

FAMILY COMMUNICATION IN THE 'OLD' FILM (2021): INTERPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Film is a medium that delivers social phenomenon that happens in the middle of society and certain messages for a problem. In a film, every character has different personality, especially when it comes to family. 'Old' (2021) tells a story in which a family spend their quality time at a holiday resort to create bonding moments. One day, they were invited to a secret beach and it turned out they grew older very quickly. That was when the conflict started and the integrity of a family was being challenged. This paper will discuss how communication within a family is analyzed from the view of interpersonal communication which is affected by conflict and social dynamic. The author will apply qualitative approach with content analysis method. From every scene that taken on this paper, the author will deliver the result of analysis into five components, such as openness, empathy, support, positive feeling, and commonality. The result shows that, from all five components, family communication addressed by the members takes them to unity and care, not something that can break them or conflicts.

Keywords: Communication, Family, Interpersonal, Conflict, Film

1. Introduction

Film is one of the artistic objects that delivers the meanings and messages of social issues. A good film is one that represents social reality through audio, visual, and texts (Irhani & Aesthetika, 2022). Film is more than just a form of entertainment; it constructs the viewers' thoughts through the messages delivered by the film creators. That is the way a film could educate people about life, whether it is fiction or nonfiction.

There are several genres of films that we can enjoy, such as horror, action, science-fiction, and drama. The word 'genre' comes from the French language that represents type, collection, or category (Kamalesh, Lakhota, & Pandey, 2019). Films that we can see these days are categorized into genres based on aspects in the story and we can sense that by viewing the whole part. The 'Old' Film (2021) is considered as a drama because it reflects social issues occurring in our life and involving families (Mukhibova, et. al., 2022).



Figure 1. The Family in 'Old' Film (IMDB, 2021)

'Old' (2021) is directed by M. Night Shyamalan which tells a mysterious and thrilling story about a regular western family. It was also adapted into a novel entitled "Sandcastle" written by Pierre Oscar Lévy and Frederik Peeters. The story started when a family had a trip to a remote island and it was just like holidays that everyone could have. On that beautiful sandy beach, out of the sudden, those family tourists found a dead body nearby. Mysteriously, those people started to get old and they had to find a way to stay alive longer. The situation escalated and that was when one of the families had conflict within their compound (Manao & Cyntara, 2021)

The film was shot in the Dominican Republic where the beach and cliff view were taken. That was the first location of Shyamalan's movie out of his hometown, Pennsylvania. There are several actors/actresses that contribute to the success of 'Old', for instance Gael Garcia Bernal, Vicky Krieps, Rufus Sewell, and Alex Wolff. The movie also got to the top of the Box Office list in the United States in the first week which beat 'Space Jam: A New Legacy' and 'Snake Eyes'. Based on the data from Box Office Mojo, 'Old' has brought USD 48,27 million of revenue from the US screening and USD 90,1 million from global screening (Zaravina, 2022).

The main characters in this film are family members. They are just like ordinary families who happen to spend their quality time throughout the holidays. It is reflected on the scenes that these people quarreled over the things in the family. There are several conflicts happening in the film within the family circle. The conflicts may happen due to lack of communication. If the members in the family do not maintain healthy communication, it will be possible to cause disharmony and misunderstandings (Izzulhaq & Simanjuntak, 2022).

Positive communication in the family can avoid conflicts and support the growth of the members (Pramono, 2020). Satisfaction in marital relationships also affects good parenting for the children and that makes the family more intimate to each other. The better the communication happens, the better the emotional condition of the children are. Therefore, quality time with family can create stronger bonds and communication which stimulates interactions among family members (Aryaningrat & Marheni, 2019).

There is some previous research discussing the matter of family communication in the film. Apparently, family communication can be researched through the lens of Barthes' semiotics by identifying some symbolic gestures and signs (Pratiwi & Kusumaningtyas, 2022). The data were taken from scenes in 'Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini' (2019) which contain gestures, non-verbal communication, and verbal communication. This qualitative research showed that positive communication can avoid conflict and support the growth of every family member.

