

# ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Cut-Ups, Slams And Jabs: Verbal Aggressiveness Or Politeness?



There is no such thing as human nature independent of culture.

(Geertz, 1973, p. 49)

What does it mean to be a “polite,” “supportive,” “non-aggressive” interpersonal communicator? What is the significance behind communicators who engage in ways of speaking that explicitly contradict traditional ways of interpersonal “competence” and, yet, construct and maintain group solidarity? The intersection of these questions is where I locate the Upward Bound case.

In this essay, I explore the ways of speaking of the Upward Bound speech community. Upward Bound is a government-assisted program that gives high school students from poor socioeconomic statuses the opportunity to earn early college credit for free. A goal of this program is to allow for the student to make a smooth transition into college once they graduate from high school, and then to boost their level of preparation and thus success once in the college setting. In order to qualify for the program, students must come from low-income households, and households in which the parent/s do not hold a college degree. Group members were familiar with one another, as they had spent the last three years in the program together.

Through my fieldwork, I realize that these students use talk in culturally distinctive ways. Their communication styles illustrate a norm of “politeness” that is strikingly antithetical to the germinal “politeness” universal proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and valorized widely by scholars who study interpersonal communication. As a result of this discovery, I begin to problematize the notion of “Politeness Theory” and normative theories pertaining to “defensiveness” and “verbal aggressiveness” and communication scholars reliance on linguistic universals in general.

The following study is an attempt to “reverse” my scholarly ways. Following

Pike's (1954) lead, I use an emic (rather than etic) approach to focus more on the reports of the participants and to let conclusions emerge from the data. In line with Philipsen's (1977) discussion on "linearity" in research protocol, I begin this analysis with some theory in mind (e.g., "Politeness Theory"). In this sense, I am curious about how this speech community enacts "politeness," "defensiveness," and "verbal aggression." However, I make a deliberate move to first discover this group's (potentially distinctive) methods of communicating *prior* to employing (i.e., embracing and/or challenging) traditional theory.

### 1. Brown and Levinson

"Face," according to Goffman (1967), is:

the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [or herself] by the line others assume he [or she] has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes. (p. 5)

In *Interaction Ritual* (1967) and preceding this work, his *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman detailed the extent to which "social actors" painstakingly and, yet, naturally, felt compelled to "impression manage" so that their "face" (which is "presented" "front stage," where most risky communication occurs) is subjected to the wills of various audience members, who are simultaneously doing similar "facework" of their own (so they, just like the performer, can construct and maintain a "socially desirable face"). Admittedly, this brief summary is far from complete. It is in no way intended to be representative of Goffman's impact on sociology, anthropology, social psychology and communication studies. Actually, Goffman (1959 & 1967) has significantly influenced the field of interpersonal communication for many years.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) "Politeness Theory," perhaps the most influential extension of Goffman's (1967) work, contends that all communicators are concerned with and use "politeness" to protect their face and the face of others in social interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) state:

[. . .] normally, everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces, it is in general in every participant's best interest to maintain each other's [. . .] face [. . .]." (p. 61)

Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that the function of "politeness" extends beyond the social interaction itself. They suggest it is an "expression of social relationships [. . .] part and parcel of the construction and maintenance of

social relationships and addresses the social need for the control of potential aggression within society" (p. 5). Thus the ethical and, in their terms, "rational" social character (AKA the "Model Person") (p. 58) will communicate with "politeness" in mind, lest she/he wish to face interpersonal conflict and/or sanctions for not communicating in such a way.

Similar to Goffman (1967), Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualize "face" as "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must constantly be attended to in interaction" (p. 66). Thus, "face" is a vulnerable part of social interaction, dependent on the influence of self and the other. Additionally, "face":

consists of two specific kinds of desires ('face wants') attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face). (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 13)

"Face wants" then relate to a communicator's expectation to be autonomous and confirmed in social interaction. Cupach and Metts (1990) suggest that face is critical to all types of interpersonal relationships and offer a similar description to that of Brown and Levinson (1987):

*Positive face* refers to the desire to be liked and respected by the significant people in our lives. *Negative face* pertains to the desire to be free from constraint or imposition. Messages respecting one's autonomy are supportive of negative face, whereas messages interfering with one's desired actions are threatening to negative face. (p. 5)

Face and thus politeness is a personal notion. In turn, it is co-constructed by communicators in social interaction. It would follow then that an element such as communicators' personal identity and, more specifically, their self-concepts are subject to whether their conversational partners abide by the universal (constitutive) rules incorporated with the communicating of politeness.

While Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that it is in human nature to use politeness, they also concede that this is not always possible. Some talk "run[s] contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker" (p. 65). That is, communication inherently contains "face threatening acts" (FTA's), speech acts that challenge the positive and negative face wants of the communicators. Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that communicators formulate their approach to

politeness based on three factors: social distance (communicators experience greater face threats when interacting with those with whom least familiar); power or status of the hearer (in relationship to the speaker) (with increased power comes an increased face threat to the communicator); and the rank or degree of imposition (the extent to which the speech act will take away from negative and positive face wants). Put simply, interacts with less power than their partners, those with increased relational intimacy, and those situations posing a higher degree of threats will be approached with a greater concern for politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Eelen, 2001).

Brown and Levinson (1987) also provide five “hierarchical” “superstrategies” that communicators generally use to approach FTA’s. The authors use “hierarchical” to mean that these strategies are rank ordered; they each vary based on the level of threat posed to the “face” of the other. Concurrently, the strategies vary based on the amount “redressive” action (“facework”) the communicators employ.

First, a communicator may choose to speak “baldly on record” (Brown and Levinson, 1987). On this occasion, the speaker does not focus on the “face wants” of the hearer and, thus, takes no “redressive” (“facework”) action. Given this, “bald on record” is considered a FTA with the highest threat. A communicator, Linda, needing groceries, might speak “baldly on record” by stating, “Go to the store for me.”

Second, the communicator may employ “positive politeness,” a move in which he/she addresses the positive face wants of the hearer. In other words, the communicator shows appreciation for the hearer and the desirability of the hearer’s needs and wants. Again, in need of groceries as in the previous example, the speaker might say, “Linda, you have always been such a helpful friend to me, would ya’ consider running to the store for me?” In this instance, “redressive” work is employed so as to include Linda (“friend”) as a socially desirable person and the speaker’s approval of her (“always...helpful”).

