

Film Analysis 1

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes communication in the context of relationships. Griffin, Ledbetter and Sparks (2015) defined it as “the ongoing use of language and gestures in anticipation of how the other will react” (p. 55). Self-images are derived from interpreting communication, which dictates how people communicate with each other. *The Trip to Bountiful* embodied the essence of symbolic interactionism through relationships established with language and labels. Non-verbal behaviors were also used to emphasize these relationships. The characters gauged reactions and determined their self-image.

Mrs. Watts and Ludie Watts had a relationship that was defined by their labels. Ludie referred to Mrs. Watts as “Mama” and she referred to Ludie as “son.” Mrs. Watts enjoyed talking to Ludie about the “good old days” of Bountiful. As a mother who had become dependent upon her child, the memories of the past were a comfort. When Ludie spoke to his mother, he used kind words and softly derided her requests to visit Bountiful. Proxemics helped to explain their dynamic relationship.

Proxemics were used to establish power during their interactions. When Mrs. Watts reminisced about Bountiful, Ludie was seated while she stood. This forced Ludie to gaze upward at his mother while she spoke. It transported Ludie back to child status, a time when “Mama” was the authority figure. Conversely, Ludie used the same tactic when he picked her up from Bountiful. Mrs. Watts wanted to discuss her travels to Bountiful, but Ludie insisted that they accept it and move on from the topic. He exuded legitimate power by standing while his mother remained seated thus not allowing her to force him to raise his gaze to meet hers.

Taking the role of the other and mindreading influenced Ludie and Jessie Mea. They put themselves in Mrs. Watts’ shoes and attempted to figure out where she had gone. They were

successful at taking on the role of the other because they ended up at the same bus station as Mrs. Watts. While at the bus station, Ludie utilized minding when they searched for Mrs. Watts. He paused for internal self-talk, once when Thelma told him that she had seen Mrs. Watts and again when Jessie Mae demanded that they return home to wait for her. Mrs. Watt's combination of taking the role of the other and minding resulted in the construction of the self.

Mrs. Watts developed a looking-glass self by taking the role of Jessie Mae and Ludie. During the bus ride with Thelma, she imagined herself as Jessie Mae and conveyed that Mother Watts was crazy because they were not interested in the same activities. Mrs. Watts paused to reflect that she was not crazy for wanting to return to Bountiful. This minding shifted her focus to Ludie's interpretation of her behavior and she believed that Ludie understood her desire. Her self-image was derived from her looking-glass self, which was constructed from Ludie's perspective. This showed that Mrs. Watts had a deeper relationship with Ludie since she valued his opinion more and choose to believe that she was not crazy.

The Trip to Bountiful focused on relationships and their powerful influence on communication. Naturally, one will alter their communication style to fit the relationship. Utilizing skills such as taking the role of the other and the looking-glass self will help one be successful in determining the most effective communication behaviors. The anticipation of a partner's reaction will also influence how someone chooses to communicate. Understanding these principles allows the sender of a message to create the perfect message for each scenario. This will result in a positive communication experience between the partners if done properly. However, having an understanding of these concepts can help to effectively resolve conflicts as they appear within relationships. Whether for non-confrontational or conflict communication, the proficient use of these skills can result in a more effective communicator.

Film Analysis 2

Social penetration theory is a multi-stage journey of relational development. Griffin et al. (2015) defined it as “the process of developing deeper intimacy with another person through mutual self-disclosure and other forms of vulnerability” (p. 97). Breath of penetration (BOP) refers to horizontal disclosure, or the range of topics. Vertical disclosure is called the depth of penetration (DOP). Higher levels of DOP indicate the disclosure of more personal information. The balance of costs and rewards determines when owners of information choose to self-disclose. *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* depicted two characters with different levels of interest in the development of their relationship and conflicting ideas of appropriate self-disclosure. Their journey through BOP and DOP culminated in the disclosure of information that conveyed the level of meaningfulness of their relationship.

Del and Neil shared information at different rates which delayed their DOP but bolstered their BOP. Del shared more biographical information. His messages were more encompassing than Neil’s short and direct responses. Neil used verbal communication to convey his desire to be left alone when he told Del, “I’m not much of a conversationalist.” His nonverbal behaviors emphasized this statement; he used a lack of eye contact, increased length of silence before responding and fumbled with his magazine. When prompted, Neil would self-disclose the bare minimum of information. This demonstrated the law of reciprocity, “a paced and orderly process in which openness in one person leads to openness in the other” (p. 99). They also discussed surface components of the situations they found themselves in, such as being tired or wanting to go home. Over time, they began to increase their degree of DOP.