Another research presented that permissive communication is the way to raise children and make family a comfortable 'home' to live (Utama, et.al, 2023). This research aims to identify communication patterns in a family which can address moral messages and support effective communication. This qualitative research then was written on "Family Communication as a Medium for Delivering Moral Messages in 'Just Mom' Film".

One more research that raises the issue of family communication is 'Representation of Family Communication in The Wonder Movie'. Family communication that conveyed in the movie was expressed through gestures, dialogue, shooting, and scenes. This study uses constructivism paradigm and semiotics approach to analyze. The ideology level shown in the film is patriarchal ideology in which the father figure took the dominant role in the family (Irhami & Aestetika, 2023).

After reviewing literature and previous research, the author aims to describe the family communication in 'Old' movie (2021) from an interpersonal perspective. The data will be taken from scenes, including gestures, verbal, and non-verbal communication, played by the actors. The concept of interpersonal communication by DeVito with five dimensions is applied in this research, such as, openness, empathy, support, positive feeling, and commonality. This study will employ qualitative content analysis in which the author tries to make sense of the context and create meaning or interpretation through some texts, substances, or other forms of content (Roller, 2019).

2. Theoretical Background

Theory and concept are used by a researcher to help analyze the data. They offer a framework to organize and to understand knowledge in specific fields. Without theory and concept, the researcher is not able to rationalize the big picture of the relationships between variables and concepts. Besides, the theoretical framework also can be well-designed as long as the researcher knows how to determine the variables and the methods.

2.1 Social Behaviourism Paradigm

Social behaviorism paradigm was found in the early 20th century and it was associated with these names, such as John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner. In this paradigm, the behavior of individuals is much influenced by the environment and it causes some changes in subsequent behavior (Aspandi, 2020). According to Skinner, social behaviorism addresses the way people live, care about their surroundings, and manage life itself.

In terms of communication, this paradigm aims to focus on comprehending human communication through the behavior displayed and the social factors that affect the process. The factors that shape our communications are the role of social interaction, cultural context and environment context. They could impact on how the people express themselves and interpret the message to another communicator.

2.2 Interpersonal Communication in Family Relationships

Communication within a family can occur in a dynamic way and that dynamic relations contribute to create relationships, maintain connections, and support personal development. There is where interpersonal communication could sustain the family relationship and family make a communication pattern which is unique and affected by each member's personality, cultural background, and traditions. Joseph A. DeVito 1997 (in Patriana, 2014) said that, in interpersonal communication, humans can develop these five elements within a group/family, such as openness, empathy, support, positive feelings, and commonality. Here, each of the component of interpersonal communication in family framework is explained:

1. Openness: Openness in the family means that every member of the family should be open / honest with their thoughts and feelings to each other
2. Empathy: Empathy comes when the children in the family feel appreciated because the communication between parents and children run very well. The parents can understand the children's situation so they would not miscommunicate or cause a new conflict.
3. Support: There are several actions that show support in a family relationship. For example, the parents give a chance to their children to speak and avoid arguments.

Active listening is one of the best actions taken. Parents and children should remind each other and they should come together to find the solution for family problems.

4. Positive feeling: Positive feeling is embraced when one of family members welcome / accept the other's feeling to maintain harmony

5. Commonality: This aspect talks about how communication can achieve successful goal as expected by the whole member of the family

2.3 Film

Film is a communicative media that has audiovisual features and delivers a message to a group of people in a certain place (Asri, 2020). As one of the instruments of mass communication, a film could tell or inform a lot of stories once at a time. Film also takes its viewers to go through space and time and talks about pictures of life which can influence society. Film is not created for entertainment only, but it also teaches people plenty of lessons.

A film maker may bring up their own experience or social event into a film story. Film always records the reality that grows and develops in society and projects it into the screen so the viewers would enjoy it. According to Redi Panuju, film is the most effective tool to spread missions, ideas, and campaigns. Pictures, dialogs, and characters of the film are very important in bringing messages. Film can be the object of research in social study and should be appreciated so that the filmmakers are motivated to produce more. Communication studies have contributed a lot to the development of research in film or motion pictures.