Third, “negative politeness” occurs when the speaker’s talk addresses the negative face wants of the hearer. In other words, the speaker confirms the hearers need to be unimpeded and not imposed upon. The speaker, in need of the run-to-the-store favor, might say, “Linda, I wish I did not have to ask this, but I have no food and am also sick. If you’d just take only a half an hour to run to the store, I would gladly return the favor as soon as I am well. “Redresses” action is taken to minimize the extent Michaela would feel imposed upon in this interaction (the wish not the ask the favor, the thirty minute mention, etc.).

Next, the speaker may communicate by going “off record.” This is where the FTA is performed in an ambiguous way. By its vague nature, there could be multiple interpretations (and, in turn, less threat) related to the speech act. Seeking the grocery favor in indirect means, the speaker might say, “You would not believe how low my food supply is. And it could not fall at a worse time, being sick and hungry.” This is less a FTA because the hearer might interpret this as casual conversation in which the speaker is simply venting and not requesting.

Finally, the communicator might choose not to utter the FTA whatsoever. Because the speaker’s needs and wishes go unspoken and, thus, because there is minimal (if any) imposition on the hearer, this is considered the least threatening of the superstrategies that the speaker can engage.

Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that, with social distance, power, and degree of imposition in mind, speakers choose “politeness strategies” based on the intensity of the FTA. Thus, the more intense FTA’s receive the higher ranked “superstrategy.”

At this point, it is important to consider the ways in which “Politeness Theory” allows for the acceptance of cultural variation in communication style. This assumption of their model plays a pivotal role in this essay. The authors argue for an *acontextual* notion of communicative behavior. “Politeness Theory” is:

[...] the bare bones of a notion of face which (we argue) is universal, but which in any particular society we would expect to be the subject of much *cultural elaboration*.” (p. 13, emphasis added)

This notion of “cultural elaboration” seems questionable because of a later claim they make:

While the content of face will differ in different cultures (what the exact limits are to personal territories, and the publicly relevant content of personality consists in), we are assuming that the mutual knowledge of members’ public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are *universal*. (p. 62, emphasis added)

Thus, politeness is a “universal” phenomenon. Everyone is intrinsically motivated to interact in such a fashion and, even more, everyone enact politeness. What then does this mean when communicators do not identify with such a phenomenon? I will attempt to address this question below.

Researchers have studied Brown and Levinson’s (1987) perspective extensively. Intriguing treatments of their model span a number of communicative contexts

including: academic discourse (Tracy & Baratz, 1993); advice giving and solicitation (Goldsmith, 2000; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000); argumentative interactions (Schreier & Groeben, 1995); coding practices (Wood & Kroger, 1994); compliance gaining and influence goals (Cai & Wilson, 2000; Kellermann & Shea, 1996; Wilson, Aleman & Leatham, 1998); comforting (Tighe & Hale, 1997); disagreements (Holtgraves, 1997); friendship (Cupach & Messman, 1999); gender (Baxter & Bullis, 1986); Javanese women (Smith-Hefner, 1988); “intergenerational issues” (Coupland, Grainger & Coupland, 1988); multifunctionality of discourse and message production (Leichty & Applegate, 1991; Lim & Bowers, 1991); nonverbal behaviors (Trees, & Manusov, 1998); nursing (Spiers, 1998); personal relationships (Dillard, Wilson, Tusing & Kinney, 1997); power (Graham & David, 1996); requests (Baxter, 1984; Craig, Tracy & Spisak, 1986); romantic relationships (Baxter & Bullis, 1986); and solidarity (Cupach & Messman, 1999; Lim & Bowers, 1991).

Other scholars offer a notion of “politeness.” Gu (1999) overtly grounds her conceptualization in Chinese moral standards. The author sees “politeness” as “[...] a sanctioned belief that an individual’s behavior ought to live up to the expectations of respectfulness, modesty, additional warmth and refinement” (p. 245). Contrasting this is the work of Blum-Kulka (1992), who honors the relationship between “politeness” and culture. She argues:

[...] systems of politeness manifest a culturally filtered interpretation of the interaction between four essential parameters: social motivations, expressive modes, social differentials and social meanings. Cultural notions interfere in determining the distinctive features of each of the four parameters and as a result, significantly effect the social understanding of “politeness” across societies in the world. (p. 270).

Blum-Kulka’s (1992) approach reassures me. It affirms the likelihood that communicative meaning is co-constituted between communicators rather than representational. It would follow then that a cultural group would construct their own notion of “politeness,” if their talk would even be described by the given community as “polite.” Contrasting this, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that “politeness” is a communicative ritual, a “primordial origin [. . .] omnipresent model for rituals of all kinds” (p. 44). This seems to discount the possibility for which Blum-Kulka (1992) wisely allows. The apparent consequence of this type of theoretical move, again, seems to be that little if any room is left for the possibility of cultural distinctiveness.

It is clear that Brown and Levinson's (1987) approach to communication entails rationally thinking one's way through talk, so as to determine the most "polite" way possible to speak. Generously then, if Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that communicators "do" things through talk, which from their essentialistic standpoint, this seems to be the case, they gesture toward the likelihood that FTA's function to, as the name implies, "threaten" the hearer. Thus, to employ "impolite" communication is to show threat and, more specifically, imposition (threat to "negative face") and the undesirability or disapproval of the hearer (threat to "positive face"). Communicators wishing to avoid conflict, then, need to avoid FTAs. In turn, it seems to follow also that the communicators who avoid threatening, conflict-like talk, also might avoid the type of person who is threatening and/or conflict-oriented.

## *2. Defensiveness and Verbal Aggression*

There exists an abundance of literature regarding interpersonal communication style.

