved. Moreover, Southern Vietnamese is informal, relax, and friendly. I was born in Southern Vietnam, but my parents were born in Northern Vietnam. As a result, some of the culture practices I learned from my family were slightly different from my friends. Growing up I knew very early in my life that I was different from the people in the area because I was teased for being a Northerner. Although everyone spoke Vietnamese, my parents' accent was different and they were proud to identify themselves as Northerner. I, on the other hand, not so much. At that time, I did not share their view because of all the teasing I received from the other kids. As an adult, I have changed my view. Now, I am proud

to identify my northern root. I have learned many culture practices from my family. One of the first thing I learned as a kid was to be polite and courteous to everyone, especially to all my elders because if I did not it was a direct reflection of my parents for not teaching me manner. Therefore, the very first concept I learned as a child was collectivism. Another thing I learned from my family was reverence for ancestors. As long as I can remember, there has always been an altar for my deceased great grandmother, grandfather, and later on my grandmother. On that altar, there are always fresh fruits and flowers. In addition, my mother or someone would light an incense on that altar every day. And on the anniversary of their deaths, the family and some closed relatives would get together and hold a feast in their memories. Another culture practice I like in my family is the preparation for the Lunar New Year or Tet. Every year my family starts to thoroughly clean the house, decorates the house with fresh flowers, and my mom makes the traditional "banh trung" cake a couple of weeks before the first day of "Tet". These culture practices are just some of the things I have learned from my family.

Preserving family traditions, by Thaisan Nguon

My family and I migrated to America from Cambodia. There were many customs that my parents imparted on us to preserve our heritage and culture. The first thing that comes to mind is the Khmer language. My mother and father primarily spoke Khmer to us in the household. You would think that that would make me a fluent Khmer speaker but I am not. A big part of the Khmer culture is Buddhism. We often went to the Buddhist temple to pray and pay homage. We always went to temple with food. The food was used in part to pay homage to the spirits of our ancestors and to provide as offerings to the monks who were praying for our salvation. We had many artifacts related to Buddha in the house. And once a month my mother would have us all burn incense in front of a statue of Buddha and place it in a little bowl full of rice grains that help keep the incense upright as it burned. There was always a big spread of food in front of the statue of Buddha and

once all the incense burned out, we ate the food. Another cultural practice we all learned was to "sompeah". The act of "sompeahing" requires you to put your palms together flatly, place them in front of your nose, and slightly bow. This cultural performance was absolutely required of us whenever we met someone new, especially if they were our elders. This act is a traditional Khmer practice that communicates reverence to the person receiving it.

Conflicting parenting styles, by Derric Burbie

I grew up living with both of my parents, and that experience influenced my view of “family", and of interactions within "family" structures in a variety of ways. I am an only child, so my immediate family consisted of me, and my parents, and my family setting consisted of us living together in the same household. Although we lived together, my Mom and dad had differing parenting styles. My dad believed in conformity orientation, so he didn't tolerate any actions that did not match his personal views. My dad grew up in a single head of the household, protective family unit headed by my Grandmother (his Mom). Growing up in a protective family probably affected his parenting style, and the transmission of parenting style continued through him based upon his family socialization. Although my Mom also grew up in a protective family, she believed in conversation orientation, and her parenting style was vastly different from my dad's. I don't know if my Mom's parenting style was different because of her gender, her occupation as a teacher, or because she grew up with both of her parents living together in the same household, but she believed in conversation orientation, and liked to converse about issues that arose.

Going against the rules to keep my family close, by Dara Yin

Growing up I would say that I belonged to the disengaged system. There was not much information shared to me growing up. I did not know about any family history except for the fact that my family came from Cambodia during the genocide. My

family was never affectionate, the first time I heard my mother say I love you was in a prison visiting room. I didn't even know how to shower properly until I was a teenager or even clean myself after using the bathroom. I did not communicate at all about my feelings to my family. I never told them about how I felt about my dad not being there or how when my dad came to see me for an hour and I never saw him again made me feel. After I was incarcerated, I found myself in an enmeshed system. Enmeshed systems are families that prioritize closeness among members rather than rigid boundaries. This did not happen until I was able to get a hold of a cell phone years ago. Here I was able to call when 1 wanted for as long as I wanted. I was able to speak to them more often and listen to them about what is going on in their lives. Even though I was breaking the rules to speak to them, that was how enmeshed I was about connecting with them. They did not want me to get in trouble but they also enjoyed speaking to me more often.

Cultural Unity: African values and practices, by Risala Rose-Aminifu

Growing up, my family was cultural nationalist who were instrumental in the 1960's civil rights era. They were also founding members of "US ORGANIZATION", founded by Dr. Maulana Karanga. The children were given African or Swahili names that had meanings, and we also spoke Kiswahili in our household and schools. We learned to value every human being, our community and our family. We learned to be one with the environment and care for the planet that we currently inhabit. My family taught us kids these things by constantly instilling in us these core values. We did not celebrate Christmas, but instead celebrated Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is a seven-day holiday that starts on December 26 and ends on January 1. It encompasses the values of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, creativity, cooperative economics, and faith. These are collectively known as the Nguzo Saba. With these principles, I have learned to navigate life's rough seas, and

remain afloat. These cultural practices have made me the person I am today, and given me great strength and fortitude to accomplish anything and everything that I want. I feel blessed to have been raised by caring and loving family members who have set my moral compass very high. However, I have made a costly mistake as a child and came to prison, my past will not define my future. I will be a productive member soon.

Interpersonal Conflict:

Reflections on Interpersonal Conflict

Editors' note: In this Chapter, students identify their learned insights into conflict styles, causative factors into learned behaviors, and coping mechanisms to alleviate tensions. Students demonstrate some of their knowledge with interpersonal conflict and conflict styles using terms such as: deductive reasoning, interaction, disagreement, dominating, avoiding, and obliging styles.

Finding Common Ground, by Derric Burbie

The textbook notes three components of conflict (*disagreement, interference,* and *negative emotion),* and based upon my experiences with conflict, I think *disagreement* is the most important component because without disagreement, there is no conflict. Once people who are engaged in a conflict figure out how to eliminate their disagreements, the conflict becomes over, and people can work together on resolving the conflict. My thoughts usually focus on resolving the conflict once conflict begins, so my conflict goals usually deal with finding common ground to figure out how to come up with a mutually agreeable solution. However, depending on my conflict goals, and whom I am involved in a conflict with, I vary my conflict strategy. For me, conflict resolution depends upon who I am engaged in a conflict with. Sometimes, I choose to resolve the conflict amicably, and sometimes I do not, but the basis of my decision depends upon the person, and not the conflict itself because for me, relational goals are the most important in deciding which conflict strategy, and which conflict style to utilize. Usually my conflict strategy entails use of integrative conflict strategies, and my conflict style usually incorporates either an integrating, or a compromising style to resolve the conflict with a mutually satisfying solution. However, sometimes I am involved in a conflict with someone whom I dislike, and where there is a pervasive tension so I use a

distributive conflict strategy, coupled with a dominating conflict style. When conflict occurs with someone I care about, I at times will use an obliging conflict style, or an avoiding conflict style to prevent a hostile episode from occurring.

Finding common ground on prison grounds, by Deon Whitmore

Being in prison, conflict and arguments becomes something of a norm. It is inevitable with so many different personalities crammed into the same physical space. Arguments are seen in everyday functions around this place beginning in the morning within a cell on the proper routine for washing up; then during breakfast where there is always something wrong in the kitchen and everyone is in a rush to eat and most of the time there is not enough food. Then in the recreation yard there are endless arguments from basketball, football, dominoes, cards, handball, and anything else that involves competition. Disagreeable communication tends to happen in close-knit groups in prison; otherwise there would hardly be any communication. So that is a good thing. However, this can easily lead to violence, so you have to be careful who you end up in this kind of situation with. There is nothing worse in prison than a prideful man who can't accept that he is wrong. Contradicting language and behavior are far too often seen but rarely spoken about. Insults and yelling in conversation are fighting words, so pick and choose your battles wisely around here. Most of the time it is not worth it, so try to avoid these situations. Hostile episodes are common, but in prison everything revolves around respect. So, if you find yourself around someone you have negative feelings or resentment toward, it is best to avoid them. My heart has become callous over the years, and I tend to hold grudges so I can walk by someone I know without speaking a word, as if I never knew them. Pervasive tension is hard to avoid, being that we are forced into the same environment we have no choice but to try and communicate in order to find some type of common ground. I deal with these types of conflict on a regular basis. Welcome to my reality.

Negotiating learning outcomes through demand and withdrawal interaction, by Bertho Gauthier

I have experienced a demand/withdrawal interaction with a student in my class. According to the text, demand/withdrawal is when one partner demands something from the other, and in response, the partner withdraws from the conversation by not answering or paying attention. The demand may had been for a change in behavior, agreement with a position, or even just attention during the discussion. In my case, the student was frustrated with a math problem he was not comprehending. I always urge my students to redo everything we learn in class when they get back to their cell or they will not retain it. I also have a high expectation that they study because I like to transition to the next lesson almost weekly. This particular student can get concepts in class, but forgets them by the time he returns due to the lack of study. Therefore, when I transitioned to the next lesson, he struggled with the examples I gave because he forgot the foundations. The student became frustrated and mentally withdrew from the class by focusing on other things as well as attempting to get his peers off task. A few times I had to give him a nonverbal message to try and get him back focused. In the end, demand/withdrawal interactions are unbeneficial for both parties. In this instance, he could not elevate to the next concept, while I had to struggle to keep the rest of the class focused.

The art of understanding conflict, by Thaisan Nguon

A few behaviors that would violate my rules about how people should behave during a conflict is name-calling, physical violence, and being unresponsive. When a person starts calling me names, I interpret that to be a sign that the person lacks respect for me as a communication partner. It also tells me that their argument does not have any standing because calling me names is just a ploy to distract me from the real issue. Whatever their motivation is for name calling, it should not excuse the behavior and I would promptly end the conversation.

Physical violence is a definite rules violation in conflict engagement with me. In the past, I often resorted to physical violence when dealing with certain conflicts and justified my behavior as simply part of the cultural norm for boys to be this way with each other. I know better to believe in this false notion now, so I absolutely reject any act of physical violence when dealing with conflict. There are so many other options to exercise that are non-violent, and I choose to explore those routes only. Finally, when a person is unresponsive to me during a conflict it tells me that they are shut down. The ability to carry on communications is critical to progressing the conflict towards an amicable solution. For me, I do not like to leave a situation without some sort of understanding or reconciliation because I feel that a conflict that is left unresolved will morph into something bigger. I see an unresponsive person to be someone I do not need to continue speaking with until they are ready to fully engage in a conversation to work through a conflict.

