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Communication 331

Theories in Film Paper #2

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**Communication Theories in *Edward Scissorhands***

Have you ever considered what life would be like with no hands? Better yet, what life would be like without hands and having lived the majority of your life in isolation? These are questions the human race wouldn’t usually ask them-selves or even contemplate for a moment. However, while watching the film *Edward Scissorhands* both of these questions raced through my mind constantly. Edwards lived a very different life and was abruptly thrown into the everyday life of the people around him, obviously there were bound to be some communication barriers to conquer.

One of the first communication principles I noticed throughout the film, from early parts of the movie to the very end, was not necessarily anything to do with Edward’s personality but more so Peg Boggs’ personality. Peg is the local Avon lady and on a slow business day she decided to travel up the mountain to a rundown home that seems to be off limits to the rest of the town. Once she enters the house she realizes that something is different about this place, then she finds Edward hiding in the shadows and begins to understand that he has been trapped her from the outside world for quite some time. What amazes me about Peg throughout the film is her people-oriented listening style. Peg asks this strange boy questions about what his hands were scissors and offers to take him under her wing so to speak, when the normal reaction would be to take off running and screaming from uncertainty.

The definition of people-oriented listening is basically people who are more concerned with the community and happiness of others around them, these types of listeners are interested in developing connections with others through communication. Peg shows her interest for the community by hosting a barbeque for the neighborhood to meet Edward; she also appears to host a Christmas gathering every year for the neighbors.

Another interesting listening technique I noticed throughout the movie was portrayed by Peg’s husband. Peg’s husband seems to have a hard time catching onto, or noticing important things mentioned in conversation. I would say that her husband has become a professional at selective listening, which is only hearing bits and pieces of salient information. I will provide you with two examples to support my position on selective listening. In the beginning of the film we see that the family is enjoying a meal with Edward for the first time, Peg’s husband keeps referring to Edward as “Ed”. Of course, Peg wants Edward to feel respected by the family so she demands several times that her husband use his correct name, which seems to completely go over her husband’s head as he continues to call Edward “Ed”. Later in the film, Edward meets the family at a local diner where he informs them that Marge has tried to seduce him in her new hair salon; while the rest of the family is completely alarmed by his remark the father continues on about a different piece of information.

Since we are already discussing different listening techniques, now would be a good time to mention a minor example of a listening technique I picked up on during a scene in the film. Edward is arrested due to a misunderstanding about a breaking and entering incident; once he has been declared mentally unstable the judge agrees to let him go. However, in one scene we see one of the local police officers asking if Edward will be okay to function in the outside world, the examiner explains in great detail Edward’s communication capabilities and provides the officer with proof that Edward is unstable. Once the officer hears the long and drawn out explanation he says “Just tell me if he’ll be alright out there?” Immediately this scene made me think of the action-oriented type listeners, they want a short and to the point message; instead of a long drawn out explanation.

Amongst the characters there are also plays on power roles, most predominately with Kim and Jim. Jim clearly shows his power over Kim and even his friend group throughout the movie. However, in my opinion the power is given to Jim. Kim tries to dispute his wishes at times, but always gives in when it comes down to the wire. He uses manipulation to convince her that he should get his way. In several scenes we see him raise his voice of act in an angry manor to convey that he is more important and authoritative than the other people he is immediate circle.

Of course the most important and interesting character in the film *Edward Scissorhands* is Edward himself. Edward emerges into the film almost like a new born child, not understanding much about the things that happen around him and needing constant attention. In the beginning of the film Edward relies on his nonverbal communication skills a significant amount more than his verbal communication skills. His facial expressions convey the messages that he cannot put into words, his unsureness and confusion; even emotions are more predominantly understood due to his use of kinesics. Edward uses other nonverbal codes throughout the film as well, such as proxemics. However, we don’t see Edward use much of haptics or proxemics until closer to the end of the film when he finally learns to embrace another being. Kim helps him learn how to hug another person and he is finally comfortable will the strength of her tough and the closeness it demands for them to embrace.

In conclusion, I was honestly surprised to see all of the communication theories and concepts that appeared throughout *Edward Scissorhands*. I was wondering how well actors could portray things such as listening types through acting. The actors did an outstanding job of bringing the film to life and giving examples of what life would be like for someone in Edward’s situation. I thoroughly enjoyed this assignment; it shows me that I am capable of picking up on others communication skills and styles. This is necessary practice for my future as a professional communicator!