One area centers on "supportive" and "defensive" communication styles (Gibb, 1961, 1964, 1970 & Eadie, 1982; & Stamp, Vangelisti, & Daly, 1992). Messages that are "evaluative," "controlling," "strategic," "neutral," "superior," and "certain" are believed to promote "defensive climates," while those that are "descriptive," "problem oriented," "spontaneous," "empathic," showing "equality," and "provisional" are said to promote "supportive climates." It is commonly believed that the way in which a communicator interacts directly affects the communication "climate" and, thus, the extent to which a conversational partner feels threatened and/or motivated to continue speaking. This area of research is widely accepted in the communication discipline. Hybrid Introductory and Interpersonal Communication courses commonly highlight Gibb's (1961) work, and the research that expanded on his germinal ideas (see Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1999; Wood, 1999, Adler, Rosenfeld, Towne, & Proctor, 1998; & Stewart, 1999).

Researched even more extensively is the area of verbal aggression. Like Brown and Levinson (1987), "verbally aggressive communication literature covers a number of foci including: adolescents (Roberto & Finucane, 1997); characteristics of aggressor vs. the action of aggression (Infante, Riddle, Horvath, & Tumlin, 1992); emotions (Vangelisti, 1989; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Vangelisti, Daly, & Rudnick, 1991); communicator credibility (Infante, Hartley, Martin, Higgins,

Bruning & Hun, 1992); gender (Infante, 1989; & Infante, et al., 1996; Nicotera & Rancer, 1994); hate speech (Leets & Giles, 1997); interspousal violence (Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989; Infante et al., 1990; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993); narcissism (Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990); organizational communication (superior-subordinate communication) (Infante & Gorden, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991); persuasion and receiver resistance (Lim, 1990); physical violence (Harris, Gergen, & Lannamann, 1983; Infante & Wigley, 1986); sibling relationships (Martin, Anderson, Burant & Weber, 1997; Straus, Sweets, & Vissing, 1989; Tevin, Martin & Neupauer, 1998); small group communication and cohesion (Anderson & Martin, 1999); social learning (Infante, D.A. & Rancer, 1996); and various situational factors (Onyekwere, Rubin, & Infante, 1991). For the purposes of the current essay, I am most interested in the conceptualization of verbal aggression, examples of “verbally aggressive messages,” and the proposed effects of these “impolite” messages.

Infante (1995) defines “verbal aggressiveness” as a “highly destructive form of communication that should be clearly identified by the communication discipline so that methods can be delineated for control” (p. 51). In turn, Infante and Wigley (1986) add that verbal aggression is communication “attacking the self-concept of another person instead of, or in addition to, the person’s position on a topic of communication [...] in order to make the person feel less favorably about self” (p. 61). Thus, this communication style seems to involve a communicator’s intention to harm others. Furthermore, it certainly seems like verbal aggression connotes anger and negativity. In fact, this mode of communication, as Infante et al. (1996) see it, seeks “to deliver psychological pain” (p. 317).

Common examples of verbally aggressive messages include character attack, physical appearance attack, teasing, ridicule, threat, swearing, etc. (Infante, Sabourin, Rudd, & Shannon, 1990; Infante & Wigley, 1986). Also, “verbal aggressiveness” is believed to cause hurt feelings, anger, irritation, embarrassment, discouragement, relationship deterioration and relationship termination (Infante & Wigley, 1986).

Researchers on communication style often distinguish “verbal aggressiveness” from “argumentativeness” and “assertiveness.” While the latter two are considered to be “constructive” communicative behaviors, the former are “hostile” and thus “deconstructive” (Infante, 1987 & Infante, Rancer, & Jordan, 1996). I am reminded again that “verbally aggressive” style is believed to convey something negative and harmful to the hearer. What research does *not* seem to



note is that communication that has the characteristics of “verbally aggressive” communication might actually connote messages of interpersonal warmth, solidarity, and trust. Common to the research previously mentioned is a central theme: “defensive” and “verbally aggressive” communication lessens the likelihood or terminates the chances for effective, supportive, or interpersonally rich dialogue. Various others describe potentially harmful communication style with many of the same assumptions.

Knapp and Vangelisti (2000) describe “extreme” ways of communicating, those “destructive patterns,” or “interpersonal chamber of horrors” (p 367). Wilmot (1995) discusses various findings about harmful communication styles and relationships. These include: “cross complaining,” “insults,” “put-downs,” blaming the other with high levels of certainty,” “fewer strategies for maintenance and repair,” and “giving negative information more weight than positive” (see Hays, 1989; Fincham & Bradbury, 1989; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Beach, 1991; Noller & Ruzzene, 1991). Furthermore, Spitzberg and Cupach (1994), in *The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication*, as if the title of this project alone was not enough, include a variety of essays entitled with similarly negative connotations including: Duck’s “Delights and *Dilemmas*”; Spitzberg’s “Darkside of (In)competence”; Cupach’s “*Social Predicaments*”; Wilder and Collins’ “Patterns of Interactional *Paradoxes*”; and Daly, Diesel, and Weber’s *Conversational Dilemmas*” (italics added).

In contrast to the above-mentioned are studies that seem to affirm nontraditional talk. For example, Labov (1972) describes the communication of a particular group of African American adolescents as “ritualized banter.” Basso (1979), studying the Western Apache, suggests a functional benefit to the use of silence (a communicative aspect that, in mainstream research, is often viewed as being troublesome). Cogdell and Wilson (1980) identify the communicative practice of “jiving.” In particular, “foolish talk jivers” and “tease jivers” seek to entertain and manage one’s credibility through talk. Expanding on Labov (1972), Culpeper (1996) and Kienpointer (1997) conceptualize “ritualized banter” as “mock impoliteness.” Katriel (1986) demonstrates the uses of “directness” (e.g., “talking *Dugri*”) among the (Israeli) Sabra culture. Finally, Wieder and Pratt (1990) describe the “razzing” practices among the Osage Indians. This is a practice that, in part, seems to show membership and solidarity as a “recognizable Indian” for tribe members. Altogether, these “nontraditional” findings take a localized communication style, describe it for what it is and does, and, for the most part,

does not seem to impose evaluation based on whether the talk is “polite,” “defensive,” etc. A common thread between these various studies is that each, in its own way, allowed for the localizing of communicative norms vs. evaluating based on a “universal” way of understanding communication.

Thus, I am concerned with what both “Politeness Theory” and “defensiveness” and “verbal aggression” researchers say about the study of interpersonal communication. Clearly both have their merits. Sometimes “universal” ideas can serve as frameworks with which to enter a research study. Yet, in Pike’s (1954) sense, these etic mentalities seem to function more to exclude rather than include diverse theories on communication and culture.