Finding resolution through mutual compromise, by Lindsey

As a youth naively, I believed that all is fair in war, and I equated conflict as war. However, I no longer believe that to be the case, since I am older and mature. Management of conflict requires proper handling and non-harmful resolution should be the goal. My conflict strategy is an integrative conflict strategy, in which I seek to come to a mutually satisfying solution, if possible. This is my relational goal if the conflict involves someone to whom I communicate with regularly and wish to maintain an open line of communication. Specific behaviors that would violate my rules about conflict is blatant disrespect. The notion that one person is superior, and the other is inferior, is violation number one. Mutual respect is the best way to handle disagreements and conflict. Another rule is, never use condescending language that attacks another person's character, or human value. Respect is a two-way street and both persons in a conflict have the right to be treated as a valued person, despite their different views and opinions. Physical assault, aggressive touching, pushing, or hitting is a rule that

should not be tolerated in any conflict situation. The mere audacity of one person physically accosting another because of a disagreement, interference, or emotions is unacceptable. Everyone has the right to feel safe from physical harm during a conflict. Interpersonal conflict should not escalate to physical combat. My personal rules are what I live by and utilize in my interpersonal communication and interpersonal conflict resolutions.in People communicate differently and have various styles of conflict management. Two people involved in a conflict must have compatible styles of conflict management. Incompatible styles will result in one being dominant and the other submissive. Two aggressive styles will likely end in a physical altercation, or non-resolution of the disagreement. To effectively handle interpersonal conflict, one must be compromising and not exert punitive power or dependence power.

Learning new conflict styles, even when they conflict with my personality, by Ninh Nguyen

Up until about 10 years ago, I knew only two ways to resolve a conflict and that was either competing or avoiding. If I cannot win, then I avoid until I can win. I more or less managed all of my conflicts with these two styles at that time. Ever since I learned about other conflict styles like integrating, obliging, and compromising, I believe I have managed my conflict better.
For me, the hardest conflict style to learn is obliging because of my personality. I am competitive by nature and I do not like to lose. Sometimes in my zeal to win at all costs, I forget to consider about other people's emotions and the relationship I have with them. I have ruined and destroyed so many relationships with family members and friends alike because I cannot oblige in a conflict. Another problem I have, is that I like to resolve problems as they arise instead of downplay them because they could build up over time, cause more resentment, and hurt later on.

The first step is awareness…, by Gustavo Tamayo

I can remember how my negative emotions would arise in certain situations with my high school sweetheart. The anger, hostility, and jealousy I would feel caused me to react in a negative and usually violent manner. I turned that anger into a malicious manner by taking it out on the hostile relationships I had with my gang. I was a street soldier at all times. So those negative emotions were a constant and consistent feeling I was accustomed to. I am not proud of it yet I'm aware and realize the importance of the component of conflict that negative emotions played in my life.

Reflections on Interpersonal Communication Comfort and Support

Editors' note: In this Chapter, with an empathetic voice, students talked about their own methods of providing comfort and support. They delved deep into their personal understating of the differences between genders norms of offering emotional comfort, and the importance of having external support. Terms and concepts used in this chapter are: Person-centered, support (emotional, tangible, esteem, and network), empathy, cognitive complexity, and perspective taking.

Finding emotional support in my sister, by Larry L Torres

When I need support, I typically turn to my younger sister Mabel. In recent years she and I have become real close siblings, and we are good friends as well. There are a lot of characteristics that make her reliable. She never puts herself first, she does not minimize or maximize, nor does she offer cold comfort. The support she gives is very person centered. Our common history also helps because she understands my life in ways most people don't; She knows me very well. When I am sharing with her, she focuses on my feelings, she helps clarify what I am saying, and tries to see things from my point of view. It probably also helps that she is a female, since it is believed that females are better at giving comfort. We also share a sense of trust. I think this also increases her reliability. She also trusts me to support her which gives our relationship a sense of balance. It probably wouldn't be as easy for me to confide in her if it felt like a one-sided thing. The equality makes her reliable because it shows that she respects me enough to confide in me. I believe that lack of balance would undermine the reliability of her support. It makes it easy for me to turn to her for the emotional support I would otherwise have a difficult time finding. It has taken years to establish the sense of trust and history that we share. It is not easy finding someone who

can be emotionally supportive. This is what makes my sister such a reliable source of comfort.

Underlying emotions: Learning how to give comfort, by Ninh Nguyen

For most of my life, I do not know how to properly seek or express comfort and support. I believe that my lack of this important social skill was rooted in my childhood because I did not have proper modeling from my parents. Growing up in a Vietnamese family, I learned early on that we do not express our feelings so there was no opportunity to learn how to seek or give comfort and support. As I grew into my adolescence, I adopted the warped belief that seeking comfort and support were for wimp. So, I kept most of my feelings to myself, except for anger no matter what. More importantly, 1 do not know how to express comfort and support when someone shared their problems with me and I came across as uncaring and cold. Over times, people just stop sharing their problems with me. As I grew into adulthood, I began to notice the way I expressed my comfort and support just rub people who were in distress the wrong way, but did not know how to approach the problem properly. When comforting others, I tend to talk about the problem and to solve it. In doing that I use ineffective support messages like putting myself first, minimizing or maximizing, and cold comfort. Before reading this section of the chapter, I did not realize I was doing these things. I thought I was helping but in reality, I came off as a jerk. Another ineffective support message, I tend to use, is to distract from the problem which is insensitive. Now that I am aware of the proper ways to express comfort and support, I will strive to be more conscious of it when people share their problems with me. I will talk about the emotions that underlie the problem by empathizing with my partners and validate their feelings.

Person-focused comfort, by Derric Burbie

When comforting others, it is extremely important to use empathy and to take in consideration any other factors that may be at play,

such as the person's own comforting preference. I have found from experience that people usually comfort others in the fashion they are either accustomed to receiving comfort, or in the fashion they prefer to receive comfort, so taking a person's comforting style into account provides a glimpse into how the person likes to receive comfort. I believe when the person becomes the focus of the communication, the comfort will be received as long as the effort is genuine. Utilizing person-centeredness to construct both verbal support and nonverbal support messages shows a genuine concern for the person.

My sister gives me hope for the future after prison, by Thaisan Nguon

The person that I typically turn to when I am in need of love and support is my sister Samantha. And when I use the term "need", I do so liberally. Meaning, when I reach out to her, it is not because I "need" something from her (such as love and support). Rather, I reach out to her because I NEED to share something with her. The love and support that I receive from her is simply the awesome byproduct of the kind of relationship we have. Over the years, I have shared with her a range of things that have been happening in my life and she the same with me. She has seen me in many shapes and colors and always seem to have the right words to say through any situation. Whenever I would make her laugh out loud, she would always say to me, "Remember Bro, I'm gonna be your agent/manager when you come home. I'm gonna book you for some stand-up comedy work!" *Sigh* She always spoke with such hope about me coming home; even when my prison sentence dictated that I would likely die an old man in prison. She was my sounding board when I had a tough time negotiating love while being in prison. Having her impart the wisdom that she bears as a woman, more precisely, as an independently thinking woman, really helped me put a lot of things into perspective. And because of that, I know I am a better boyfriend for it. Among many other things, I am always comforted by her honesty, strength, humor, and love for dogs. The most recent thing I was able to share with

her was the commuted sentence that I received from Governor Brown. After explaining to her and her equally awesome husband Chris, the magnitude of my newly commuted sentence, we all rejoiced over the very real reality of me coming home. And as we celebrated this news as a family should, without skipping a beat Samantha says to me, "Cool! You can service train my dog when you get home Bro!" As I smiled, and laughed, and agreed to do so, I was ever so reminded by my own recollections of the conversations we shared that never once did she doubt I would find my way back home. And for that unshakeable faith, I will forever be grateful, I will train as many dogs as she wants for starters.

Selected Proposals for Social Science Research

Introduction by Dr. Nina O'Brien

Social scientific research requires curiosity, determination, grit, resilience, creativity and insight. Whatever the specific outcomes, research leads to new knowledge and insight about the world, as well as to new questions and new discoveries about ourselves. The research proposals shared here represent the dedicated efforts of three communication scholars to apply theory and the scientific method to questions about the interplay among race, education and incarceration. Drawing on formal instruction in communication theory and methods, as well as on their own experiences, insights and expert knowledge, these scholars develop new and nuanced ways to understand the carceral environment, and the role of communication and education in clarifying and humanizing the experiences of incarcerated people.

Williams' proposal, *Education in prison can decrease recidivism*, notes that while "studies show that education can serve to prevent incarceration, and in-custody education programs can drastically decrease recidivism for those who have suffered a prison stint, what is not readily known is how in-custody educational programs affect prisoners behavior while incarcerated." To address this gap, Williams weaves together theories of Expectancy and Motivation to better understand whether, and to what degree, opportunities for education in prison reduce verbal threats, conflict and physical violence.

Also investigating the ways communication shapes and challenges our understanding of race, **Walton's** proposal, *Interracial interactions in prison*, draws on the theoretical framework of Communication Expectancy to better understand conflict display in same-race communication among African-American prisoners. By exploring variations in verbal aggressiveness and nonverbal immediacy in same-race and

mixed-race interactions, Walton seeks to uncover key differences, and to specify the role that race plays in the communication and resolution of conflict.

In *Does Interethnic Communication Apprehension Cause Racism in Prison?: A Study of Prison Communication Behaviors*, **Gilmer** tackles the prevalence of race-based affiliation in prison, and asks "how can someone make this dramatic change from a person who may have made one mistake in life, into a person who would assimilate into a lifestyle full of hate and racist overtones, despite this individual's upbringing and values taught to him as a young man?" Using Communication Apprehension as a lens, Gilmer challenges our expectations, and suggests that attention to intercultural communication skills may provide alternative ways for incarcerated people to more safely and meaningfully develop relationships and navigate prison politics.

Creatively working through the ethical, practical and emotional challenges of conducting research in prison, these authors clearly demonstrate that incarcerated scholars are in a unique position to awaken our recognition of prisoners as vital, vibrant, productive and caring members of our communities, to contribute to our knowledge about the prison industrial system, and to promote the development of more a more just and decent world, both in prison and beyond its walls.

Nina F. O'Brien
Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Management

Education in prison can decrease recidivism

by Dortell Williams

The vast majority of prisoners incarcerated in California are under-educated (Bunnet, 2015, p. A9). Lack of education is a strong risk indicator for future imprisonment. To the contrary, a RAND report integrated a 2013 meta-analysis of more than 30 years of previous research, which concluded that "inmates who participated in correctional educational programs had 43 percent lower odds of returning to prison than inmates who did not" (Clarke, 2014, p. 34). Thus, studies show that education can serve to prevent incarceration, and in-custody education programs can drastically decrease recidivism for those who have suffered a prison stint. What is not readily known is how in-custody educational programs affect prisoner's behavior while incarcerated.

