

The glass castle by jeannette walls: a critical review

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The Glass Castle

According to anthropologist and cross-culture researcher, Edward T. Hall, “Communication is culture and culture is communication.” Hall believed a person could only communicate with other people when that individual understood his or her culture. However, in today’s society people seldom recognize the fact that our sense of self is shaped by the culture in which we have been reared (Adler 47).

The relationship between communication and culture is very complex and intimate. Based on the Merriam Webster dictionary, culture is defined as “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time. In a sense, it is not so much that individuals set out to create a culture when they interact in relationships, groups, organizations, or societies, but rather cultures are a natural by-product of social interaction. Therefore, one can say culture is created, shaped, transmitted, and learned through communication and communication practices are largely created, shaped, and transmitted by culture.

Before discussing “The Glass Castle: A Memoir,” by Jeannette Walls, it is important to understand the implications of this communication and culture relationship. It will be necessary to understand that self-concept is a relatively stable set of perceptions which individuals hold about themselves, while self-esteem has to do with evaluations of self-worth and can be defined as “being proud of oneself or evaluating one’s attributes highly” (Wylie 127). Some of the characteristics of the self are a result of inherited personality traits. In addition, the self-concept is created through messages

from significant others, reflected appraisal, and through social comparison with reference groups. The self-concept is subjective and “ incorporates all that you think and feel about yourself” (Roberts 22). Other factors that affect the self-concept are culture and gender. One’s self-concept, as well as the self-concepts of others can be changed through self-fulfilling prophecies.

Likewise, an important issue in interpersonal communication is self-disclosure, defined as “ the process of revealing oneself to others” (Derlega 137). The social penetration about the self that is intentionally directed toward others. The social penetration model and the Johari Window are tools for describing our self-disclosure with others. Communicators disclose personal information for a variety of reasons and benefits: catharsis, reciprocity, self-clarification, self-validation, identity management, relationship maintenance and enhancement, and social influence. On the other hand, the risks of self-disclosure include: the possibility of rejection, making a negative impression, a decline in relational satisfaction, a loss of influence, and hurting another person. Nonetheless, the four alternatives to self-disclosure are silence, lying, equivocating, and hinting, these ethical alternatives depend on the speaker’s motives and the effects of the deception.

With that being said, as I inform the reader from a critical perspective of “ The Glass Castle: A Memoir,” by Jeannette Walls, it will be vital to continue to follow the belief that communication shapes culture and culture shapes communication. As I critique the book based upon the terms and concepts we discussed throughout the tenure of the semester it is important to keep

the concepts of culture, class, and communication in mind. In addition, as I mention the several issues covered in the memoir, such as mental illness, poverty, family communication, self-esteem, self-concept, and perception it is critical to keep family culture in mind.

In the memoir, Jeannette portrays the culture of her dysfunctional family and her difficulties growing up through the way she communicates. Although according to the Social Science Research Council, “from whatever angle the study of childhood and parenting is approached certain problems inevitably arise” (Gelles 58).

Throughout “The Glass Castle: A Memoir,” Jeannette is faced with numerous barriers in her life, yet she never complains because she thinks along the lines that “the person we are is also derived from the particular cultural and historical contexts we find ourselves in” (Stevens 22). Despite the many obstacles set forth by her parents during her childhood, Jeannette develops into a successful woman later in life. One of these obstacles is that Jeannette must cope with is the carelessness of her mother, Rose Mary, and the destructive nature of her father, Rex. Subsequently, Jeannette uses plot, characterizations, and conflicts to influence the way she communicates with the reader.

After reading Jeannette’s memoir, the patterns of communication in the Walls family become clear. It became very transparent that there were many repetitive factors that shaped the Walls family’s lives. These factors changed the way I interpreted the memoir. Unlike anything I can relate to, I tried to

have empathy rather than sympathy because “ one must not make the error of believing that poverty is simply an accident or unfortunate consequence of the ‘ way things are’” (Benson 252).

“ We live in challenging times” (Smith 3) and Jeannette’s life is no different as the Walls family is constantly moving from place to place, struggling to make enough money, and faced with numerous accounts of sexual abuse, parental alcoholism, evidence of mental illness, and poverty throughout their childhood.

Often, “ the disturbance that upsets the balance of a family occurs within the family system itself. The presence of an alcoholic, for example, produces change in the behavior patterns of the other family members. The focus of the family becomes the alcoholism. The presence of other types of compulsive behavior can similarly affect families. A family member experiencing a chronic illness or a mental health problem can also throw a family out of balance. Such unbalanced families do not function well; they are dysfunctional” (Dysfunctional).

Based on the article from the North Carolina State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, in “ The Glass Castle: A Memoir,” Jeannette mentions several cases of sexual abuse during both her and her sibling’s childhood. She communicates with the reader about her own experience with Billy Deel, a stranger, and Stanley, as well as her brother’s experience with Erma.