What seems to be missing in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) perspective is the possibility that not all communicators are likely to see politeness as a universal human aspect. Additionally, the authors seem to have eliminated the possibility that communication (i.e., talk and processes of talk) traditionally evaluated as threatening and, consequently, “destructive,” “negative,” and moreover “incompetent” could in fact, be “non-threatening,” “constructive,” “positive” and a sign of “cultural competence.” Moreover, they eliminate the possibility that “impolite” communication (as they describe it) could actually serve unique functions in terms of solidarity and interpersonal warmth.

Similarly, there are “missing” qualities to the preceding discussions about “defensive” communication (see Gibb, 1961, Eadie, 1982 and Stamp et al, 1992) and “verbally aggressiveness” (see Infante, 1995; 1996 and Infante and Wigley, 1986). For the sake of brevity, I simply suggest the possibility that not all communication typically viewed as “questionable” (e.g., criticism, insults, character attacks) is interpreted by the involved communicators as damaging to psyches and, more specifically, self-concepts. Moreover, and similar to my concern with Brown and Levinson (1987), I would like to suggest that there might be instances where “aggressive” communication, instead of seeming to distance the communicators (Gibb, 1961), might actually serve positive, solidarity building functions as well. In short, scholars are in need of a reminder that interpersonal communication is subject to variations in “style” based on culture. I hope to offer such insight in this essay.

### *3. Ethnography of Communication*

Hymes’ (1972) ethnography of communication (eoc) approach is ideal for this study for a number of reasons. First, Hymes (1972) takes the attention away from

universal theories being used to understand/explain/evaluate culture and puts it directly on the culture's members' descriptions of how communication works for them. As labels of politeness, defensiveness, and verbal aggression in the above mentioned research seem to have been prescribed by the respective scholars, ethnography of communication focuses on the voices of the participants of my fieldwork.

Being able to, in Hymes' sense, "particularize" (Saville-Troike, 1989), I will be freer to uncover and embrace a way of speaking that might otherwise not be taken favorably. Next, Hymes (1974) argues:

[I]f members of a community themselves class certain patterns of speech as deviant, mixtures, marginal, or the like, that is a significant fact; but we do not want to be trapped into having to treat phenomena that way, merely because of the limitations of the model with which we start. Where community members find patterns natural, we do not want to have to make them out to be unnatural (p. 433).

When one typically judges "politeness" or levels of "verbal aggression," there seems to be evaluative statements attached to these judgments. For instance, a communicator is "impolite" and thus "ineffective, "insensitive to the other," or "incompetent." Ethnography of Communication seems to blend quite nicely with my intentions of not evaluating the Upward Bound members communication style, a style that, by traditional folk, would be highly scrutinized.

#### *4. Speech Community*

Hymes (1972) argues that a speech community is comprised of communicators who "share knowledge of rules for the interpretation of speech, including rules for the interpretation of at least one common code" (p. 19). Given that the proceeding investigation will look at the shared system of meanings for specific terms and the ways these terms are use in social interaction, Hymes (1972) conceptualization seems like an appropriate fit.

This speech community is comprised of fourteen students ranging in age from seventeen to nineteen years old. In terms of race, one student was of Caucasian decent, two from Asian decent, while the remaining eleven students were of African American decent. There was an equal number of young men and woman. As previously mentioned, these students were members of the Upward Bound program.

## 5. *Classroom as Field*

Overall, extending the eoc work of Hymes (1967, 1968, 1972 & 1974), Philipsen (1992; 1997), and Carbaugh (1989; 1992), I utilize both ethnographic fieldwork and interviews to tell the story of this dynamic group of young communicators—those hoping to foster a family and a successful life. I conducted approximately forty-two hours of fieldwork for this study. As these were my students, fieldwork consisted of the hours spent teaching my Introduction to Communication class on a regional campus of a Midwestern university. I met with these students for ninety minutes, four days a week, for a total of seven weeks in the summer, 1998. My observations and jottings were based on experiences before, during, and following class. Although the students were fully aware of my study, I attempted to make the jotting of field notes as inconspicuous as possible, so as to obtain as relatively “natural” communicative behaviors.

In the sixth week of my study, I conducted thirteen open-ended interviews with the students. One student out of the fourteen declined to be interviewed. Interview sessions took place privately, in one-on-one sixty-minute sessions (held in a separate classroom away from the respondent’s peers). I utilized an unstructured, open-ended interviewing style. I interviewed from a scheduled list of questions; follow-up probes were frequently utilized wherever appropriate. This conversational interviewing protocol allowed for “a more flexible approach, allowing the discussion to flow in a way that seems natural” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 152). All interviews were recorded on micro-cassette and remain in my possession. I completed all transcribing and coding work alone in order to consistently encounter the data.

What follows is an account of the ways of speaking of the Upward Bound speech community. I first present two themes that I discovered in my fieldwork and interview data. These two conclusions center on the ways in which these communicators contrast the normative ways of speaking I previously discussed. In short, this community challenges what we “know” about communication style, politeness, and “competent” communication.

## 6. *“Cut Ups,” “Slams” and “Jabs”*

Apparent throughout my fieldwork was the observation that this group communicates in ways that contradict traditionally normative ways of speaking. One way the group communicated could be described as what is typically understood as verbal aggression. For instance, I observed group members routinely teasing Jack for having a raspy voice, one that he used repeatedly to

participate in class discussion. Additionally, I witnessed the group mock Harriet due to her different (somewhat quirky) style of laughing and for the ways in which she squinted her face when she smiled. She laughed with a raspy voice and a look like she was trying to not move a muscle in her face. Also, Benny was teased for being overweight. On other occasions, Tammy was continuously ridiculed merely for expressing her point in class. In turn, many group members criticized each other in a sarcastic manner if they stumbled over words. Finally, and not any less significant, I also noticed group members directing a significant amount of sarcasm at themselves as well.

When questioned about these observations, group members effortlessly provided insight as to this intriguing, and somewhat alarming, way of using communication. Nearly all respondents identified this way of speaking as using (in their terms) “cut-ups,” “slams,” and “jabs” (hereafter referred to as C/S/J). They also mentioned that much of their communication was filled with “sarcasm” and “overly critical communication.” However, this type of communication was not received negatively. A number of instances illustrate this notion.