I believe the vast majority of the violence and aggression that occurs in California prisons is a result of poor communication between staff and inmates, and among prisoners themselves. Germane to this particular study are two communication theories: Expectancy theory, which according to Burgoon (cited from Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), assumes that an individual will be more likely to select a choice in which the expectations of that choice are likely to have a more favorable outcome than others. A motivational factor intersects with the individual's selection. Referred to as motivation theory which interprets such experiences, as when an individual associates positive meaning with behavior, then she or he is more likely to repeat that behavior (Sullivan, 2009, p. 332). Both expectancy theory and motivation theory rely on complicated cognitive function that prisoners can achieve as human beings, and are capable of gaining through educational experience. This scientific investigation would embark on the following one-tailed hypotheses:

H1: That prisoners with at least an associate of arts degree (AA degree) are less likely to engage in verbal threats and conflict.

H2: That prisoners with at least an associate of arts degree (AA degree) are less likely to engage in physical aggression.

The affirmation of these hypothesis, if implemented into prison policy, could potentially enhance the quality of life for prisoners, cultivate a new culture of effective communication, tolerance and acceptance among inmates and prison staff, and among prisoners themselves. The social scientific discipline would also gain understanding as to the motivations of prisoners in the carceral setting, which could possibly be generalized in other social venues.

Sample

There are approximately twenty maximum- and medium-security state prisons in California. Maximum- and medium-security prisons have the highest occurrence of verbal and physical aggression (CDCR,2018) I believe preliminarily that I could generalize the results of my findings by limiting my proposed study to two separate facilities within one institution. The California State Prison, in Los Angeles County (CSP-LAC) institution hosts Facilities A and Facilities B.

Facility-A is designated as a medium-security, general population facility that also houses maximum-security inmates due to state-wide overcrowding. The representative population for this study would be approximately 2,000 male prisoners. Facility-A is also known as the Progressive Programming Facility, which houses a unique population of male prisoners who have an exceptional reputation for pro-social behaviors and attitudes, which this researcher happens to be aware of. In contrast, the cultural norms of Facility-B are more consistent with the typical reality of prison life. Those norms include more prisoner violence, substance abuse, weapons infractions, and other maladaptive behaviors.

However, with access to higher education, these behaviors, are subject to change. I hypothesize that prisoners housed on Facility-A will have less incidence of violence than Facility-B as a result of having had a longer period of access to college programs. (The college program was initiated on Facility-A.) Furthermore, a likely intervening variable would be that the men on Facility-A have developed a common culture of pro-social attitudes and behaviors that would likely contribute to a marked decrease in violence as compared to Facility-B. Specifically, I would compare the prison-disciplinary/education records of those who possess an AA degree to those who do not, to ascertain which population group (A or B) has less or more violence.

Expected results

I would expect to find a positive correlation between those who possess an AA degree and a decrease in violent or aggressive behavior of this group and their corresponding in-custody behavior. Should my hypothesis be confirmed, I would interpret these results to mean that education at the AA degree level, or higher, reduces violence and aggression in maximum- and medium-security settings. Should the null hypothesis be affirmed, and there is no difference or no correlation, I would regroup and hypothesize a new reason for why there seems to be an extant difference in behavior between those with AA degrees and those without AA degrees.

Final Reflection

This final paper was written as a proposal, but also in a way that touches on the various methods and lessons learned during the course to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts. Professor O'Brien's design of the final in this manner was a great way to reinforce this semester's learning, and instill practical, creative, scientific and critical thinking. It was challenging, like a fun puzzle would be, but nowhere near overwhelming. We had good preparation.

I learned many new ways of approaching research and design, for instance, the intricate and involved experimental design, or the less intrusive content analysis (by archival data analysis). Also, the various ways to confirm a hypothesis, including the null hypothesis. I think the most challenging part of the class was remembering the steps to the SPSS and the various statistical formulas practiced by hand. (Nevertheless, practice makes perfect and practice is something I intend to do more of.)

The most rewarding part of the class was absorbing the wealth of knowledge taken in and having an excellent and trustworthy guide to get us there. While I respect this discipline as an academic approach, the procedures, praxis and apprentice quality of this discipline made me feel like I was learning a discipline, and a trade as a bonus. Like a trade, skill is very advantageous in this field and, again, practice is the way to get "skilled" at this.

Overall, I found this class to be challenging in a very engaging way. At the outset, when I learned that Professor O'Brien would be instructing the class. I knew we would get the support we needed. And while I am still challenged by these various statistical formulas, the class instruction (and professorial demonstrations that there are more ways to skin a cat) has motivated a desire within me to concentrate on math after I graduate.

That said, the experience I gained while under Professor O'Brien's tutelage proves my "hypothesis" that she is a gifted instructional designer. I appreciate how she used each lesson/chapter as a crescendo toward the final where we would bring it all together. It was a really smooth class that seemed to fly by, if you ask me. The most important characteristic of Professor O'Brien was her patience. She made sure we all had each step down before she moved on, and she did it with a willing attitude, not as though we were derailing her class schedule. It was also uplifting to hear that we, the usual "voiceless," had such a positive and impactful influence on her recent tenure at the university. I

believe the institution, and all of her future Golden Eagles, are better for it. Congrats to her!

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Interracial interactions in prison

by Andre Walton

When people choose to interact with people of their same race whom they do not know, there is an expectation that that particular interaction is going to be a positive one. The way in which the person you have chosen to interact with communicates is important. Their nonverbal communication reinforces the decision of whether or not the interaction will continue. Communication, whether it is verbal or nonverbal, is "the process by which one person stimulates meaning in the mind(s) of another person (or persons) through verbal and nonverbal messages" (Wrench, 2008, p.4). Additionally, when the communication is contrary to what is expected, a perceived violation occurs. Narrowing the focus on the interpersonal communication between only African American males in contrast to African American males and males of other races, the communication becomes more interesting. This is relevant and important to the communication discipline because of its focus on the intercultural aspect of communication.

Theory

Social learning theory states, "behaviors and values are learned from observing others, whether prosocial or antisocial" (Sullivan, 2009, p.479). People learn how to treat and or behave around other people based on their observations of the interactions of others. They take what they have observed and develop similar behaviors. These observed behaviors are assimilated and imitated. When the individual interacts with other people, he or she is more likely to interact with others using the observed behaviors. These modeled behaviors could include negative and or positive reinforcements. An individual's experience within their environment can also teach them how to interact with others. A person who regularly views a particular behavior being displayed within their neighborhood may come to perceive that particular behavior as acceptable. That behavior can be exercised so often that it becomes a norm and begin to operate beyond the

individual's conscious awareness. Social learning theory can help to explain behaviors and assist in predicting how individuals will interact with others.

Hypotheses

Based on the previous discussion, I argue that the interaction between African American males is more likely to elicit negative behaviors than it would between them and males of other races. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> H1: African American males are more negative when interacting with each other than when interacting with males of other races.
>
> H2: A change in behavior occurs when males of different races interact.

Expected Results

Results supporting the hypothesis would be significant to the discipline of communication because it could provide more insight into understanding what causes the negative behavior African America males display toward each other as opposed to males of other races; expanding dialogue about this phenomenon.

Reflection

As a qualitative research, my study was more opinion-based, supported by personal knowledge. I was basing my hypothesis on an interaction of one person which could not explain the behavior of a larger group of people. However, the germinal idea was planted. What started out as knowledge arising out of my own opinions and perceptions became a quantitative study in which I had to be objective and create knowledge based on facts that were obtained through the scientific method (theory, prediction/hypothesis, observation, and empirical generalizations).

Looking at what to me has been going on for a long time through the lens of a social scientist and terming it "phenomenon," I began to look at the situation more seriously. What has been challenging is maintaining focus on what is actually being studied. Because for me, I would know what I am looking for, but then through research something else would appear that sounds like a better explanation of the phenomenon and I would adopt that explanation. However, with accepting the new explanation, the study slightly changed.

Working with limited access to technology was also challenging. However, the most rewarding part of this process was being able to put together a research paper with such limited resources. I could only imagine the type of research papers we would produce with access to what society has to offer, i.e. college library, the Internet, and the open world. This entire educational process is fascinating to me. I stopped going to school in the ninth grade and from the ninth grade to where I am now, "all" of the education I acquired was in prison. I received my GED in prison. My associate's degree was received in prison. I am now close to earning a bachelor's degree, which to me is significant. I look forward to the journey ahead.

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Does Interethnic Communication Apprehension Cause Racism in Prison? A Study of Prison Communication Behaviors

By Jimmie L. Gilmer Jr.

Abstract

As this author has matured in his thirty-two years of being in prison, I noticed that, especially for white inmates, arriving at a maximum-security prison yard is often accompanied by a choice to seek out other culturally similar inmates. In seeking out culturally similar individuals, many of these white inmates employ strategic activity wherein they adopt racist attitudes and behaviors. This author will examine the communication choices of these men in an attempt to determine if these behaviors are intentional and result in long-lasting changes in the subject employing them, or if these behaviors are temporary and employed because of constraints created by the environment.

Keywords: prison, ethnocentrism, attitudinal change, intercultural competence, interethnic communication apprehension

Introduction

In 1987, I was arrested on a charge of murder. Later, I was sentenced to prison for a term of Life Without the Possibility of Parole. In the subsequent thirty-two years of imprisonment, in the California Department of Corrections (CDC), I have observed many inmates come into the prison system and eventually parole after ten, twenty, or even thirty years. In all my years of incarceration, I have often wondered how and why an individual would change from someone raised with impartiality, only to then turn on a dime and gravitate toward hate. Over the years, I have been surprised by this change and have witnessed the transformation of young white men into monsters. In 2019 in Charlotte, North Carolina, I watched on television as white men, young and old, and to my surprise some women, marching and chanting, “Jews will not replace us!” In the aftermath of the march, some altercations, assaults, and small riots broke out; and, it was

later revealed that a White Supremacist group traveled from California to North Carolina to start what they hoped would begin a race war. Almost all of these men were later identified and arrested; some of them served time in California State Prison System. I question why these changes are taking place in our society, and what triggers them. However, as I ponder the mentally of these men, I have questions. How can someone make this dramatic change from a person who may have made one mistake in life, into a person who would assimilates into a lifestyle full of hate and racist overtones, despite this individual's upbringing and values taught to him as a young man? As an African American, serving time in prison I have been on the front lines of incarceration, I have observed first-hand this sub-culture of ethnocentrism, negative stereotyping, and the long history of racial violence behind bars. It has fascinated me as well as frightened me, knowing that this form of hate could one day reenter society, and in some cases, already has. I want to understand how, why, and when this hate developed in these young men. This sub-culture uses violence to push some to make decisions from a place of fear; new, young prisoners placed in these situations often turn away from societal norms to embrace hate as a method of surviving prison. There is also the fear of what other white prisoners may think if they see the new prisoners as inferior. Prison will and can change the minds of men. Therefore, it is important for our society to know why these changes take place within the minds of men in prison. This study will examine how they will reluctantly abandon their values in order to hide in the shadows of hate behind prison walls.