If the owner determines that information is extremely private, then it will take more time for them to self-disclose. Neil was quick to deflect Del’s attempts at gaining information that

was beyond their current level of DOP through verbal messages. This did not prevent their relationship from progressing because they both began to let down their safeguards. Del's character was messy, lackadaisical, and not very perceptive. This was perceived by Neil when he saw the state of the hotel room after Del got settled in. Neil showed more of his personality, intolerance for outsiders and hostility when he argued with Del about their unfortunate situation. This represented a deeper level of self-disclosure between the two characters. Throughout the film, this trend of deeper self-disclosure continued.

The peak of their relationship depicted the internal struggle between cost and reward. Neil and Del went their separate ways after they reached Chicago. It was during reflection that Neil realized the meaning of the intimate details that Del chose to share and their true DOP. Del was faced with a decision when Neil asked him "what are you doing here?" His delayed response indicated the internal cost versus reward analysis. Neil's choice to return to the platform and search for Del showed a high level of commitment to the relationship which reduced Del's cost. The reward was that sharing could allow him to no longer be alone. Del ultimately chose to share his most private information, that he was a widower.

Social penetration theory looks at the person as a series of layers that guards an individual's most private information. Relationships do not begin with immediate self-disclosure. It requires a give and take of personal information in which the recipient handles the information properly for a level of trust to be established. The owner of the information will self-disclose when he or she deems that the rewards outweigh the costs. *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* is pertinent to today's society because human nature has not changed. We do not like to be vulnerable to those around us. Therefore, we tend to self-disclose only once a relationship has been established. It is very unlikely that this reality will ever change.

Film Analysis 3

The narrative paradigm is based on the idea that humans use stories to communicate. Fisher believed that “all forms of communication that appeal to our reason are best viewed as stories shaped by history, culture, and character” (Griffin et al., 2015, p. 303). In accordance with narrative rationality, stories are rooted in coherence and fidelity. Coherence looks at the reliability of the story by calling into question the probability of a story. Fidelity addresses the moral of a story by examining how the story resonates with the listener. The characters in *Avalon* used narratives from their past as a way to reason in the present. The stories that they shared were able to be analyzed using narrative rationality. As an ideal audience, the children of the Krichinsky family were fitted with the tools necessary to decode these stories.

Eva and Ann’s relationship was established by interpreting their past in terms of the narrative paradigm. Eva came from a different country, culture, and way of thought. She did not believe that women belonged behind the wheel of a car because she was accustomed to being chauffeured by men. She considered this to be a good reason and therefore made the decision that she would not ride in a vehicle that Ann was driving. Eva’s narrative was emphasized when Ann’s vehicle was struck by the bus. Eva was unable to separate Ann’s sex from the blame of the accident. On the other hand, Ann was American born and raised. She was less rigid to change and her good reason was derived from her experience growing up in times where women were beginning to strive for independence. She felt that she had good reason to support her decision to learn how to drive. Their pasts affected their future communication interactions and they remained constantly in conflict. The Krichinsky’s were a tight knit family and were constantly present in each other’s lives.

Whether solicited or not, the adults would tell the children stories about when the Krichinsky's first came to America and some of the struggles that they faced. In terms of coherence, these stories appeared to have some inconsistencies because the adults would dispute the exact timing of the events. Also, the storyteller would be interrupted by other adults and the context of the story would shift based upon their input. While the basis of these stories were mainly consistent, everyone had a slightly different interpretation of the stories from the past. This transitioned into the fidelity component of these stories and to understand this, one must look at whom is in the audience. The children of the Krichinsky family were an ideal audience because they were being raised to embody the values associated with their Jewish and Polish heritages. An outsider of the Krichinsky family may not have been able to understand some of the cultural aspects of the stories. However, the children were able to understand and internalize the teachings that were being conveyed by the adults. Due to the status of the children as the ideal audience and their ability to utilize these narratives to be the basis for their logic of good reason, they do represent narrative fidelity.

Humanity has always relied on narratives and we will continue to do so. Understanding the context behind meaning creates active listeners. They are able to dissect the information that is pertinent to them and then apply it to their lives while casting off unnecessary messages. We live in a world where we are constantly bombarded by narratives from multiple sources at the same exact time. To be successful, we must be able to differentiate between the messages. The analysis of *Avalon* is important to today because it depicted the evolution of a family who had one foot in the past and one in the present. The members of the family who were able to apply the messages to the changing society were extremely successful in personal and professional contexts.

References

Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2015). *A first look at communication theory*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.