Cliff reports: It is a smart and intelligent way to tell someone off without using profane language or degrading yourself...when someone gets smart with you, you learn more about the person so you can learn how to grow closer.

Cliff’s statement seems particularly significant for three reasons. First, he presents C/S/J as a way of speaking that is familiar to him. In turn, this leads to me speculate if there is strength to this being a way of speaking for this community. Next, and more specifically, he reports how, if one is to communicate via C/S/J, how communicators might shape such communication. That is, Cliff sees it as being “smart” and “intelligent,” and not “degrading.” It would seem to follow then that less “intelligent” communicators would speak in profane ways. Finally, although profanity is to be avoided, communicating through C/S/J should not be. This is because it seems to produce positive results for the group (e.g., learning “more about the person” or for communicators to “grow closer”). Altogether, C/S/J seems to point away from a communication style that offends and, more importantly, toward something more functional (e.g., building familiarity and interpersonal closeness).

Similarly, Jack stated, “...It [C/S/J] helps you feel more secure...you see eye to eye

with the person and know where they really stand.” Several group members concurred that this communication style allowed group members to see each other “eye-to-eye.” JB adds:

I feel like it is a necessity. I think that if we didn’t have [C/S/J], we would be really insecure, saying “what are they really thinking?” Hurt feelings ... sometimes you get them, but sometimes you have to have them just to feel secure and know what people think about you.

At this point, it seems logical to suggest that communicators that see “eye-to-eye” also seek to know each other, or to “authenticate” (i.e., to seek the authentic real person in the other). Perhaps more intriguingly, seeking the authentic other, a “necessity” in JB’s terms, seems to create a reassurance for the Upward Bound communicators. This is a reassurance that helps keep them feel “secure.” Together, these two thoughts seem to reflect my previous mention of C/S/J serving a familiarity function.

Next, Leonard states, “It takes the seriousness of the group away so we can relax more.” Nicella shares this sentiment: “I think it’s a benefit. We often times laugh at it. It is just something ...like certain ‘cut ups’ we almost hear everyday.

We are used to it.” Meanwhile, Latoria explains: It’s just comedy and since we spent the whole summer together, we became kind of close like a family. So it’s automatically you can ‘cut up’ on each other.

Jessica notes: Like when you ask us for our opinion and stuff [while teaching] and people are always with a sarcastic comment to what they say...because we are used to each other. But some people still get offended. Yet, ‘cause we have been together for two or three years, when we cut each other up, we all laugh at it.

Ellissa adds: I think it’s a benefit. We often times laugh at it. It is just something, like certain ‘cut ups,’ we almost hear it everyday. We are used to it. Maybe it is something to like cheer a person up, or make you realize who you really are.

Finally, Anne states: It is not really conflict because they are just playing around. Because we know what each other is about and what...how each of us thinks and what is important to us.

At this point, it also seems that the these communicators benefit directly from a strong sense of familiarity. Whether it is from spending “the whole summer together,” seemingly earning an “automatic” right to use C/S/J talk, or being

“used to each other,” group members tell me that C/S/J is less hurtful because they are so tightly bonded. This is exemplified by Tiffany’s example:

Sometimes, like when Tootie talks, James always seems to find something wrong with it. [I asked her if this was an example of a “cut up”] Yes it is! It really doesn’t push us apart because we will look past it – because of the strong bond we have and we know how everybody is and we don’t pay much attention to it.

Interpersonal familiarity seems to function as a way to accept C/S/J, which at this point, seems to be developing as a commonly uttered speech act. Larry addresses the issue of Tootie:

Like with Tootie – no one really means it very seriously. It’s just a playful thing from us being together over the years. Because we have an understanding that we are all trying to get to a certain point [success in life] and the only way we are going to do that is if we work together and don’t worry about the little stupid things that go on.

These statements also lead me to realize that C/S/J regularly humors Upward Bound communicators. This is because Ellissa tells me that they hear it nearly “everyday.” Also, C/S/J, as Ellissa sees it, is in fact a “benefit” for this group. This communication style is influenced by familiarity and is a “playful” way of using talk, one that is like “comedy” and lets the group members “laugh.” “relax,” and be less “serious.” Thus, C/S/J, for many (but not all) group members seems to be a way of entertaining themselves.

Harriet states, “I don’t like them [C/S/J]. They can tear people up and sometimes they can pull people together. It shows how a person really feels.” Lenny adds, “this type of communication will cut you off and make you stop talking and not want to participate or anything...it is in our group.” Meanwhile, contrasting these statements is Jessica, speaking in terms of her public speaking ability, when she suggests that C/S/J “could be supportive; that could help you get better.”

This style of communicating, then, is not fool proof. It is not the all-doing tool with which these communicators build familiarity/closeness and entertain themselves. For some, this form of talk “does” other things (e.g., it may “tear people up” or “cut you off”). Interestingly enough, Jessica provides the first hint of the possibility that C/S/J serves this speech community as a way to build communication skills.

Intrigued by preceding responses dealing solely with C/S/J, I questioned the group

about their perceptions of the overall classroom “climate.” Seven out of the thirteen respondents used the descriptor “supportive” in their view of the communication. Other respondents used descriptors such as “fun,” “open,” “really close,” “playful,” “goofy,” “compromising,” “friendship,” “understanding,” and “togetherness.” Particularly interesting was Ellissa’s comment: Everybody gets along...no arguing and no fighting. Everybody works together. Our communication is good when we are together, but it lacks at times when we are by ourselves or we are separate.

This leads me to consider the possibility that this particular group, perhaps moreso than other speech communities, thrive (and are reliant) on their interconnectedness. It also encourages me to thematize the ways in which these members use talk to ensure this connectedness.

### *7. Monitoring*

In addition to the discoveries pertaining to C/S/J, I discovered that the Upward Bound group members communicate in ways that resemble hyper-vigilant monitors. There were many instances when I observed participants being highly concerned with their peers’ communication and overall behavior (socially and academically). These observations center on the ways in which students’ attempted to control and also show encouragement through talk.