Theoretical Background

Communication Apprehension

First is the high communication anxiety that new inmates coming into prison feel. Every individual in prison has to choose to interact or not interact with other prisoners. McCroskey (1970) defined communication apprehension as the anxiety and avoidance a person feels during either actual or potential communication

situations. These anxious feelings are measured by behavioral displays like reticence – an unwillingness to talk to another person (Phillips, 1968); and, shyness – the withdrawal, turning away, or increase in physical distance, by a person from a communication situation (Daly, McCroskey, Ayres, Hopf, & Ayres, 1977).

Culture in Prison

Culture, including criminal culture in prison, is shaped through an interactive process (Sampson & Bean, 2006, pp. 3-36). Sampson & Bean go on to describe the social setting in criminal situations as performative of cultural expectations. Violence, culturally reinforced in boys as a behavior used to create a "pecking order", and establish rank in that order (Cahill, 1989), finds full expression in prison, where men use physical harm, or the threat of physical harm to dominate others (Bourdieu, 2001). In prison, one of the major sources of this violence is the racial categorizations used by prison administrators (Jenness, et al., 2007).

Ethnocentrism

These racial categorizations also lead to ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism makes people bond tightly with group members to feel "proud of their own heritages by subjectively using their cultural standard as criteria for interpretations and judgments in intercultural communication" (Chen & Starosta, 2005, p. 27).

Lin and Rancer (2003), recognize that there are good parts to ethnocentrism, but negative effects of ethnocentrism include the misperception of people from other groups and seeing the behaviors of members of different groups in the worst possible light.

Interethnic Communication Apprehension

Often prison culture creates ethnocentrism because the people who come to prison, even if they don't have general communication anxiety, have interethnic communication

apprehension, since prison is small, cramped and ethnically diverse. This enforced ethnic mixing, often intentionally made worse by the correctional officers, results in high interethnic communication apprehension. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997a) stated that interethnic communication apprehension is "the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people from different…ethnic groups" (p. 147). In their article, they argue that this fear comes from high ethnocentrism, as well as communication anxiety.

Intercultural Communication Competence

Finally, opposite to the apprehension and ethnocentrism is intercultural communication competence. Intercultural communication competence is broadly thought of as a person knowing how to communicate fully and ably the particular (intercultural/interethnic) situation (Spitzberg, 2000, pp. 379-380). If a new prisoner has the ability to communication with many people, including talking across cultural and ethnic boundaries, then this person will be able to facilitate communication that is appropriate and effective (Chen, 1989). Chen (1989) broke apart the idea of intercultural communication competence into four dimensions, each with four parts, in order to be able to evaluate this trait (Chen, 1996).

Hypotheses

H_1: There is a negative relationship between interethnic communication apprehension and intercultural communication competence

H_2: There is a negative relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication competence

Reflection

Racism in California prisons is a serious problem. Inmates refuse to integrate, even though those that refuse are subject to the loss of all personal property and privileges. Officers are reluctant to tackle racism head on because of fears that wide-spread violence

will inevitably result. The solution to this may require nothing more than teaching newly incarcerated individuals how to relate appropriately and properly in such an intercultural communication context.

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Selected autoethnographies from

Methods of Communication - Humanities

Introduction by Dr. Angela Cooke-Jackson

Michelle Alexander (2010) author of *The New Jim Crow Era: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* states, "bars and walls keep hundreds of thousands of black and brown people away from mainstream society – a form of apartheid unlike any the world has ever seen" (p. 190). In doing so she says that, "prisoners are thus hidden from public view – out of sight, out of mind" (p. 190).

This research is the autoethnographic experiences of two incarcerated men involved in the only in-person Communication Studies bachelor's degree program in the country. I am their teacher and I hold classes inside a maximum-security prison where they have been exiled. Our class time is similar to most other college classroom environments with one important caveat, I'm in prison teaching and they are serving life without parole (LWoP) sentences. Over the course of the 15-week semester their writing assignments are deeply vulnerable and heart wrenching to grade, yet they awaken a different level of consciousness in me. Deep in their writings are disturbing questions like, "has society written us off," or "can we ever truly be forgiven even when we've daily asked for forgiveness," or "is there redemption?"

The authors of the two pieces, Samuel and Justin, urge mainstream culture to take a critical gaze at the reality that rehabilitation and intellectual stimulation through education can offer empowerment… even when you are being educated behind bars. Their work offers a voice to the invisible, de-humanizing, and silencing experiences of being a man incarcerated with no opportunity for parole.

Angela Cooke-Jackson
Associate Professor of Communication

Dear Brother: A Self-Reflexive Look at Sibling Relationships Through the Reflective Lens of a Sibling (An Autoethnography)

by Justin Hong

Abstract

This Autoethnography uses excerpts from five writings that my sister Elaine wrote about different memories and experiences regarding our relationship. Using her writings as a mirror, this paper exposes my shortcomings as an older sibling and reveals the complexities of sibling relationships affected by separation and incarceration.

Keywords: Autoethnography, social-roles, self-construct, identity, intimacy, incarceration, separation

> *July 11, 2009*
> *...His hair is so long, longer than mine. He had his hair tied in a ponytail with a sock. Then it was braided in two and tied once more. He's gotten bigger, but he hasn't grown taller. He says he does 2000 push-ups a day. To pass the time, I'm sure. He seems so much better than before, though. His complexion is clearer, his voice is serene and calm, and he holds the composure of a grown man. But he looks so much more like my father now, it scares me. "It's still Justin," I remind myself. But when he smiles, the bulk of his cheeks sculpt and round up exactly the way dads did. I burst into tears the moment I saw him, and I forget to breathe for what seemed like an eternity.*
> *Elaine Hong, "Pelican Bay"*

A "Brother" is an identity that a male inherits as his parents bring another child into the world. These siblings, sometimes

sharing toys, clothes, and childhood experiences, also share a bond of blood that binds them for life. However, this powerful tie of DNA does not necessarily define closeness, and while this identity may imply certain social roles, it is not a true reflection of the "brother's" character or self. One can be a "good" brother or "dead-beat" brother; he will be a brother nonetheless. Unfortunately, throughout this writer's life and twelve years of incarceration, he has been more times than not, the latter.

In 2018, my sister Elaine sent me several of her personal writings that documented specific memories and my specific role (or lack thereof) at different times of her life. Her words, sometimes filled with anger, pain, and love, were undeniably raw, riveting, and revealed many painful realities about our relationship.

This autoethnography is a brutal and honest look at my identity through the personal writings of my sister Elaine. This endeavor challenges my own self-concept of my "Brother" identity and forces me to confront my failures as an older sibling. As autoethnographies "are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding" (Sparkes, 2000, p.21), it also allows me to offer insider accounts of difficult situations that families encounter that may not be easily understood to outsiders (Adams, Manning, 205, p.356). Therefore, this autoethnography is not only a way for me to accept responsibility for my failures, but also shed light on the complexity of sibling relationships affected by separation and incarceration.

Thanksgiving

> *December 2, 2010*
> *…He was only 13 or 14 at the time. We had both gotten in big trouble by dad earlier that day, I can't even remember what for, and were told that we wouldn't be having dinner, even on Thanksgiving Day. And my brother still snuck out to make sure I could experience Thanksgiving. He risked getting beat up, yelled at, and punished all night, for me. Even*

> *dad was so taken aback, he retreated from his room to help grandma unpack and plate dinner. And we ate together, in fragile, awkward silence, but in peace. I will never forget. Justin's face was bursting with pride, and his mischievous eyes were literally twinkling as he came home with two white plastic bags dangling from each side of his bike's handlebars, full with delicious fried chicken. It wasn't an elaborate turkey dinner, but it was, and always will be, the best Thanksgiving of my life. I will never forget. I could never match up to his heart. It's so big. If it were me, I'd just be like "Screw it. Screw life. Dad is a jerk." And I'd be mad. But not Justin. He found a way to provide, with little to no means, like he always does. And most importantly, he found a way to beat hate with love.*
> *Elaine Hong, "Thankful/Thanksgiving"*

I remember that night. I remember being careful not to let the bags of food hanging from my handlebars swing too much. I remember that it had started to rain on the way back home. I remember the pounding in my heart as I tried to make it back home without my dad noticing I was gone. I remember it like it was yesterday. While this memory pokes at old wounds, it is still, hands-down, my favorite Thanksgiving. However, the way my sister remembers that night is not exactly the way I do. It's interesting how people can have different accounts of the same situation. Memories are funny in that way, I guess.

Some conflicting details from my sister's account vary in relevance. For instance, KFC was closed that night and so the fried chicken was from an Albertson's across the street. I do remember my dad being taken aback by my act of disobedience, but I don't remember him eating dinner

with us. While these details are not major discrepancies, where I find conflict is in the way my sister interpreted my actions and perceived me. She says that I have a "huge heart" and that I "beat hate with love," and while I wish I could take such credit, it was actually my grandmother who was the hero of that night.

After my father cancelled dinner and went back to his room full of Popov vodka bottles, I was hurt. I was angry. My heart was not filled with love, but rather fear and hatred towards my dad. As I was ready to allow "hate" to ruin Thanksgiving, my grandmother pulled out a twenty-dollar bill from the fanny-pack she wore under her clothes and pressed it into my palm. She told me quietly, with a similar twinkle of mischief in her eye that my sister saw in mine, to go buy something delicious for my sister and me. With her reassuring words, it was *her* "huge heart" and love that beat hate, and manifested into a Thanksgiving that my sister and I would never forget.

I am so grateful for my grandmother who had the courage to defy my father and allow me to be the arbiter of her love. I remember the sense of pride and accomplishment I felt coming back with those grocery bags of fried chicken and the joy on my sister's face as she ate the food her brother "provided." My grandmother not only provided a Thanksgiving that my sister and I would cherish for life, but she facilitated me to be the brother that my sister needed during that turbulent time in our lives. Not only did this strengthen the relationship between my sister and I, but she allowed me to practice an act of love during a time when my heart was filled with hate.