Films have been made into different genres which become tools to deliver messages and to entertain the crowds. The power of audiovisual in the film can touch the people through feeling and moral values. There are a lot of implicit messages contained in a film and they can be eloquently exposed to the audience. Through film, a lot of the audience can feel related to the story or scenes that reflect their lives.

2.4 Encoding and Decoding

Encoding and decoding were introduced by Stuart Hall which are applicable when communicators give or receive messages through media. Encoding is a process when the sender arranges the message with the best coding before it is accepted by the receiver (Afifah, 2023). Whereas, decoding means a process when the communicator receives the message and makes an interpretation. This is when the communicator also tries to reconstruct the message given by the sender.

Between encoding and decoding, there is always the possibility that distortion might happen. Misunderstanding could happen if the receiver of the message misinterprets the intention of the sender. This misunderstanding is influenced by perception which comes from the value system that we embrace. However, perception can lead us to see objects, messages, or the surroundings with different angles.

3. Methods

Methods in research are used when the author needs to gather, analyze, interpret, and make conclusions. The methods will lead the author to aim for the answer of the research questions. There are some approaches that are applied in research, for example quantitative and qualitative methods. This research will use a qualitative approach where the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural context and find out the reasons behind behaviors and situations.

3.1 Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research is conducted when the researcher understands and interprets any event, interaction, and behavior in certain situations with some perspectives (Fiantika, et. al., 2022). Qualitative research does not require statistical procedure to analyze the findings during investigation. The interpretation constructed by the researcher is shaped by the experience of the researcher with social and historical values. Subjectivity does influence the interpretation and also perspective applied by the researcher.

Human behavior is the key observable point in qualitative research. In this study, scenes of the film are the units of observation and the researcher tries to understand the object / human behavior through those scenes. In qualitative research, generalization is far from the aim of this method, meanwhile, this method creates the extrapolation of meaning of the research object. Once the meaning is found, the author could describe the condition of the object in a comprehensive way.

3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

In content analysis, the author constructs the meaning from the object that is being observed and investigated. The author in this research has the task to encode the messages taken from the film, such as texts and scenes. Before conducting the analysis, the author is supposed to extract all data from the texts in the media or we call it 'sampling technique' (Mayring, 2014). The data would not be meaningful if the author did not analyze them with the textual content and other components. The author should follow some sequence to operationalize the data into meaning making.

Firstly, the author will determine the units of analysis. Units of analysis are a group of scenes that the author has selected and will discuss in the study. The selection of scenes is collected based on the categorization of theory. In this matter, the scenes are categorized into five components of interpersonal communication and each scene represents each component, such as openness, empathy, support, positive feeling, and commonality. Afterwards, the author constructs the interpretation through encoding the texts and visuals in each scene.

4. Results and Discussion

This part includes the investigation and analysis of the components in the film. The components which are examined in this research are the scene, expressions, texts, and other forms of storytelling techniques on the screen. In the discussion part, the author gives interpretation towards the collected results. The author will provide some insights, perspectives, and also explanations in a significant way. To strengthen the analysis, the author needs to tell some of the background story from the film and the context will help illustrate each scene in the discussion part.

4.1 Synopsis

The story began when a family from town came to a beach resort and planned a family vacation. The father, Guy Cappa, and the mother, Prisca Cappa, were having conflicts and almost separated, but they still wanted to entertain the whole family for bonding time. Guy worked as an actuary who dealt with life probability and risks. Meanwhile, Prisca, the mother, worked as a curator in a museum and she had cancer. For quality time, they also went with their two children, Maddox Cappa, the older daughter who was supposed to be 11, and Trent Cappa, the younger son who was supposed to be 6. When this family

had breakfast in the morning, a hotel staff approached them and offered them a hidden beach nearby the hotel. They were so excited to find out the new secret place for pleasure.