The first assault occurs when Jeannette is playing hide-and-seek along the tracks with some of the neighborhood kids. “ I found the perfect hiding place, a small tool shed behind a clump of sagebrush that no one had hid before, But just as the kid who was [It] was finishing counting, the door opened and someone else tried to get in. It was Billy Deel. He hadn’t even been playing with us.” (Walls 85). However, after hissing and telling Billy that there was no room, he crawled inside and arranged his legs so that they were pressed up against Jeannette’s. Then as the two children heard the muffled shouts of the other kids being chased by the boy that was looking for them, Billy ‘ smushed’ his face up against Jeannette’s then grabbed her hair and made her head bend sideways so he could stick his tongue in her mouth. Eventually, Jeannette bit Billy’s ear to stop him, Billy punched Jeannette in the face, and the other kids came running into the shed after hearing the ruckus. Afterward Jeannette was reluctant to tell her father because she had a feeling it would cause problems.

The second assault Jeannette describes was when she was almost ten years old. “ I was awakened by someone running his hands over my private parts. At first it was confusing. Lori and I slept in the same bed, and I thought maybe she was moving in her sleep. I groggily pushed the hand away.” (Walls 103). Shortly after the stranger said, “ I just want to play a game with you” (103). The next day, when her Dad came home from work the children told their father what happened and “ he said he was going to kill that lowlife sonofabitch” (103). Although, just like the first instance, no serious action was taken to find the pervert or prevent it from happening again.

The third offense took place while the Walls siblings were under the supervision of their Father's alcoholic mother, Erma. She told Brian that he needed his pants hemmed and demanded him into their grandfather's bedroom. According to Jeannette, " she could hear her brother weakly protesting, so she went into the bedroom and saw Erma kneeling on the floor in front of Brian, grabbing at the crotch of his pants, squeezing and kneading while mumbling to herself and telling Brian to hold still, goddammit. Brian, his cheeks wet with tears, was holding his hands protectively between his legs" (146). Likewise, when the children told their father of the assault he responded by first blaming Brian calling him a ' pussy' and saying " Brian's a man, he can take it. I don't want to hear another word of this" (148). Then after their father left, the children began speculating if Erma had ever done to their father what she did to Brian.

The last assault mentioned by Walls was in an experience of her own when nobody else was around. " I felt Stanley's hand creeping onto my thigh. I looked at him, but he was staring at the Hee Haw Honeys so intently that I couldn't be sure he was doing it on purpose, so I knocked his hand away without saying anything. A few minutes later, the hand came creeping back. I looked down and saw that Uncle Stanley's pants were unzipped and he was playing with himself." Although Walls felt like hitting Stanley, she was afraid she would get in trouble the way Lori did after punching Erma, so she hurried to her Mom, who just said, " Oh, you're probably imagining it" (184).

Jeannette then replied, "' He groped me! And he's wanking off!' Mom cocked her head to the side and looked concerned ' Poor Stanley' she said, He's so

lonely.' ' But it was gross!' Mom asked if I was okay. I shrugged and nodded. ' Well there you go' she said. She said sexual assault was a crime of perception. ' If you don't think you're hurt, then you aren't she said ' So many women make such a big deal out of these things. But you're stronger than that" (184).

Consequently, based on the examples above, Jeannette's descriptions of her parent's responses clearly influence the way she communicates with the reader. In addition, her parent's patterns of communication when it comes to sexual abuse are very odd because her parents believe that the sexual abuse toward their children is an act of violence only when it is inflicted by a nonrelative. Therefore, I disagree with her parents beliefs because in my opinion this leads me to the idea that both parents may have been victims of sexual abuse while they were children and thus they dismiss it from being a serious matter.

In relation, after reading the story of the Walls family I believe Jeannette certainly did not have the easiest life growing up, but she may have had one of the most interesting lives. In whole, I enjoyed the book because the experiences Jeannette and her family went through make for a very exciting read. The experiences are out of the ordinary and do not represent how a typical family would live.

Jeannette was born into a rather odd family which influenced the way she communicates with the reader because her parents were not the most cautious of her well-being. Her parents raised their children completely

different than I was raised and made several assertions I did not agree with. Her parents believed their kids should be able to take care of themselves and that too much parental intervention would lead kids into becoming too dependent. Therefore, Jeannette and her siblings were constantly in dangerous situations since their supervision was limited. For example, Jeannette writes that her earliest memory was being on fire. She was cooking hot dogs over a stove and caught herself on fire when her mother thought that it was a good idea to let her three year old daughter cook hotdogs over an open flame. Luckily she was not injured, other than a few burns and hospitalization, until her father came in and told her, “ we are going to check her out, Rex Walls-style” (Walls 14).

In conclusion, throughout “ The Glass Castle: A Memoir,” I realize that Jeannette and her siblings must leave their parents in order for their lives to get any better. The children eventually start to comprehend that their parents are holding them down with their ridiculous lifestyle. Ultimately it is the way the members of the Walls family lived their lives is not only eccentric and different and influences the way Jeanette communicates with the reader.