However, knowing the truth behind this memory and the effect that it has had on my sister, I am unsure if my actions were a true representation of who I was at the time. Was I the brother that my sister perceived? Or were my actions prompted by the character of my grandmother, misinterpreted?

Admission Letter

August 11, 2009

…I often think about how unfair life is, and sometimes I wish I could just quit. You were never there for me when I needed you the most. Those preteen years were horrible. I was picked on for my homemade clothes, I was chubby, with a face full of pimples, and too awkward to fit in. You weren't there to scare off the boys, those who courted me, those who bullied me. You missed all of my swim matches and band performances, and you never picked me up after school like all my other friends' brothers did…The way you chose to live didn't match up to the standards dad had for you, and you were soon out of the house to live with mom in the faraway city of Los Angeles. I was stuck back home in the city of La Palma, which claimed two square miles of boring wasteland. I've missed you. It seems like we haven't had a real relationship since that terrible day you were forced out of the house in your whisper thin white t-shirt and hand me down shoes, holes and all. …It's already been seven years, and I'm applying to college. I'm no longer that kid sister you had that worshiped your every move and vowed to hate dad for taking you and mom away from me. I've grown past that. What happened to you is horrible, what happened to me was horrible. But what if things happened differently? You might still be out there, dealing drugs, making bad decisions, forgetting about me and your life back in La Palma.

Elaine Hong, "NYU Admission Letter"

The above excerpt was from my sister Elaine's admission letter that she sent to New York University. She was seventeen years old; I was twenty-one, and I had already been incarcerated for three years. However, in all actuality, I had left my sister long before my imprisonment.

Social-roles refer to the positions you hold with respect to other people which come with a set of certain behaviors for performing your character (Solomon, Theiss, 2013, p. 75). Consequently, in family relationships, there are certain social-roles that each person is expected to satisfy. For instance, a father may be expected to teach his son how to shave. A mother may be expected to teach her daughter to comb her hair. Likewise, in my sister's letter, she clearly defines certain social-roles a brother should fulfill during that crucial time of her adolescence. So, where was I? Well, I was in Los Angeles, gangbanging and selling drugs. I was in prison, thinking only about what I was going through. I was in a world where only I existed, a place where I was failing miserably as her brother.

When I was kicked out of my dad's house, I was fourteen years old, my sister was ten. When I left to Los Angeles, I felt liberated. Free from my father's anger, abuse, drinking, and rules, I left and never looked back— not even to see that I was leaving my sister behind.

For the four years I was separated from my sister before my incarceration, I hardly kept in touch with my sister. Not because I couldn't, but because I was too busy living my life selfishly and doing what I wanted. I can only think of three times within those four years where I actually visited her. A "Dead-beat" brother would be a forgiving portrayal.

I didn't know about her band practices, her swim matches, the bullies, and the boys. I didn't know that she was awkward and had a hard time fitting in. I didn't know that every time she saw one of her friend's brothers pick them up, it was only a reminder that I wasn't there to do the same. I didn't know those things, *specifically*, but who am I

kidding, I knew. I knew that any teenage girl would be navigating through a barrage of pressures and obstacles and that my sister would be no exception. I knew that there would be moments where she would need her brother to comfort her, encourage her, listen to her, and just *be there* for her. I knew all of these things, and I ignored them. I ignored the "specifics," because I didn't want to feel the guilt and shame of leaving my sister behind.

"It won't be as bad on her as it was on me," I told myself.

"She'll be fine, Dad won't treat her the way he treated me," I convinced myself.

I couldn't have been more wrong. It even occurred to me to bring my sister with me, yet I didn't want my grandmother to be alone. Therefore, it would be my sister's sacrifice, not mine, to ease my own conscience. A "Dead-beat" brother would be a forgiving portrayal.

Christmas

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions." - Dante

December 24, 2009

Justin called again. I don't even know what to say to him anymore. It seems like all we do is fight, or it's just him rambling on, lecturing me. I know he thinks I'm still a kid, and I'm not saying that I'm grown up, but I feel like he doesn't know me for who I really am. He just assumes everything about me…I know that Justin doesn't hate me, and that he just wants to protect me from the world, but he speaks to me so harshly it really hurts. I wish he wouldn't do that. he even told me that if I go to New York, don't bother coming back. He doesn't want to see me go to NYU and fail fulfilling my dreams and waste everyone's time and effort. I know he doesn't mean it, I know he loves me, but he's projecting a

hurtful reaction, like dad would have. I know
they have good intentions. They all do.
Everyone seems to have good intentions, don't
they? Everyone thinks that they are good,
deep inside, yet people can be so fucked up,
they don't know how to express love.
Elaine Hong, "Christmas"

What is wrong with me? How could I say such harsh things? My intentions were good, right? Atleast, I think they were…

When my sister told me that she wanted to go to New York University, I didn't understand why she wanted to move so far. I remember being against it. I rationalized it to myself by saying that she could easily go to UCLA or USC and pay less money. However, the truth was that I was scared. My sister was leaving, and the whispers of uncertainty mocked, "What if she forgets about you, the way you forgot about her."

Moving to New York couldn't have been an easy decision for my sister. Starting over, moving to a place where you are the stranger in every room. The fear, the uncertainty—she must have felt so alone.

Knowing that I was incarcerated, she must have felt that she was leaving me in some way as well. I'm sure that in my harsh and hurtful words, I put that thought into her head in one way or another. I can only imagine the added pressure and guilt I must have put on her. However, little did I know, New York represented the new beginning she desperately needed. A new life far from the pain, abuse, and the abandonment that marked her like a disease. No one would know the suffering of her past, the suffering that my absence and incarceration contributed towards. When everyone else in her life questioned her decision, she came to me with hopes of support and an ally. So, she wouldn't

feel so alone, and without fail, I failed her again. What is wrong with me?

I Have a Brother

May 6, 2012

I have a Brother. His name is Justin Hong. His Korean name is Hong Sung Hoon. He was born on 7/11/88, the year of the dragon, a Cancer. His blood type is O. He is 23 years old. I have admired him as my idol for as long as I can remember. My big brother, so cool, always the popular one. He is incredibly smart, sociable, and gifted at whatever he does. He can sell air to humans, he's that good. And his smile, his contagious smile, lights up any room he enters. Growing up, he was everything that I wanted to be. Now, he's dead. To society at least. The longer he's gone, the more people forget…He used to drive a Honda accord. It was gold. Our stepdad bought it for him. He has several tattoos, but the only one that I can remember clearly is the "LA" logo on his hand. He loved breeding fish; he had a crowd of lively piranhas when I visited him in LA that one time. He's neat, a little too neat. He's struggled with rage in the past, but now, his patience and love for others is commendable. He is open-minded, he listens. He has a genuine appreciation for the little things in life, and I have a lot to learn from him…I will always live to know of him, but I won't really know him, not really. But he is my rock. He reminds me of where I come from, and to always be grateful for the things he doesn't have. It is a gift, but it is also a painful burden…he is broken. He is constantly

fighting. The demons. They're endless.
Desperation and fear are offered to him on a
platter every day. I'm sure it's maddening.
Elaine Hong, "I Have a Brother"

In 2012, just before my sister wrote the above piece, I was released from the "Hole" (Administrative Segregation) after attacking another inmate. I remember being in the hole, unable to call or contact the outside world. It was definitely *maddening*. However, that experience put a lot of things into perspective for me. I started to see how my actions and selfishness was affecting others in a new light. It was shameful. I remember the shame I felt as I wrote letters to my mom and sister explaining why I wouldn't be able to call them for who knows how long. I wasn't yet at the place where I considered the person I attacked, and in that sense, I was still very callous and selfish. I was only considering how my actions were affecting the people closest to me, but still, it was a step forward in the right direction.

Self-concept is the sum total knowledge you have about yourself which is also made up of the social-roles you play in other people's lives (Solomon, Theiss, 2013, p.71). When I read the above letter, I didn't realize the impact that I had on my little sister growing up. How she looked up to me. How see *saw* me. If only I saw myself in the same light, I may not have made the regretful decisions I would later in life. However, she did see the juxtaposition of who I was at one time in my life and the person she was currently writing about. Where I was once impulsive, angry, and quick to say hurtful things, I was now *patient, open-minded,* and I *listened*. Where I was once *broken,* I was now somehow *fixing* myself.

However, there is another part of her letter that saddens me. The part where she wrote that she will always know *of* me but never really *know* me. It's a hard truth, but the truth nonetheless. Unlike conventional sibling relationships, we were raised under different roofs for the

better part of our adolescence and young adulthood. *Intimacy* is the connection between two people that includes psychological, emotional, and behavioral bonds (Solomon, Theiss, 2015, p.266) and our lives, separated by familial issues and incarceration, has often kept us at a distance that makes it difficult to develop such closeness. Our relationship has been in large part been through the occasional phone calls, prison visits, and letters. Sadly, I too will always know *of* my sister but never really *know* her.

Conclusion

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." –John 8:32

It's hard for me to read all of my sister's personal writings. Each time I read them, my eyes sting and my heart feels like it's going to explode. It's probably why I have only read them a handful of times but force myself to do so every so often. To feel the pain. To remind myself.

Identity is always changing. Who we are today is undoubtedly different from who we were a few years ago and who we will become a few years from now? Who we are and our own self-concept is also built and socialized in part by the people around us, the lessons we learn from them, such as the lessons, let's say, from a compassionate grandmother? It can also change from the memorable experiences we share with others and the regrets of our past failures.

The social-roles of sibling relationships however, are not so clearly defined, especially when they are affected by separation and incarceration. Sibling relationships are unique in the way that their roles can be reversed, despite the implied social role of older siblings. As I missed the opportunities to be there for my sister in her times of insecurity and accomplishment, my sister has never failed to be there for me when I needed her most. As much as I was supposed to teach and guide her as an older sibling, she has

taught me so much about who I was and more importantly, who I want to be.

While my sister and I have lived very separate lives, it was through the intersection of various communication methods such as phone calls, prison visits, and letters that has merged us back together. While our involvement in each other's lives has not been as consistent, we have learned to combine our lives into a substantial sibling connection, sharing our lives, beliefs, and feelings, concluding that distance does not necessarily determine closeness and intimacy.

Through this Autoethnography, I have been able to challenge my self-concept of my "Brother" identity. To publicly address the truth of what I have done in my past and who I was and am as a brother. This has been a truth that I hid and made many excuses for many years, however, doing so has only added to the shame and burden of my disappointments. As difficult as the truth was, it was one that I needed to confront to fully accept responsibility for my failures as an older sibling. However, in doing so, it has also brought an unexpected freedom. A freedom to choose to be a better brother, understanding that I am not bound by my regrets but rather can use them as motivation to be the brother my sister always deserved.