Apparently, they were not on their own in the car taking them to the beach. They met another family consisting of father, mother, daughter, and, the elder one, a grandmother. The father, Charles, was a surgeon on holiday, took his wife, Crystal, daughter Kara, and his mother, Agnes to the secret beach. Those families did not know each other, but their children, Maddox, Trent, and Kara, still played together. There was a driver who took them in a minivan and the driver was not very open to share about the hidden beach. He just instructed them to take the path down the beach and let them enjoy the rest of the day.

Strange things happened when Trent found a dead female body at the beach area and the rest of the guests were in shock. The doctor even was unable to identify the cause of the death. They were all scared and they could not go out of that place since the water got higher. Another strange issue happened at the beach when Prisca found out that his son and daughter grew that fast. She was panicked and the conflict with her husband was not finished yet. The situation got weirder when there was a couple of psychologists and a nurse trespassing and joined the people at the beach. An African-American celebrity was involved as well at the beach and he was accused of the killing and all troubles. More arguments were made and they still had to make a solution to get out from that mysterious place. However, the center of attention of this film is about the family itself and the way they maintain their relationship through tough communications.

4.2 The Significances of Interpersonal Communication

The author divided the analysis into five significance of interpersonal communication which are analyzed by the film characters' behavior and scripts. There is openness, empathy, support, positive feeling, and commonality. Each component will be discussed with the captured scene and conversation between characters in the film. At the end of each evaluation, the author will conclude the ideas so the reader would understand the interpretation.

4.2.1 Openness

The part about openness occurred when Guy and Prisca argued about their relationship and family plan. It was taken in the hotel room on the first day they arrived at the resort. The time was night when they were about to rest, but the children stayed outside their parents' room. However, the children still overheard what their parents were arguing about.

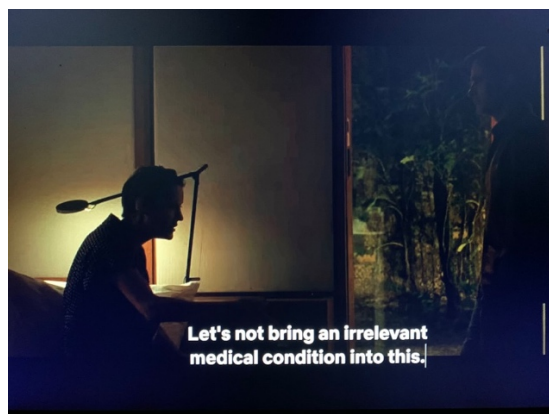


Figure 2. The scene between Guy and Prisca arguing

- Prisca : “We were on a course to separate. That’s confusing enough for us. Let’s not bring an irrelevant medical condition into this, Guy. Compartmentalize. It’s only for three days.”
- Guy : “You found a place?”
- Prisca : “Yes.”
- Guy : “Prisca, come on.”
- Prisca : “You’re always thinking about the future! It makes me feel not seen.”
- Guy : “You’re always thinking about the past. You work in a goddamn museum!”

From the text above, this couple has expressed their own feelings during their marriage. Guy, as the husband, still cared about his wife’s health, meanwhile they and their children needed quality time even though they were about to separate. Prisca felt that he should have not thought about the condition because she wanted to make a good time as a family. She also expected that Guy appreciated more of her existence in the family which caused her to think of leaving the marriage. However, Guy was kind of a man/ husband who kept thinking about the plan ahead whereas his family should have been his focus, especially on a holiday. That holiday should be an effort for them to reunite or come back stronger as a family which meant that the divorce could have been canceled.

4.2.2 Empathy

Empathy comes in the family when one of the members in the family accepts the others’ situation through communication to avoid bigger issues. In *Old* film, there were a lot of conflicts because they were in difficult circumstances. One of the scenes presented that Trent, the younger son of Guy and Prisca, grew very fast and became an adult. He and the other ‘child’, Kara, apparently were in a relationship already and Kara turned out to be a pregnant woman. Their parents were in shock because everything happened in only a couple of hours. However, Maddox, Trent’s sister, who turned adult as well, tried to calm down the situation and be understanding as possible as she could.

