

Analysis of Parent-Child Relationship in the Perspective of Satir's Iceberg Theory: A Case Study of the Dunphys' Discourse in *Modern Family*

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Abstract: This paper presents a case study of the Dunphys' in the American TV series *Modern Family* to examine the discourse between parents and children from the perspective of Satir's Iceberg Theory and to investigate the influence of discourse on parent-child relationships. The study argues that parents should cultivate the ability to position themselves within the "relationship" rather than the "change." In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of children's capacity to think from others' perspectives and avoid imposing their own perceived correct views on others.

Keywords: Virginia Satir's Iceberg Theory, Parent-child relationship, Discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

Modern Family, a family sitcom that premiered on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) in 2009, employs a mockumentary format in its filming and storytelling, as previously stated[1]. The show's humorous style serves to not only entertain audiences but also prompt them to consider family relationships. The characters' personality traits, behavior, and particularly their discourse patterns leave a lasting impact on viewers. The family dynamic of Claire Dunphy and Phil Dunphy is a prime example of a typical family, wherein conflicts often arise between parents and children, and disagreements or differences in viewpoints frequently occur among family members. These conflicts are characterized by distinct discourse patterns and expressions that reveal the nature of the relationships and psychological processes of the individuals involved. Utilizing Satir's Iceberg Theory as a framework and applying various language analysis methods, this paper seeks to interpret the parent-child relationship in this family. The paper aims to investigate how parents and children can establish or undermine their relationships during communication by analyzing the effects of the language family members use in their interactions.

2. Overview of Satir's Iceberg Theory

Virginia Satir is a well-known psychotherapist and a pioneer in exploring family therapy models[2]. According to Satir, an individual's relationship with their birth family is profoundly interconnected and profoundly impacts their entire life.

Satir employs the iceberg analogy to explain this relationship, illustrating that while a massive iceberg's visible actions and reactions are apparent above the sea's surface, only one-eighth of it is visible, with the remaining seven-eighths concealed beneath the water. The broader hidden ice represents the "internal" aspects we have long ignored. By uncovering the mystery of this glacier, we can unearth our desires, expectations, viewpoints, and emotions in life, enabling us to see our true selves.

The Iceberg Theory offers significant guidance for parent-child relationships within families. As a couple, parents must learn to place themselves in a "relationship" and consider each other's perspectives. As children, they must learn to think from others' perspectives and avoid restricting others with their own beliefs. Parents and children must also learn to respect one another and communicate equally. The Iceberg Theory encourages us to understand and care more about our family members, encourage our children, and criticize them less.

This paper utilizes the television show *Modern Family* as a case study to analyze the communication patterns and discourse analysis in parent-child relationships within the context of this sitcom.

3. Case Analysis

In contemporary society, the family unit is often subject to external influences, mainly through parental guidance. Pursuing a happy and harmonious life is a universal aspiration, with a peaceful and healthy family being a fundamental prerequisite for attaining this goal.

The quality of an individual's family atmosphere during their formative years is crucial to their future outlook. A positive and optimistic disposition can be fostered through experiencing a supportive and nurturing family environment. However, children seldom experience their parents' childhood, and parents are often unable to fully comprehend their children's unique qualities or discern how best to provide them with love and support. In light of this, it is essential to recognize that a family plagued by contention, disparagement, violence, and indifference is not conducive to fostering positive personal growth. Such negative outcomes can often be traced back to the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by parents toward their children.

3.1. Overview of the Family Background

Claire exhibits a dominant and competitive personality, which can be attributed to her upbringing in a divorced family with a sickly older brother. Her challenging circumstances necessitated her to display strength and resilience. Her

father's beliefs about parents' total dedication to their children also influenced her outlook on child-rearing. Claire has devoted herself to her family for over a decade as a housewife, viewing the relationship between parents and children as one of elder and junior with a necessary distance. Regarding her children's romantic relationships, Claire tends to be overbearing and even meddling, as evidenced by her efforts to break up her eldest daughter's relationship. Her focus on academic performance is high, making her a challenging parent in the eyes of many children[3].