Rumi, a philosopher, once said, "The wound is where the light enters." I like that image. As light is used to illuminate something in darkness, it is also my hope that by my "wounds," there can be a broader understanding of the complexities of sibling relationships affected by separation and incarceration. As painful as these letters and memories are, it has also helped mend many of the wounds inflicted by my past, finally giving the opportunity for healing and forgiveness. The following is the rest of my sister's letter that beautifully sums up our relationship.

(Continued from "Admission Letter")
...maybe life isn't so unfair after all. I still have you, and you still have me. We both have

lives that have found ways to use and abuse us, but atleast we are still here, breathing, existing. I'm glad I still have you, even though you and I are more than 300 miles apart. Hopefully soon, I'll be heading more than 3,000 miles away to pursue my education. It scares me, but I know I'll be okay, because you've taught me to be strong, you've taught me to be brave, and I'm grateful to have you as my rock. Like you always say, you don't have a weak sister, and you never will, I promise you that. I love you brother, and I hope that somewhere, sometime in life, we will be reunited.
Until then, all my love,
Elaine.

Until then little Sis…until then…I love you.

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The Holy Bible, New King James Version. John 8:32.

Defying arrested development: The prison-industrial complex as a contemporary rite of passage for urban males of color

By Samuel Nathaniel Brown

Keywords: Rite of passage, narrative, communities of color, autoethnography

Abstract:
"DAD" is a phenomenological analysis of my own experiences during the 22 years I spent in prison while serving a life sentence. This Autoethnography uses previous research on mass incarceration, its impact on communities of color, and Malidoma Patrice Some's theorization of the rite of passage process. It is my hope that the experiences I share not only bring awareness and understanding to the countless urban youth who systemically have the harsh system of corrections supplanted as their DAD, but also provide an impetus for mental, and collective, social change.

"Applying lessons learned from centuries in the penitentiary"
-Tupac Shakur

Introduction

A rite of passage is typically associated with a ritualistic process or ceremony designed to transition an adolescent male or female child into adulthood. According to Somè (1994) a rite of passage must have six specific stages. My Autoethnography is an attempt at establishing for future analytical processes, that many urban youths from communities of color undergo the traumatic experience of incarceration as a rite of passage.

I will do this by first setting forth the six stages of a traditional rite of passage, secondly drawing a parallel between the "Belly of the Bush" and the "Belly of the Beast" in order to show that the experience of incarceration satisfies all of the prerequisites required of a traditional rite of passage. Finally, I juxtapose the ramifications of the two rite of passage processes and discuss the harmful impact of the latter ("Belly of the Beast"). I will use my

personal narrative as an urban man of color that has transitioned into adulthood while incarcerated.

What is an Autoethnography?

Autoethnography, at times, seems to have both an immutable and mutable nature. It is mutable in the sense that each researcher seems to have an independent connotation of autoethnography. It is immutable in the sense that they seem to all agree on the core definition of autoethnography. Adams, Ellis, and Jones (2017), in their signature piece *Autoethnography* cited Bochner & Ellis' 2006 definition of an autoethnography as a "research method that uses personal experience ('auto') to describe and interpret ('graphy') cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices ('ethno')." (p. 11)

For the instant work, I tend to identify with the connotation of Autoethnography as a "qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon. (Wall, 2006, p. 1) My close identification with it can be traced back to a postmodernist, and definitely postcolonial, perspective fundamentally opposed to the hegemonic rigidity of positive science. As a carceral classroom scholar, my research contributions to the discipline of Communication Studies, when viewed through the lens of positivism, are hardly worth legitimate consideration and have no value. However, when rooted in postmodernism "Autoethnography's value can rest in bringing visceral and street knowledge to scholarly texts in undiluted forms." (Key and May, 2019, p. 2) Thus, my contributions, while breaking from the traditional, find value in the more progressive, inclusive, and evolved form of academia. "It is suggested that the freedom of a researcher to speak as a player in a research project and to mingle his or her experience of those studied is precisely what is needed to move inquiry and knowledge further along. If a researcher's voice is omitted from a text, the writing is reduced to a mere summary and interpretation of the works of others, with nothing new added. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994)" (Wall, 2006, p. 3)

I could discuss prison, the Belly of the Beast, as a more contemporary rite of passage for adolescents from urban communities of color, but to do so as a rhetorical ethnography rather than a personal narrative-based autoethnography would be to deprive the research of the richness that is my personal experience as a juvenile that transitioned into adulthood within the confines of the Prison Industrial Complex while triumphantly defying the ever prevalent psychosis of arrested development. As a human being, marginalized thrice over, I find the use and postmodern/postcolonial reception of autoethnography to be very welcoming and extremely promising.

The Six Stages of a Traditional Rite of Passage

A rite of passage is typically associated with a ritualistic process or ceremony that is designed to transition adolescents into adulthood. According to Malidoma Patrice Somè (1994) a rite of passage process consists of six specific stages that represent interdependent phenomenological occurrences. The stages are temporal and are as follows:

(1) The initiate must leave home. (2) A ceremonial or symbolic death must take place. (3) The initiate must learn the ways of their culture/community. (4) The initiate must be confronted with a set of circumstances or problems that compels them to look within self in order to overcome the challenge. (5) There must be a ceremonial or symbolic re-birth. (6) The initiate must return to their home. (Somè, 1994)

Belly of the Bush vs Belly of the Beast as a Rite of Passage

"this aint'cha Momma's house. This is the big house. This is my house." Yelled the big redneck Sherriff to us room full of prisoners. We stood barefoot, naked, shivering, and silently pretending to be calm and collected. Precluded, by the threat of physical harm, from picking up the roll of clothes that sat on the floor directly in front of me, I listened as he went on…" don't talk back to me or any of my officers. Don't none of you motherfuckers talk while I am talking and when you are given an order you better follow it…"

"Excuse me Sir…" interrupted one of the naked prisoners. He was immediately cut off. "Didn't I tell you not to speak when I am talking" "Yeah", he responded "…but…" He never got to finish his statement. A big group of corn-fed sheriffs slammed him on the floor, pummeled him, twisted his limbs, and ordered him to refrain from crying out in pain, as his naked body lay smashed on the dirty cold floor under the weight of like eight cops. I noticed blood pouring from his lip. His lip burst when his face was maliciously smashed against the floor. I took it all in. As I did so, I remember thinking, "I'm on my own."

That feeling of being on my own emanated from deep within a place of uncertainty, a feeling I had felt many times throughout my life and would feel many, many times over as I continued to sojourn through the belly of the leviathan that is known as the prison industrial complex. Once I begin to analyze my narrative and compile research on the topic, I realized that my loneliness was merely an inherent trait of the initiation process.

"Initiation is an extremely individualistic, self-centered activity. The camaraderie you feel with the elders and the other boys may try to hide that, but ultimately no one will save you if you fail to remember what you need to survive. No friend will do for you what you are supposed to do for yourself in order to further your own process" (Somè, 1994, p. 286)

I did not lift a finger to help that guy as the officers mauled him, and neither did anyone else. We were all concerned with furthering our own processes. (Somè, 1994) That is, surviving the experience. While there have been times over the 22 years of my incarceration when I came to the aid of others or vice versa, the core thought process has always been self-preservation. This serves as a clear example that there exist a seamless parallel between the traditional "Belly of the Bush" rite of Passage and its contemporary "Belly of the Beast" mutation. Utilizing my personal experience, I know the six stages of a rite of passage are satisfied as follows: (1) I left home when I was arrested and shipped to prison. (2) The trial and sentencing phase of the criminal justice proceedings represented a symbolic death. Once I was sentenced to

life in prison, I was presumed dead on the streets. My family mourned me so. (3) Throughout the years I learned a great deal about myself, Black history, American History, World History and the social dynamics that work in tandem to create American culture and subcultures. (4) In prison I have been faced with innumerable challenges that only I could overcome by reassessing my thoughts and subsequently changing my behavior. (5) In my personal journey of renegotiating my identity, and changing my perceptions and behaviors, I have consciously navigated the tempestuous waters of re-socialization, resulting in a spiritual, mental, emotional, and social rebirth. It is represented by each time I complete a positive program, graduate with a degree, or respond to someone calling me by my real name and not my old street moniker. (6) The initiate must return home. I am fighting to physically go home as this autoethnography is being written. Most prisoners do parole at some point. Not everyone is sentenced to life in prison. Thus, we see that all six stages of the traditional rite of passage are satisfied within the process of the more contemporary mutated version.

Magnitude and Impact

"Elders and mentors have an irreplaceable function in the life of any community. Without them the young are lost – their overflowing energies wasted in useless pursuits. The old must live in the young like a grounding force that tames the tendency toward bold but senseless actions and shows them the path of wisdom. In the absence of elders, the impetuosity of youth becomes the slow death of the community." (Somè 1994 p. 310)

This quote emphasizes how crucial the traditional rite of passage process is to the optimal development of initiates and the larger collectives within which they independently and interdependently function. Somè captures the magnitude and impact that the process has on the community when done properly, but warns of the slow death that results when it is not. Current American criminal justice practices do not appear to take into account the magnitude and impact, or cause and effect, of trauma and socialization on people accused of committing crimes. The

2018 California Children's Report Card gave California the letter grade "D" in the area of Youth Justice and Child Welfare. It argued that "juvenile justice systems must become trauma-informed to help youth improve their outcomes. Youth who are incarcerated with unaddressed traumas can be traumatized further." In 2016, the Sentencing Project published a study entitled *Racial Disparities in Youth Commitments and Arrests*, finding that youth who are incarcerated are more likely to suffer from depression; not further their education; have suicidal thoughts; and be incarcerated as adults. These findings highlight the stark contrast between the magnitude and impact of the traditional rite of passage versus the more contemporary version. As told by Malidoma:

When I was four years old, my childhood and my parents were taken away from me when I was literally kidnapped from my home by a French Jesuit missionary who had befriended my father…at the age of twenty I escaped and went back to my people, but found that I no longer fit into the tribal community. I risked my life to undergo the Dagara initiation and thereby return to my people. During that month-long ritual I was integrated back into my own reality as well as I could be. But I never lost my Western education. So, I am a man of two worlds, trying to be at home in both of them – a difficult task at best. When I was twenty-two, my elders came to me and asked me to return to the white man's world, to share with him what I had learned about my own spiritual tradition through my initiation. For me, initiation had eliminated my confusion, helplessness, and pain and opened the door to a powerful understanding of the link between my own life purpose and the will of my ancestors. I had come to understand the sacred relationships between children and old people, between fathers and their adolescent sons, between mothers and daughters. I knew especially why my people have such a deep respect for old age, and why a strong, functioning community is essential for the maintenance of an individual's sense of identity, meaning and purpose. I used this knowledge as my starting point." (Somè, 1994 pp 2-3)

