10 Things I Hate About You: Analysis of Communication

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"10 Things I Hate About You (10TIHAY)" came out in 1999 and is a spinoff Shakespeare’s play *Taming of the Shrew*. Bianca is a popular, pretty sophomore at high school who wants to date Joey Donner, the stud of the school, but is forced by her father’s crazy rule to not date until her older sister Kat does. Kat hates conformity and remains guarded to everyone around her, and refuses to date any of the misfit boys at her school. Cameron, a new boy to the school wants to date Bianca and devises a plan to get Joey to pay Patrick to date Kat so Bianca can date. The movie revolves around the dating lives of Kat and Bianca Stratford.

Throughout the movie, *10 Things I Hate About You*, the characters utilize three main interpersonal communication concepts and theories to communicate with one another, which include nonverbal communication, impression formation theory, and social exchange theory. One of the main concepts of communication used throughout the movie is nonverbal concept; especially by Kat in the way she uses it to keep people away. The impression formation theory is demonstrated through the relationships of Cameron and Bianca and between Kat and Patrick. Social Exchange theory can be seen through the different relationships of Patrick and Joey, and Patrick and Kat. *10 TIHAY* displays different levels of quality communication between the characters. I will also compare my style of communication to the characters.

One of the most prevalent communication styles throughout the movie is the nonverbal communication. Examples from the movie come from the different nonverbal codes categorized by researches from their studies that include:
movement and gestures, eye contact and facial expressions, space/territory, and personal appearance (Beebe & Beebe p. 199). Kat displays easy to read examples of nonverbal communication through her facial expressions, tone of voice, and movement. There is a scene where Kat and Patrick are in the car and she leans in for a kiss. Patrick does not lean in, making Kat extremely mad and hurt, which she shows through her pinched mouth and eyebrows. She also jerks backwards and gets out of the car without another word slamming the door, all movements indicating her anger. The original movement of leaning in showed her immediacy for Patrick (Beebe & Beebe, p. 211). Another example of a nonverbal cue by Kat is the next day, when Patrick is sitting with two other people in the bleachers discussing the situation of Kat and him, he almost gets hit with a soccer ball. Kat’s purposeful kick of the soccer ball at Patrick is an example of a gesture showing anger. When they cut to Kat, she gives him this nasty death glare and crosses her arms. Kat is clearly pissed off at Patrick and shows this perfectly through her facial expressions and closed off body posture. Nonverbal cues can sometimes help aid when making impressions about a person.

The Impression Formation theory can be applied to the relationships between Cameron and Bianca and Patrick and Kat. The Impression Formation theory states that “we form impressions through perceptions of physical qualities and behavior, information people share themselves, and what third parties tell us” (Beebe & Beebe, p. 73). The first time Cameron sees Bianca, he is smitten solely based off her physical appearance. He defends her to his friend Michael when Michael calls her conceited and selfish. Cameron says that she is “pure”, before even
meeting or talking to her. A halo effect, attributing positive qualities to others without confirming the existence, is seen by how Cameron perceives Bianca (Beebe & Beebe p. 74). No matter what others say about her, Cameron will do anything, including learning French and getting someone to date her sister, to be with her.

The Impression Formation theory can be applied to how people perceive Patrick and Kat. Most people fear him because of the far-fetched stories that people circulated about him. For example, he went to prison for killing someone, was a porn star, and also ate a live duck, minus the beak and feet. The stories combined with his tough attitude and personal appearance of long hair and rugged clothes make people assume that he is this terrifying guy. Kat is the only person who does not judge him off his appearance but rather solely off his gender and asks him, “Do you even know my name screw boy?” when he first approaches her. Kat uses a different set of categories to base her impressions of people. She uses things like your gender and whether or not you conform to society’s cookie cutter image. Your impressions of a person might lead to different rewards and costs in a relationship.

The Social Exchange theory can be seen in the different relationship costs and rewards between the characters Joey and Patrick and Patrick and Kat. Joey sees the relationship between him and Patrick solely as a business deal. He must pay Patrick to date Kat, the cost, so that he can date Bianca, the reward. Patrick’s relationship with Kat originally starts off as a deal, being paid money for each date he had with Kat, the immediate reward, but eventually their relationship grew into a loving one, the long-term reward. The only cost he has is the effort spent trying to
keep the fact he’s being paid by Joey a secret, which ends up making him lose Kat two times in the movie. The first time he asks Kat to the Prom and she asks, “Why? What’s in it for you?” Kat is definitely questioning the benefits he sees from being in a relationship with her. He loses her again at Prom when she finds out he was paid to go out with her by Joey. In order to get the relationship back, Patrick uses the money or cumulative reward he got throughout the deal to purchase a guitar for Kat. In the end, the reward of getting Kat back outweighed his cost of having to spend his money on a guitar.

The movie displays many different relationships where interpersonal communication is used both efficiently and inefficiently. Patrick and Kat’s relationship originally starts out as interpersonally unhealthy because of the deception and trust issues involved. Patrick’s motives to start dating Kat were wrong but his intentions to keep dating her are pure. You can see this in his relentless pursuit of her. I am predicting that their relationship will stand strong in the future. One of Patrick’s last lines is, “It’s not every day you find a girl who is willing to flash someone so you get out of detention.” He even admits that some jerk paid him to take out this really great girl and then says, “Yeah but I screwed up. I fell for her.” Their communication style as a couple is not the most efficient. Some things that they would need to work on is opening up because they are both guarded people. Also, talking to each other in a calm manner when they are frustrated instead of just storming off.
Another relationship from the movie that has a chance of a future is the intimate relationship of Cameron and Bianca. In the end, Bianca discovers that Cameron is the one she wants to date. She sticks up to Joey for him at the Prom and she ends up going on a date with him. Cameron and Bianca had issues with miscommunication in the beginning, because they both wanted something different and neither one of them clarified what they were talking about. They need to work on escalating and maintaining their relationship by learning about the other person and expressing their true emotions to one another.

There was no specific character that was completely competent in interpersonal communication and strategic flexibility. The book states that a, “competent communicator is both effective and appropriate” (Beebe & Beebe, p. 25). Each character has strengths and weaknesses. Kat is knowledgeable and skillful in using communication concepts and rules like her constant use of nonverbal cues. Bianca has strengths in being an other-orientated communicator, for she is constantly thinking of others. This movie shows many different interpersonal communication theories and concepts but not one completely competent communicator.

Throughout the movie, different communication styles came up that were similar to my own. I like to use nonverbal communication a lot when I talk to people. I use illustrators, which are “cues that accompany verbal messages and add meaning to messages (Beebe & Beebe, p. 201)” when telling dramatic stories or explaining a situation. I also use facial expressions and tone of voice to convey messages like Kat
did throughout the movie. I have learned that in order to a competent communicator I must be effective and appropriate by becoming knowledgeable, skilled, other-orientated and adaptable when communicating.

In 10 TIHAY, there were three communication concepts/theories demonstrated: nonverbal communication, Impression Formation theory, and Social Exchange theory, all of which effected how the characters communicated and responded to one another. This movie has good scenes to learn about the concepts and theories in interpersonal communication. It is important to remember that while the movie showed different aspects of communication, your style of interpersonal communication is uniquely your own.