It was well known in this community that Elaine was to be seen as a parent figure. In fact, I noticed many group members regularly referred to her with affection as “momma.” First, I observed Elaine yelling at particular group members who arrived back to class a few minutes late from a class break. Meanwhile, I observed Jack telling the group to “leave his mama alone” when they were “jabbing” Elaine for making an error in the delivery of a speech assignment. Another time, Elaine humorously, but genuinely, stated to me, “Keith, I have tried to teach my babies right.” Elaine’s “parental” status in the group seemed to set the tone for numerous other occasions when group members monitored each other’s communication.

On one occasion of monitoring, I observed Tammy communicating disgust and shame to Jack after I corrected him for never paying attention in class. Next, Andrea stated to Jimmy (regarding his messing with Harriet), “Don’t touch my girl... so you might as well sit down.” Next, while I was teaching, Lenny stated to me, “Are you giving a hard time to my brother?” when I corrected Jack for not listening to my instructions.



These instances seem to suggest that these communicators are not only aware of their peers' communication, but they have something to say about it if it seems out of line. In line with this, then, "monitoring" does not seem to be a sole event, one in which someone just watches. Monitoring was typically followed by some type of tempering, or "calling out" statement.

Tootie tells of her experience of monitoring:

One day someone, while we were talking, made a generalization about the Baptists and saying that they are always putting down Jehovah's Witnesses and I said, 'no we don't' [presumably do something that Jehovah's Witnesses do] and that 'you are stereotyping' and that person was like, "no I am not and you are stereotyping for saying you don't."

In this instance, Tootie was uncomfortable about comments made regarding practices of the religion with which she identifies. Much in the spirit of what seems to be an open, confrontation norm of communication for these individuals, Tootie challenged the other's statement and, in doing so, because the others disagreed with Tootie, there was a challenge made back to Tootie. At a basic level, if this were not an instance of monitoring, the statement would have inevitably been unnoticed. Given her apparent monitoring, her "calling out," and the others' return, it seems as though this group shows signs of a policing type behavior associated with their communication. In other words, if you, in using your talk, communicate something with which I do not agree, I will use my talk to challenge you.

Additionally, Craig discusses group participation and conflict and the need for intervention if not everyone is participating: For group process, I think it could be because there could be some people in the group who thinks they gonna have to do everything and they are elitist. Sometimes you have to set them straight and let them know it's a group thing and everyone's supposed to participate.

Finally, JB states: They [his fellow group members] encourage everybody. Like if I say something wrong, they form into a big ole' mass. Our whole group is like leaders. They're like honest and let you know how you are doing and what you are doing and what you are doing wrong.

Contrary to the preceding example with Tootie, where talk was used to negate the others' positions, it seems as though Craig presents a situation where talk is used

to ensure the others' parts in group communication. That is, talk in this case served to "set them straight," informing the overbearing others that "everyone's supposed to participate."

There is another function to the group's hyper-vigilance. These students also monitor each other as a means of motivation for fellow group members. This was apparent during various moments during my fieldwork. This seems to be most visible when considering class "Yes" moments. In the classes I teach, a statement was considered a "Yes" moment (similar to the commonly understood "light bulb" moment) when the student successfully connected the course material with their "real" lives. The Upward Bound class was extremely excited and proud of themselves and each other whenever "Yes" moments were declared. They often asked, "is that a 'Yes' moment?" after someone posed an insightful thought or comment. Next, "encouraging" talk occurred when the group would offer emotional assistance to one another. For example, Harriet seemed to suffer quite significantly from communication apprehension. During her portion of a small group presentation in class, Harriet broke down twice. However, she was able to finish with the support of her group. Some group members offered Harriet soft pats on the back, while Leonard, who was in the audience, noticeably nodded his head upward in a sign of support when she finished speaking (and was visibly distressed). I also observed Jack stopping his "brother" Lenny from doodling when I came near their desks. This was perhaps because he wanted to protect him from my impending correction. Other, perhaps less poignant, moments of encouragement occurred when group members reminded each other to complete their journal and other various assignments throughout the semester.

In addition to these moments of encouragement, I recall a time when Benny communicated with his group in a way that stays with me to this day. In this instance, Benny reprimanded some of the group for focusing their attention on external issues, such as the disorganization of the Upward Bound staff, and being distracted in their coursework. He smiled while stating to them, "That's why you all aren't gonna make it!" In other words, because he saw his peers attending excessively to political issues - things, presumably, over which they had little or no control - they were less likely to be successful in life (i.e., to "make it").

This moment is intriguing as it seems to be a finely constructed combination statement of both C/S/J and encouragement. Inspired by this utterance's complexity, by the overall strong sense of monitoring in this group, and the

richness of Elaine being treated as “momma,” I questioned the students about their apparent interdependence. Their response mainly centers on the notion of family and time spent together.

James states, “When we go to lunch, we always sit together. We eat together. We talk together. Whatever we do, we do together.” In line with this, the group characterizes their time together (in addition to being filled with C/S/J), as time in which they are strongly connected. Nicella states, “Elaine stated, “... Some people in my class are considered my sisters and my brothers and it is like we play the role of the family.” To this, Tootie adds: They [this Upward Bound community] are very open with how they feel. They have fun and laugh together. They work well together because they accept each other’s ideas and no one has to feel nervous in the group because it is family-like. They are very close.

Finally, and perhaps most poignantly, Larry states: I think there are two types of family. One is your biological family, which you are bonded to at birth. Then there is your social families which are made up of close friends which you treat the same, and sometimes even better than [biological] family.

At this point, it is abundantly clear to me that this group talks about itself as a family. With the utterances above, I can now move beyond relying solely on the talk that Elaine is seen as then “momma” figure in this group. Here, this Upward Bound community describes themselves as “open” and “close,” sibling-like, and perhaps family enough to spend nearly every moment of their lengthy time in the Upward Bound program together. Even more telling is Larry’s distinguishing between “types of family,” and his indication that perhaps social families (and likely, the Upward Bound family) hold more weight to him. Given the family-like quality then of this group, it would seem to follow that monitoring and subsequent “calling out” or “encouragement” talk would serve to maintain the family relationship that this group has in place.