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier I am a person that has been marginalized a minimum of three times over. I am Black. I grew up a member of the lower socio-economic class. Finally, I am a prisoner. These are three of the many marginalized demographics existing within the general population of America. I am grateful for the postmodern and postcolonial schools of thought, which establish a foundation for a poverty-stricken, incarcerated Black male such as myself to have my autoethnographic research taken seriously (Wall, 2016). The phenomenon of having elders and mentors replaced by politicians and insatiable executives from mega-corporations preying on the less fortunate is having a detrimental impact on communities of color. "When facts of our human existence are turned upside-down concerning the issues that are foundational to how we value the humanity of one another, it becomes easier to engage in the objectification of self and others to the degree that perceptions of humanity are minimized, devolved, and disregarded. It is at this point that invalidating a life or denigrating groups based upon race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religious beliefs becomes a common explicit and implicit practice in spite of humane policies designed to protect civil or human rights." (Cooke, 2018, p. 12)

The elders and mentors from the traditional rite of passage have a vested interest in the initiate's successful and responsible transition from adolescence to adulthood, as they understand that their very own continued existence, and the quality of it, is poised in the balance. The overseers of the mutated rite of passage only concern themselves with filling prison beds and making money at all cost. This phenomenon of urban males from communities of color unconsciously having the department of corrections surreptitiously installed as their teacher of life's foundational issues (Cooke, 2018) must be critically analyzed in tandem with the theory of Emotional Illiteracy-Based Criminality (Brown 2018) as we search for new ways to solve our criminal injustice problems here in America. I have learned through my personal journey into transformation, which I hold to be empirical data, that emotional literacy is key to defying arrested development, whether the prisoner is incarcerated or not.

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Selected Rhetorical Criticism

Concordance (selections from …)

by: Daniel Whitlow

The pertinent man—
Whose face blossoms as his knees wilt
rejects happiness by persuading isolation to mend his hurts,
the daily aches of exclusion,
How quick his lips defy trite trivialities?
how sure his mind denies invisible calamities
painful trauma memories force violent root in his naive future …
despair cares not for revolt—
look into your heart;
does a mutinous spark stare back beaten black and blue from exile's tomb?
When will our expectations compel us to act?
It is easier to invoke fear than incite change …
The dispassionate realm of reality besieging us hears the instinctive rhyme of our spirit's zealous reinvention
and fears us;
it dreads us—
we must believe in ourselves before our first step
before we slay our monsters with sharpened spears of light—
lest we stumble, crumble, and plummet in ruptured discord.
Better to bear the burden of truth than the fallacy of fettered sight.

Concordance, A rhetorical analysis of a poem Processing trauma with phenomenology and narradrama By Daniel Whitlow and Clifton Gibson

The poem, "Concordance," written in 2018 by Daniel Whitlow (a member of this analyzing team), depicts a descriptive and brooding, image-laden journey through the eyes of a perpetuator and survivor of trauma. From the initial metaphor of a "penitent man" seeking absolution, to the concluding thoughts encouraging acceptance of the relative "burden of truth," each image follows the character as they traverse the path from isolation to transformation.

The poem juxtaposes the character's struggles with trauma with social and environmental factors, as the character tries to make sense of themselves, their pain, and the world.

Michael White (2009) emphasized how a person's self-narrative "determines both the ascription of meaning to experience and the selection of those aspects of experience" that a person chooses to express (6-7). As an individual becomes aware of the multitudes of different stories in their life, they choose which stories will shape their identities, a process known as re-authoring--allowing them to reinvent their life. Seen through a phenomenological lens, the artifact's author tells a revelatory story of personal evolution where, in each stanza, he draws meaning from, and attributes meaning to, the disclosed images he chose to incorporate, creating a conscious awareness of experiences. Both the narrative and the phenomenology approaches explore how people construct their personal experiences, how they share those experiences with one another, and how the process of cataloging their lives contributes to how they organize and manage their realities. The basic concepts of phenomenology provide a strong, interpretive framework for narrative approach’s emphasis on how our "actions influence our self-descriptions and our self-descriptions shape our actions" (Dunne, 173).

Artifact Description

"Concordance" is a free-form poem of 388 words. The language is dense and complex, oscillating from pessimistic indulgence to idealistic reinforcement, establishing a feeling of disorientation or confusion. Two key elements of performance studies also come into play regarding the overall multi-voiced approach of the poem. The first, hybridity, describes the experience of how the author negotiates indistinct or blurred, multiple identities within the work. For example, the first few lines of the poem cycle through three separate voices, some expressing bitterness and discontent from the superficial qualities of society … while in later lines hope encourages the character to let go of the incapacitation of existential dread, to rid himself of trauma's toxic designs and perceive the world, and himself, in actuality: valuable and real.

The idea of hybridity correlates with phenomenology and narrative in that it considers the experience of how and why authors choose and construct specific language to reflect and express their inner dialogue, and how they organize their internal discussions.

The second element, liminality, studies the disorienting experience of suspension between multiple psychological states, and/or identities. Such an experience has two essential phases: a rite of passage, and potential internal reintegration. In terms of the artifact, the chaotic, almost forceful, conversation in the character's head represents a dangerous, volatile form of catharsis. The ritualistic flagellation represented by the self-hating language and self-doubting tendencies represents a rite of passage with two (or more) potential outcomes. Either his purgative suffering will lead to disillusionment or disintegration.

Through this rite of passage -- a process of traumatic disorientation (feeling trapped and lost inside his trauma) is followed by a reflective reintegration (understanding himself, his reality, how he sees himself in it)--the character will either succeed in stripping trauma of its influence or will fall deeper into the abyss of helpless servitude (Evans). The second phase represents only the possibility of the character's reintegration of the detached aspects

of his psyche/identities because while he possesses the capacity for the rehabilitation he seeks, nothing guarantees reestablishment of control in his life, even after surviving the rite of passage…

The concept of personal reunification, in recovery from a crisis or trauma of any kind, is recognition of the trauma and reattribution of new, positive meanings to formerly negative components in life, which is a constant struggle that requires continuous attention…

The decision to use a narrative approach as a theoretical method of criticism came from a few different directions. Each of us has considerable experience in employing narrative questioning techniques as a mechanism for positive growth. Each of us has committed acts of violence on others and, as we matured and began seeking answers to questions of why we did what we did, we found a narrative approach helpful. Also, each of us are studying the narrative approach with the intention of teaching its principles as part of rehabilitative programs in our facility. Both narrative and phenomenology approaches rebuff "external" value systems in favor of "socially determined and negotiated" truths. Both acknowledge relative experience and social interaction as the contextual pillars of truth's interpretation (Dunne, 176-177). Once we understood the parallel nature of both disciplines- specifically, the focus on how, and in what form, a rhetor shares their experiences--this dyadic dynamic made sense for our particular artifact. Both disciplines share a post-structuralist approach; both reject abstract universals and categorical generalizations common to modernist paradigms, and instead favor the mutual acceptance of existential relativity. Both disciplines focus attention on encouraging the creation of imaginative and robust descriptions to illustrate the meanings of specific experiences, how they affect a person and why it matters.

Both disciplines also recognize the process of "externalization," which uses language to separate a perceived essentialized problem from the person as a fixed identity, and instead offers them space to develop new perspectives on the problem and its nature. Within that open space, the person may redefine the problem and, optimally, re-author their lives…

After individually analyzing the text, our team compiled a consensus of interpretations, specifically examining the denotative and connotative meanings, including a line-by-line analysis of the artifact (included at the conclusion of this study). Clifton Gibson interviewed Daniel Whitlow who described the artifact as "an image-heavy expression of a world where I live the daily experience of putting pieces of myself back together, and building new ones, even as trauma's myriad voices –the inner, outer, shame, guilt, anger, sadness, etc.-- fight me every step of the way." Whitlow also argued that trauma's significant presence in people's lives was a main reason for sharing his poetry. Communicating our victories and defeats with traumas can help us and others. …

Selected
Performance scripts
and
Monologues

On self-esteem and normative family structures

by Terry Bell

Question: As you reflect on the statements that measure self-esteem, would you say your self-esteem is high, low, or average? Did you grow up living with two parents, a single parent, grandparents, or a stepfamily? How did that experience influence your view of "family"?

Six Flags Magic Mountain, Viper, Batman, wait scratch that.
Superman.
You know that feeling when you ride it twice.
Well, that's how my self-esteem was, just like a roller coaster.
Up and down, up then down. Verbal abuse, affirmation from girls, prison, education.
Today, my Superman self-esteem is still up there, and it ain't never coming down.
But let me tell you how it started, and the experiences that influenced my view of "family".
See, I'm not someone who can say, " You name it, I've done it".
Taken out of society at such an early age there's plenty I haven't experienced.
Like, having a driver's license, or going grocery shopping,
I've never owned anything that was in my name.
My childhood, far from the one I desired.
Abandoned by mom, never lived with dad, feeling unloved daily, believing I was a crack baby.
Dad said moms was on it while pregnant with me.
I'd be lying if I said these statements didn't faze me.
"You were a mistake". "Your mom tricked me into having unprotected sex with her".
Worthless I felt. Hurting more than the welts that emerged from my body after extension cord beatings.
This was my existence.

Arrested at 17, life lost then given in a form of a sentence,
indicating I'll forever be in prison.
Mind altered for the worse, then changed for the better, I became forgiven.
And after two-decades of not conversing with moms I made that call.
Her story never told, so I listened:
Couldn't distinguish truth from excuse, but what I did know is that I believed the part about dad.
She said she never smoked crack prior to my birth, but the discovery of my dad with another woman left her hurt, which led her to experience this drug.
She stated,
"He got his nerves. He was selling it to me, and would sometimes trade crack for sex".
As I fought back tears, I'm like, wow.
Thinking about my dad like
'brotha you foul'.
You tainted my mind with lies while you disguise the full truth with fiction.
You painted her as an addict and you're the one that fed her addiction.
This trickled down resentment shouldn't have never existed.
But I learned not to make the same of that of which he claimed to be a mistake.
Because he created nine of us, and I don't know who was intentional.
We're from six different women, and my mom has five additional.
So, total that's fourteen, and we all don't know each other.
So, I vowed to do things right.
Love, marriage, monogamy.
My only fear right now is consummation, not the act but the production.
Cause I don't want to contribute to a negative emotion from an undesirable event like abandonment when my child wonders why daddy isn't here.
I can't be there cause I'm here.

Feelings of hurt and confusion I'm familiar with.
I can't put my unborn through it, I speak empathy fluent.
I'm going to break the cycle of verbal and physical abuse, being a product of fornication.
Replace it with preparation, awareness, fairness, understanding, and display a true meaning of the
word "family".