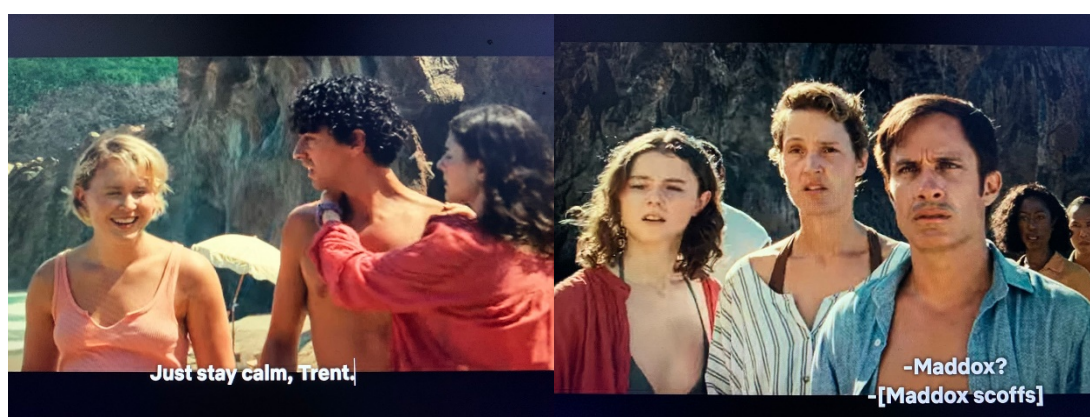


Figure 3. Maddox tried to calm down Trent in front of their family

- Trent : “Mom, you’re better. Maddox. Maddox?”
- Maddox : “It’s okay, Trent. Just let Mom and Dad figure this out.”
- Prisca : “My God, Guy.”
- Trent : “It’s okay, right, Mom?”

Charles : “Jack Nicholson and Marlon Brando were in a movie together”
 Nurse Jarin : “If she walked into the emergency room, I’d say she’s about five months pregnant”
 Trent : “What?”
 Kara : “What?”
 Maddox : “Just stay calm, Trent.”

Maddox fully understood what had happened in that situation, especially for his brother, Trent. Maddox was one sibling that used to accompany her brother when their parents were arguing. Even though Prisca, their mother, was shocked, Maddox tried her best to put herself in her brother’s shoes. She tried to make peace in the group without bringing more tension and she convinced their parents that everything was going to be alright. With a lot of pressure attacking her brother, Maddox gave her empathy for Trent to make him feel better and lower the tension.

4.2.3 Support

Support is needed when one of the members in the family is in trouble and finding a solution is the utmost goal. Support system is someone or some people who give themselves for others who need to be listened to and embraced. There are a lot of moments within a family where the members need support from each other. For instance, the wife and husband or parents should strengthen each other to give the best care for their children. In this film, Guy and Prisca had a dialogue and they discussed the wellness of their children after they found out about the absurdity near the secret beach.



Figure 4. Prisca tried to convince Guy that they would find help

Prisca : “Your hands are shaking.”
 Guy : “Yeah, they are.”
 Prisca : “Yeah, you okay?”
 Guy : “We’re on a beach with two unrelated dead bodies. That is just statistically impossible.”
 Prisca : “All three kids are reacting to something. Only the kids. I mean, look at the

doctor's daughter. The kids are reacting to something they ate. Or they caught something. We're on a remote, undeveloped island, but we have a doctor here, so...let's get the doc to look at the kids."

In this matter, Prisca tried to convince her husband, Guy, that they still get some help from the doctor. Guy seemed confused and indecisive to face all of the problems and he listened to his wife's best advice to take care of the children. She gave support to his husband so he did not need to worry about anything else and immediately found help. Prisca also made sure that his husband felt alright and asked him to talk about the plan for their children.