Two additional reports from my interviews seem to solidify the notion that these group members use talk to maintain their tightly bonded relationship. First, JB states, “If one person dropped out, everybody would feel bad – like it was their fault. And if everybody succeeded as a whole, then we accomplished our goal as when we first came in.” In other words, JB’s success (and happiness) in Upward Bound is largely dependent on the success (and happiness) of his fellow communicators. This is evident in his utterance about what would happen if his peers did not have success. Next, when questioned about her relationship with

fellow group members, Jessica states: I love them. Before I came in here, I had a void in my life and they are like a completion of it – they complete it – because they are my friends and even though some of them get on my nerves, I still love them with all my heart.

Comments like these from JB and Jessica lead me to better understand the extent to which these individuals are connected to other individuals in their group. What seems even more important now is the emotional tie group members have for one another. Both these individuals discuss “feelings” (e.g., “feeling bad” if a peer “dropped out” or “loving” group members because they filled a “void” in one’s heart). When communicators are linked to one another intellectually and emotionally, I cannot help but consider the many ways in which their talk might be affected by such a connection. As previously discussed, it seems fair to suggest that the acceptance of C/S/J and various practices of monitoring construct the bond between group members and also is informed by the already existing closeness.

I spent a significant amount of time in this essay delineating traditional approaches to studying “politeness” and the phenomena of “defensiveness” and “verbal aggression.” I attempted to re-enter the Upward Bound communicative scene, so as to re-approach pre-existing data on this group’s communication style with a different, hopefully more culturally enlightened lens. In doing so, I discovered that this speech community uses talk in ways that seem anything but traditional or universal. I spend the remaining sections of this essay further discussing the ways in which these communicators use unique, culturally-rich ways to a) talk about their communication (Carbaugh, 1989); b) construct family; and c) all while constructing and communicating in the terms of a distinctive speech code (Philipsen, 1997).

### *8. Terms for Talk*

Carbaugh (1989) identifies four levels of how communicators talk about their talk. I focus on three of the levels: “act,” “style,” and “functional” talk. Regarding the “act” level:

[. . .] a cultural term is being used to identify the verbal performance of an individual, be it a tuneful weep or religious speech. At this level, what an individual is doing with words is identified and culturally coded. (p. 99)

In other words, talk at the “act” level pertains to descriptions of things “done.”

For example, a religious speech is a type of communication that accomplishes worship, praise giving, and community building. It is a specific kind of speech act.

I noticed the Upward Bound community regularly insulting or teasing each other. When questioned about these speech acts, respondents identified this type of talk as “cut ups, slams, and/or jabs” (again, C/S/J). Granted, the combination of words was not used for this type of act. However, when questioned on various statements, and also when talking to each other about various statements communicators made in my class, group members named this talk accordingly. More significant is the likelihood that these uses of talk are, in Carbaugh’s (1989) sense, “identified and culturally coded” (p. 99). Unless I probed the respondents with jargon-type interpersonal language during our interviews, they did not refer to their talk as “insults” or “teasing.” When a person is communicating in such a way, they are labeled as using C/S/J. Their choice of this description of their talk vs. those that are more clinical or formal in nature, demonstrates to me that Upward Bound members identify their talk in terms of the “act” level. Interestingly enough, group members did not refer to their hyper-vigilant monitoring as such. They did not call this repeated talk “monitoring” as I labeled the talk above.

“Style” is an additional “level” of talk in which it, according to Carbaugh (1989), “becomes important in the study of cultural terms because it provides a sense of spoken enactment (act or event) as a selection of one rather than others” (p. 100). In other words, interlocutors have a variety of ways in which they may or may not speak. Talk about “style” pertains to that way of speaking that was chosen by communicators and, in turn, which was left unchosen.

One of the most striking discoveries from my time with the Upward Bound community relates to the notion of a “style.” There were many occasions where members would speak in ways that seemed to contradict their style of C/S/J. This was a dynamically engaged group of communication students. So, I regularly experienced full participation while teaching and trying to have a discussion. Students would often use “traditional” talk. For instance, they would state “When I think of ‘defensiveness...’ or “I feel like you are hurting my feelings...”. To use this type of talk and *not* “Man, you ‘cut me up!’” or “I don’t need you ‘jabbin’ on me today” respectively seemed to peak the attention of those listening. The fact that these instances took place is not quite as striking as is the response that these communicators faced. On most occasions, those around the speaker of such

“traditional” talk would respond back, “Oh, nice ‘school talk,’” or “Look who’s using ‘school speak.’” This leads me to believe that a) these communicators had at least two styles with which to speak, C/S/J or “school talk/speak.” To choose the former seemed to earn one the right to be in social graces. (The sociality of this group will be discussed further below.) To choose the latter entailed the “school/talker/speaker” hearing about it and inevitably being compelled to change one’s speech or bear with the C/S/J talk. Therefore, because group members had at least two styles to choose from, it would likely follow that Upward Bound members talk about their talk on Carbaugh’s (1989) “style” level.

Carbaugh (1989) describes his “functional” level of talk in terms of a “shaping,” one where “indigenous labels for speech identify powerful symbolic events in speech [. . .] indirectly and reflexively” (p. 101). Whereas the “act” and “style” may reflect the means of speech, “functional” terms are the ends, or the “various outcomes” of speech (p. 103). The “functional” claim points directly to Hymes’ (1972) argument that cultural communicators “do” or “accomplish” things through their talk. In turn, it reminds me of Philipsen’s (1992) “socially consequential” assumption of talk:

“speech is both an act of and a resource for ‘membering’” (p. 14). Thus, “membering” is one specific accomplishment. Together, Carbaugh (1989) seems to provide valuable insight as to the Upward Bound community.