On Family:

An adaptation of Shakespeare's Henry V Act IV, Scene III

by Jeff Ayers

(speaker begins at center stage speaking quietly and contemplatively)

"We few,"

(louder and more decisively)

"We happy few,"

(louder still and emphatically)

"We band of brothers!"

(speaker moves among the group acknowledging random people)

"For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, this day shall yet humble him. And gentlemen now abed in England shall think themselves cursed that they were not here with us today; and shall hold their manhood cheap whilst any speaks that fought beside us upon St. Crispin's Day."

(speaker moves back to center stage)

My lords, I ask you: are we not family? Are we to be defined by labels others deign to place upon us? Or do we reject their attempt to categorize that which we have forged together?

(speaker paces back and forth in front of group while giving speech)

Are we not family? Have we not created a sense of home among us? When we assemble, do we not feel a sense of homecoming? Have we not created a safe space wherein we express our innermost thoughts, greatest desires, or deepest fears? Have we not all bared our souls before each other on multiple occasions? Where else but in the sanctity of our home would we feel secure and free to do so?

Are we not family? Do we not share a collective identity? Each of us comes from disparate lands of origin and backgrounds, but do we not all bear the same identity? For certain, I speak not of the identity which has been ascribed to us, but of that identity we chose for ourselves: as scholars in pursuit of learning. Is this, then, not our collective identity? Do we not together soar like eagles, borne aloft by the wings of knowledge?

Are we not family? Is not our experience of a common history a trait we share? Has not each of us known both the sweet taste of success and the bitter tang of failure? Have we not all known love and loss, pleasure and pain, regret and contentment? And are not all our dissimilar histories what led us to this place and this time? Is not our shared history one where, after having plummeted? through the very depths of blackest despair, each of us decided to rebel against the fate others would shackle us with and made the decision to begin the arduous climb out of the pits of misery and death and back into light and life?

Are we not family? Is there not one among us who in their future envisions and desires not captivity, but liberty? If there be such a person, I say to you all that they are a liar! Having squandered that most precious of gifts under heaven - the ability to live one's life as one wishes - how much more keen are we to reclaim that which has been stripped from us? Is not freedom foremost in the minds of all gathered here today?

The creating of a sense of home; the sharing of a collective identity; the experiencing of a common history; the envisioning of a similar future; these are the contemporary benchmarks by which family is determined. Why, then, are we not family? Do we not meet and exceed each of these arbitrary conditions? Does not our bond born of choice make us the equals of those bound by blood?

(speaker stops at center stage)

For me, I say this: the ancient saying dictates that I can choose my friends but I cannot choose my family; I submit to you that one can

choose their friends; they cannot choose their relatives, but they can choose their family. It costs me naught to admit that I feel a closer sense of family with those of you gathered today than I do to some of mine own blood.

(with quiet determination)
Bound together by this, by family,
We triumph over all adversity.

(despondently)
Alas, my time runs out, and the end draws near.

(energetically)
But, if this is to end it, then let it end as it began!

(speaker gestures for everyone to come stand alongside while continuing to give speech)

We few, we happy few, we of the Ubuntu*; for he today that shares this bond with me shall be Ubuntu; be he ne'er so vile, this day shall yet humble him. And gentlemen here and across the land shall think themselves cursed that they were not here with us today; and shall hold their manhood cheap whilst any speaks that stood beside us upon this day!

* Refers to the name of a performance ensemble created by the class cohort. (ed)

Pseudo-listening: A playwright by Robert Pratt (with Larry Torres)

Larry

Robert hello, I haven't seen you in a while drone, drone, drone…

[Drone as if he was speaking]

Robert

[Looks at Larry and nods his head] Right, right.

[Turns to audience]

Have you ever been in a conversation where the other guy just keeps droning on and on, like what the has to say is more important than what's going on in your head? You know, things like that one song you can't seem to get out of your head,

Larry

[sings a song]

I can drone if I want to…

Robert

Who's having an affair in your stories,

Larry

Luke, I had an affair with your mother, I'm really your father

Robert

Or what's for chow tonight

Larry

Five minutes to chow release

Robert

[Turns to audience]

You know, the important stuff. Instead of suffering, you can do what I do. Just pretend to listen when you are not. I call it Pseudo-listening. It's a nice break in the day; you can use the time to catch up on you.

[Looks at Larry and nods]

Right, right.

[Turns to audience]

If that's not your style, I have some other tactics that you me interested in. Monopolizing is all about focusing the conversation on you instead of listening. I mean, you got to keep the droner focused on what's important, you!

[Looks at Larry and gives thumb up]

Yeah me!

[Points thumbs at himself, turns back to audience]

If they prove to be too self-absorbed to talk about you then I suggest selective listening; focus only on the parts of the conversation that relevant to you.

Larry,

I liked your paper, mine was drone drone…

Robert,

Yeah, it is good

[Turns to audience]

That's more like it. If you prefer to be a bit more pro-active, you'll like these next selections. Let's starts with literal listening. This is about getting straight to the heart of what they are droning about, and ignoring cues about the relationship because if they are not talking about you [shakes head] they don't really care. There last two I would suggest you only use in case of emergencies. Defensive listening is a good strategy; you perceive personal attacks in messages that aren't even criticism.

[Turns to Larry]

Larry

Is maladaptive attribution when you see a negative trait as being internal and stable?

Robert

[Glances at audience]

Just hit them with a

[looks at Larry]

Really bro that's what you think about me?

[Turns to audience]

The turn and step away from the droning. This last one is a favorite of mine for those incessant drones, I call it ambushing. Listening to gain information that will allow you to attack the speaker.

[Turns to Larry]

Larry

I can't believe I missed that question on the test.

Robert

I know, it was like the easiest one!

[Looks at audience]

This method not only shuts the drone on the spot, but can also prevent that person form droning at you in the future. So, the next time someone is inconsiderate enough to drone at you, just remember what I have told you.

[Turns to Larry]

Right! Hey, that's interesting tell me more.

[Turns to audience and winks]

Conflicted

by Samuel Brown and Baleegh Brown

-- Can you tell me what conflict is?
-- Why you asking me? You're the one giving the presentation;
-- Yeah, but you're supposed to be helping bra! We're all in here learning and seeking higher education. I ain't try'na hear that, we're all grown, besides, when we did that first run through with Elizabeth Malone, you sat there like a stone, while I almost got jumped by your light-skinned clones, I was working on my own, you were laughing as Larry Torres, droned, droned, droned...
-- You' re right man, I was wrong.
-- Well let's get off, cause we're back on...
-- So, to answer your question, to me conflict is...
Yo' mother, your father, your sister, yo' brotha; your uncle, your aunt, your son and your daughter, your homie, your friend, your spouse, your lover; when they don't get along and they fight one another...like...
"I hate you, I fucking hate you!" "I fucking hate you too!"
Or
"Momma, Baleegh hit me" NO I didn't" Baleegh"
Or
-- "How come you never answer my phone calls when I call you?" Cause this ain't working out."
-- "What do you mean this ain't working out?" "It's that damn David Lee isn't it?" "Jumanji!??... Hell nah... "
-- Conflict is...political, municipal, physical, personal, national, religious, and often times hurtful, familial, traditional, professional, purposeful, but we're gathered here today to talk about interpersonal ...
Conflict, which consists of three components
Disagreement, interference, and negative emotions
-- Which reminds me of my devotion
To a woman conflicted with the notion…of trust
You say you love me baby, and I say I love you too.
But your love ain't being communicated

Like mine is being to you.
All I ask for is a little reciprocation, some demonstration
To show me your is true
But instead you question any intentions
While I question your commitment,
-- Damn, here comes the resentment
Honestly, all this uncertainty been hurting me
Like it ain't waking
-- see
I'm not the last dude
Who bagged you and trashed you?
My intentions are heroic whether or not you know it
I promise to never use you or emotionally abuse you
This shit I'm not used to
But baby I don't wanna lose you!

-- As an adolescent, my life wasn't horrific, but it wasn't the most terrific,
in regards to dealing with it,
I don't remember being taught anything specific/
I felt rich in love, but poor in finance,
my life was a conflict of interest, back then I didn't get it;
I was conflictful, ever conflicting,
'cause inside I was conflicted/ in efforts assess it properly;
I did a colloquial etymology/
"Con" means argument or evidence in opposition-something on the negative side;
"flick" means movie, show, slide/
So, conflict equates to someone's negativity being showed;
manifesting in the forms of pervasive tension,
disagreeable communication,
arguments, and hostile episodes. like....
Fuck who you are, fuck where you're from, fuck who you're with;
if you suckaz are crazy, then I'm a lunatic/if they're ill, then I'm super sick;
they might be smart and fast, but I go stupid quick/
Move and stick, get missed and hit;

as a kid in the grip of emotional illiteracy,
this is how I dealt with conflict
When I was a baby, I bawled up my face,
when I got a lil older. I balled up my fist;
my momma she told me to call on the Lord,
but socialization molded me like this:
"A man is supposed to be hard as steel,
he doesn't talk about how he feels;
and if you discuss your emotions
then "Pot'na, you ain't keeping it real
So, as I pause and reflect.
"Pause"- Chapter 13- Interpersonal Conflict, page 358:
Question: Which conflict strategy did you use in your last major conflict? Did that approach help you achieve your goals for that conflict?
So, before we hear this answer, lets first discuss what a conflict strategy is.
According to the text, a conflict strategy is defined as:
an overall plan for how you will communicate about a conflict.
It sets forth three types of conflict strategies.
1- Distributive Conflict Strategy- An approach that involves competing with a conflict partner to obtain personal goals and to undermine the partner's outcomes.
2- Integrative Conflict Strategy- Cooperating with a conflict partner to identify a mutually satisfying solution.
3- Avoiding Conflict Strategy- Limiting communication with a conflict partner about a problematic situation.
So now that we know the three types of conflict strategies, by a show of hands which strategy do you think our guy here used in his last major conflict? Was it:
1) Distributive?
2) Integrative? Or
3) Avoidant?
Okay, let's see...

"Reflect. "
-- My self-identity goal is to maintain my integrity;

my other identify goal is for them to walk away NOT feeling malevolently, which is a stark contrast to how I once perpetuated conflict so effortlessly, heart racing and breathing heavily, no one's gon' get the better of one-clearly distributive,

But that was back then; cause now my process goal is Steven Covey:
WIN-WIN/
Thus, in my last major conflict I used an integrative strategy;
and it did achieve my conflict goals because
we both walked away feeling peaceful and equitably satisfactory/

Thank you for asking, but now I am asking you to think back to when you were a child, what was your conflict style?...

Well as I pause and reflect
"Pause"
(The remainder is improv)

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