4.2.4 Positive Feeling

Positive feeling is reached when one family member gives positive affirmation to another about something. It could be a dispute that has lasted for so long and they just find or accept what their relatives have felt so far. Guy and Prisca, a couple that kept their own problems behind their children are the ones that finally made positive affirmation to each other. One evening at the beach, they finally talked about the affair that occurred a while ago which almost caused the divorce. It was started by Guy who confessed about what he felt.



Figure 5. Guy and Prisca talked about their feelings about the affair

Guy : "Prisca, I have to tell you something. I saw your text messages one day. He says romantic things."

Prisca : "I'm sorry."

Guy : "I don't know who I would have been okay with, but...with that guy? He's-he's a joke. He's a pretend person. You deserve someone so much better than that. I should have said something when I saw it. I hide from everything. I'm a fucking coward."

Prisca : "This was no one's responsibility but me. Your anger should be aimed at me, just me. There's no place I want to be with you. Do you believe me?"

Guy : "I want to be here...right now."

Both Guy and Prisca were open about their feelings and they were not that awkward to talk about the affair. In that conversation, Guy did not attack or judge Prisca at all. Nonetheless, he gave a positive affirmation that Prisca deserved someone better who could have loved her more. On the other hand, Prisca admitted that it was her who made the fire in their house. She did not blame her husband, Guy, at all but herself. She accepted that Guy could be angry and she knew that very well. The dialogue ended when Guy finally said that he wanted to be ‘there’ ‘right now’. Being ‘there’ means that he just wanted to stay with his family, including his wife, to protect each other and stay put. Other than that, he also did not want to focus or look back to the past. He just wanted to focus on the present and did not mean to bring anything from the previous time.

4.2.4 Commonality

Commonality is a condition when members in the family have a similar way of thinking, especially when it comes to making decisions and solutions. However, there is a difference among siblings in terms of characters and mindset, but those do not prevent them from agreement on something. In an emergency situation, when there are not many options left, commonality should be reached. Trent and Maddox, the siblings in ‘Old’, were the only two people left on the beach after everyone who went there was dead. They should survive from the situation and there was not much time left.



Figure 6. Maddox and Trent in older look before leaving the beach

- Maddox : “We have about...13 hours left, do you think? We just got three days older while you held my face.”
- Trent : “Should we keep trying to get out?”
- Maddox : “I guess so.”
- Trent : “Want to make a sandcastle first?”
- Maddox : “I wonder if everybody continues to feel like a kid when they’re our age or is it because we were kids yesterday?”
- Trent : “Idlib sent me a message I never decoded. Yeah, we thought we were so smart.”
- Maddox : “Decode it.”

Due to limited time and also resources, Trent and Maddox did not have many choices and getting out was the only decision to save themselves. They both agreed on that. There were actually two things that they had in common at that specific time, which were getting out of the beach and still feeling like children. Maddox and Trent were enlightened by the idea of decoding the codes which helped them to get out. Also, while having some time, they agreed on playing like children because both of them felt that their souls are child-like even though they already look mature.

5. Conclusion

This paper discusses how families communicate within an occurrence. In a family, different characters of the family members are very normal and the way they communicate interpersonally could be different too. From this case, problems in family do not disrupt the unity, but get them closer. In an emergency situation, they kept communicating to find the best solutions and decisions to protect themselves. Even though there's still a personal issue happening in the family, the integrity of the family is the main goal to be maintained and achieved.

All five components in interpersonal communication occurred in the dynamic in the film. Both parents, who are actually on their way to separate, are fair enough and open to express their feelings and prioritize their children's happiness. They were not aware until they faced a strange pattern regarding their ages. When Trent was accused of impregnating Kara, Maddox showed her empathy and really understood his brother's feelings. Both of their parents, Guy and Prisca, worked and supported each other to give the best care for their children amidst the situation. Even though they were not really good in a relationship, they still accepted each other to show positive feelings and confessed what they really felt. After they were dead, there were only Trent and Maddox who still protected each other. They have similar thoughts to get out and survive from the anomaly and, with their inner child, they finally succeed in finding the way out.

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