

Mean girls case study essay



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It is quite easy to pass off the study of communications as “no, duh” research, but every aspect of human communication can be further studied and explained in a way that cannot be seen from the surface. There is a name and concept that accounts for virtually all human behaviors and interactions. Careful study and observation of these behaviors can help us better understand the way people function and become more self-aware. There are some main, key concepts that can give a good basis for understanding communication, but it is a field that goes incredibly in depth and detail.

As people, we are communicating constantly, even when it is subconscious. The first proposition of communication states that one cannot NOT communicate (lecture). The signals we send, both verbal and nonverbal, are received and interpreted by those around us. Although we are unaware of every detail communicated in our own daily lives, it can be much easier to study such phenomena within pop culture examples, where it becomes very evident. The movie “Mean Girls” is the perfect subject of such a case study, where it is full of examples of the theories discussed and read about thus far in the quarter.

The two main categories that define communication are verbal and nonverbal. As discussed in class and in the book, verbal communication is literally what we say. This could also include silent verbal communication such as e-mails or texting. Non-verbal communication comprises most of what we communicate as it accounts for everything else, such as facial expressions and overall appearance. The other side of communication is not

the messages we give off, but what and how we receive messages from others.

This is the listening aspect of communication and it is composed of numerous different kinds such as critical listening, pseudolistening, selective listening, selfish listening, and defensive listening. Critical listening is when you analyze the messages you receive from another. Pseudolistening is when the speaker acts like they are focused on what the speaker is saying, but in actuality they are not paying attention. Selective listening is the filtering of a message so that the listener only hears what they want, instead of hearing the speaker's entire message. Selfish listening is when the listener only pays attention to the speaker for selfish reasons, often dominating the conversation themselves, which is called monopolistic listening. Defensive listening is exactly what it sounds like. This is when the listener argues with the speaker and tries to, of course, defend against the message they are receiving (Real Communication). Other key concepts include social learning theory, which has to do with gender roles (lecture).

Another main concept, which is especially prevalent in "Mean Girls," is social comparison theory. This is the theory that describes the way people compare themselves to one another and alter their behavior accordingly. Uncertainty reduction theory talks about the need partners have to reduce uncertainty within their relationships by monitoring and using proactive or indirect strategies (Real Communication). Another concept that most are familiar with or have at least heard of is self-esteem.

This has to do with how we feel about ourselves and can be affected negatively or positively by both internal and external factors (Real Communication). In "Mean Girls," Lindsay Lohan plays main character, Cady, a fifteen year old girl who moved from Africa to the United States. Up until the move she had always been home schooled. In her attempts to adjust to normal high school life, she befriended Damian and Janice, two of the "artsy" kids. Later on in her first day she also met the "plastics" at lunch - Regina, Gretchen, and Karen.

They were the popular girls who ran things at school. Janice, who had quite a vendetta against Regina, thought it would be funny for Cady to act like a plastic too, getting the inside dirt, and exploiting Regina George. However, during the process of Cady faking her way into the plastics, her attitude changed and she morphed into someone just like them. She too began acting snotty and manipulative and eventually drifted completely from her original circle. While bonding with the plastics, Cady was shown the Burn Book, which had mean comments about every single girl in school.

Eventually, Janice got fed up with the person Cady had become and revealed the entire situation to Regina. To get revenge, Regina added an entry about herself into the Burn Book so that she would look innocent, and then turned it into the principal, blaming the book on Cady, Gretchen, and Karen who were the only girls not included. The book was then exposed to the students and chaos ensued. Cady became targeted as the most hated girl in school. After a workshop to heal the drama and tension, things settled down slightly.

Regina, however, still angry, stormed across the street only to get hit by a bus. Fortunately, only her spine was fractured. At the spring dance Cady and Regina were both nominated for queen, and Cady, upon winning, gave a speech/apology to the whole grade, sharing a piece of her crown with all of the girls. The movie fast forwards a little to show that the plastics ended up separating, with Cady going on to become a mathlete, Regina joining the lacrosse team, Karen using her innate skills to tell the weather, and Gretchen joining a new circle of friends.

Actions speak louder than words, and throughout the movie, the characters' nonverbal communication is much more relevant than their verbal communication. The way the plastics all dressed the same gave off a certain image to those around them, and everything from their hairstyles, to their pants, to their facial expressions was a depiction of their personality. Cady, in particular, shows several different types of listening throughout the movie. When she met with her crush, Aaron Samuels, for a study date, she was only pretending to listen to him because she already knew the material.

Her mind was somewhere else while she pretended to focus on what he was saying. This is called pseudolistening. Cady shows selective listening when she is first spending time with the plastics. She only listened for information that could potentially be used against them and bring them all down. This also portrays selfish listening. The only reason Cady listened to the plastics in the first place was because she had her own ulterior motive of sabotaging their reputations.

Therefore she was listening for specific kinds of information that would help her purpose. Cady shows defensive listening in a very obvious way with Damien and Janice. When they tried to confront her about her actual transformation into a plastic herself, she grew angry and argued against that statement, getting very upset about the accusation. Social learning theory applies to the way all of the characters interact with each other. The males in the movie are portrayed as athletes with a competitive nature, while the girls sit around and gossip.

Social learning theory says that women gain closeness by talking and communicating, while men use instrumental goals, or doing. One of the main theories that applies to all the characters in the movie, however, is social comparison theory. This is best portrayed by the plastics, who set the bar for the way everyone else is supposed to be in their school. But even they are engaging in social comparison, as their idea of what is trendy and cool is influenced by pop culture and current fads. Cady had to apply the uncertainty reduction theory in all of her relationships.

With the plastics she had to prove herself worthy of being their friend and loyal as well, while the plastics had to convince Cady that they were the group she should associate with. In her romantic life, her and Aaron were both skeptical and unsure about each other. Aaron would assist her in math class to show interest, while Cady gave physical hints as well. Both partners dipped their toes into the water a little bit, easing their way into the relationship and giving back and forth cues to maintain a stable connection.

But one of the most relevant concepts in “ Mean Girls” is self-esteem. In this particular movie, self-esteem is something that all of the characters should strive to develop, as they all display their lacking in this area in one way or another. The fact that the plastics have to constantly prove their beauty and popularity is a mask for their insecurity. And the fact that other girls in their school strive to be like them shows that they do not have the confidence to be their own person.

All of these theories apply to every single person in their every day relationships. As stated, it may not be so apparent to us on a day to day basis, but stepping back to analyze such concepts serves as quite an eye opener. “ Mean Girls” is somewhat of a hyperbole of normal high school interactions, but it is a great example of how these theories apply. Works Cited: Real communication: an introduction Dan O’Hair - Mary O. Wiemann - Bedford/St. Martin’s - 2009 Mean Girls. Dir. Mark Waters. Perf. Lindsay Lohan. Paramount Pictures, 2004. Film.