First, this group does membering with its talk. Evidence for this claim is most apparent in the hyper-vigilant monitoring in which they engaged during face-to-face conversation and general class (group) discussion. And by “members,” I am arguing that they “member” not so much by exclusive terms, but rather by the processes with which they talk among each other and through the talk that they utilize to discuss their communication style. As previously mentioned, I regularly observed group members policing each other. For instance, they would reprimand each other when returning late from break, correct each other for talking in a loud voice, yell at each other if they were not paying attention in class, etc. When questioned about these behaviors, respondents spoke most frequently about this being a family; thus, these ways of interacting were family-like. I illustrated how Elaine was referred to as “momma” by group members, how respondents told me that their peers were “brother-” and “sister-” like, and how, in ways, the Upward Bound (“social”) “family” was potentially more like a family than the respondent’s “biological” family. To me, these are all either explicitly, or implicitly, family-like

things to do and say. I imagine that, if these communicators were *not* so heavily bonded, their talk might be the antithesis of that just described, perhaps non-protective, stranger-like (unfamiliar), and distant. This was clearly not the case. Incidentally, the claim that this group is a family seems reasonable to me, in addition to reasons previously mentioned, because of the group members' pronoun use. When discussing things like Upward Bound functions, group projects, or perhaps events that happened at lunch, this community speaks in terms of "we." The "we" pronoun was also very much present during my interviews with the group members. Granted, this is not an attempt to utilize the trite phrase, "there is no 'I' in 'team'." However, to me, "we" is more family-like talk than is "I." Thus, while this does not present the argument for this group's intense "sociality" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 13), it offers a possible explanation for the function of such language.

Further instances of Carbaugh's (1989) and Hymes' (1974) argument on the functionality of talk come to mind. Group members reported that C/S/J were regularly used to serve a number of functions. First, most group members told me that this way of speaking was "entertaining" or something to "laugh at." Thus, this form of talk's function was to entertain the group. This would not surprise me, as this group, although they were experiencing early college credit, often came from oppressed backgrounds. In turn, all respondents told me that they were unhappy with the Upward Bound staff. Entertainment, then, seemed like a reasonable thing to create through talk.

Second, interviewees reported that C/S/J was a way in which a) others could be "called out" or "straightened out" if they were doing or saying something inappropriate; and b) communicators could determine what the conversational partner thought of him/her. Regarding the "called out" or "straightened out" function, respondents told me that this particular communication style was a form of confrontation. If someone was wrong (e.g., acted out of place, or misspoke), then C/S/J was a way in which that person could be tempered, or put in her/his place. This makes sense to me as not saying something would seem to lead to a problem festering rather than being discussed. Next, C/S/J seemed to be a way in which group members required or forced self disclosure. That is, numerous respondents told me that this type of talk "showed the hearer where 'he/she was' and vice versa. Thus, C/S/J functioned to remove uncertainty and ambiguity. In its blunt nature, this style of talk promoted a climate in which interlocutors knew where the other stood.

### *9. At the Intersection: Functional Disfunction*

I previously discussed how those who study interpersonal communication seem to have a tight grip on Brown and Levinson's (1987) "Politeness Theory" and the notions of "defensiveness communication" (see Gibb, 1961; Eadie, 1982; Stamp et al., 1992) and "verbally aggressive communication" (see Infante, 1995; 1996; Infante & Wigley, 1986). In doing so, I demonstrated how the preservation of "face" is believed to be a "universal" concern of all communicators, regardless of culture (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman 1967).

In the sense of how I discussed them previously, these "universal" perspectives make sense to me. After all, with respect to "positive face wants," I often want others to embrace, affirm and approve of who I am as a person while I interact with them. Similarly, regarding "negative face wants," there are many times in which I want others to give me my space. I often want be more autonomous than interdependently engaged with others through talk. Also, I shy away from talk that is too aggressive for many of the same reasons listed by communication scholars earlier. Perspectives like those from Brown and Levinson (1987), Goffman (1967), Infante (1995; 1996), and Infante and Wigley (1986), and Searle (1976) seem reasonable enough to use them provisionally as a means with which to explore culture. Thus, in line with Rosaldo (1982) and Hymes (1990), I believe that taxonomies, with caution, can be useful tools even for the emic researcher. Regarding the universals I questioned in this essay, I am still more concerned than appreciative of these theories.

A large portion of the preceding essay highlighted the ways of speaking of the Upward Bound speech community. Through use of their terms, I discovered how they communicate in ways that traditional researchers would probably deplore. Using traditional knowledge, these group members talk in "impolite" way, modes of speaking that "should" threaten the other (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The insult-like content of C/S/J "should" threaten both the "positive and negative faces" of the hearer. This talk critiqued and mocked the other and, therefore, labeled her/him as less "desirable." In turn, C/S/J engaged the other into conversation when he/she might have wanted to remain autonomous, or uninvolved. Similarly, monitoring, and more specifically, policing talk also engaged the other and typically discredited what the other was doing. Contrasting this is the encouragement function of monitoring talk. While this seemed to engage the other (and thus threatened negative face), encouraging talk seemed to honor the hearer's positive "face wants." This talk communicated, "You are good enough, or worth our helping you through talk." Thus, this seems to be



an area where Brown and Levinson's (1987) perspective seems particularly efficacious. Communicators also spoke in "defensive" and "verbally aggressive" ways, those that "should" have damaged the self-concept of the hearers (Infante, 1995; Infante 1996; Infante and Wigley, 1986). Additionally, their talk "should" have put distance between the interactants (Gibb, 1961; Eadie, 1982; Stamp et al., 1992). Holistically, these ways of speaking "should" function in this way. However, in the communicative realm of the Upward Bound speech community, they didn't.

This group self-identified as a "family." They are "brothers" and "sisters," siblings created through talk. Communicators in this group are concerned for each other's welfare. In turn, they are worried that they would feel down if their fellow group members did not succeed. Within the world of these communicators, and based on *their* terms, the Upward Bound members were far from "incompetent."

At the intersection of linguistic universals and those who speak in ways that appear to contradict these universals is the Upward Bound speech code. According to Philipsen (1997):

Every common culture of which interlocutors might partake, and which they might use in speaking together, includes, among its parts, a part devoted to the symbols and meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct. *A speech code, then, is defined here as a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct.*" (p. 126)

In that the Upward Bound speech community talked among each other and talked about their talk in shared ways, they personify Philipsen's (1997) notion of speech code. Perhaps these young individuals *were* in fact enacting "politeness." Yet, it was *their* norm for politeness. This does not abolish the notions of Brown and Levinson (1987), Infante (1995; 1996), or Infante and Wigley (1986) or others similarly universal in argument. As Geertz states, "there is no such thing as human nature independent of culture" (p. 49). Thus, it humanizes them. It enriches traditional, etic based perspectives with the possibilities that come from exploring cultural ways of communicating.

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