In contrast, Phil is a popular parent among many children who values fun and experimentation over traditional approaches to parenting. He emphasizes teaching through enjoyment and fostering friendship with his children. Phil prioritizes his children's happiness, considering academic achievement a secondary external aspect.

The three children raised in this family exhibit varied personalities. The eldest, Haley, is viewed as a rebel by her parents due to her disinterest in academics, which often causes conflicts with her mother. The youngest child, Luke, is treated with great care and affection, leading to him being spoiled and naive in his interactions with the outside world. Alex, the second eldest, is talented and intelligent, with a history of academic success and outstanding achievements. Still, her parents' inattention and indifference toward her have left her longing for their love and attention. Despite her efforts to attract their attention through exceptional performance, she is often met with indifference and is now indifferent to others.

3.2. Analysis of the Conversation

Conversation: (Background: The family is wearing Christmas sweaters and preparing to celebrate Christmas via video call when the mother, Claire, notices a burn hole on the couch and wants to know who the smoker is.)

Claire: Real smokers, if you don't step forward, all three of you will be punished.

Children: What? That's not fair.

Phil: I can forgive you for smoking, but I can't forgive you for lying. No, I can't forgive you for smoking either. Does no one want to confess voluntarily? It's okay, do you know what will happen next? We'll cancel Christmas!

Children: Dad, that's not fair[4].

This dialogue features Claire's assertion that if a child is unwilling to admit smoking, she and Phil will enact punishment, and all three children will face equal consequences. This approach by mother Claire represents a threat to the children's rights. Expressions such as "all three of you will be punished" may engender a tendency to evade responsibility in the children, leading to inconsistent responses. Throughout the conversation, the discourse between Phil and Claire is characterized by the imposition of control and the use of intimidation, infringing upon the rights of both parties and impeding the smooth exchange of ideas. As a result, a conflict arises in the conversation.

4. Interpretation of the Parent-Child Relationship Based on Satir's Iceberg Theory

Effective communication is vital in promoting mutual understanding and comprehension between parents and their children in the context of parent-child relationships. During this communication process, parents should aim to understand the psychological differences between themselves

and their children, including differences in culture and personality traits. Additionally, parents should treat their children equally and respect and recognize and encourage specific behaviors and characteristics that their children possess. This approach creates the most favorable gift and educational environment that parents can provide to their children. To foster harmonious, stable, and long-lasting relationships, parents and children should approach each other with a positive and optimistic attitude toward the personality and lifestyle differences between them. Effective communication that appreciates, rather than denies or blames, the other person's perspectives and feelings should be practiced to fully understand what each individual wants to express from their innermost being.

In addition to understanding the personality and lifestyle differences between each other, it is also essential for parents and children to learn how to express negative emotions arising from their psychological needs. Only when emotions are relatively stable can individuals reason and take the correct approach to dealing with one another. It is common to experience negative emotions such as unhappiness and irritation when faced with unpleasant or unfavorable situations. However, it is crucial to learn how to understand and express one's feelings appropriately to resolve and eliminate negative emotions in a timely manner.

According to Satir's Iceberg Theory, everyone has aspects of themselves that are unknown and unwilling to be accepted. However, this does not mean these aspects are forever buried in our hearts and cannot be seen. Only through self-understanding and the ability to change those aspects of ourselves that we are unwilling, do not want, or cannot face can we gradually recognize those hidden parts of ourselves that are unwilling to be seen and accepted by others. This recognition allows us to transform these aspects into new strengths that can be used to solve problems and improve relationships with others. This approach enables individuals to face challenging situations and confusion with a new attitude and approach, ultimately leading to harmonious, stable, and long-lasting outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The concept of family education pertains to the education parents provide to their children throughout their growth and development. According to the renowned Chinese education specialist Xue Lixin, parents serve as children's first teachers, enabling them to comprehend the world and acquire knowledge. Family education is deemed critical for facilitating children's physical and psychological well-being[5]. This paper applies Satir's Iceberg Theory to analyze the conversations between a family depicted in the television series, *Modern Family*, and explores how parental communication impacts parent-child relationships. Furthermore, the paper suggests appropriate solutions to address the concerns raised. It is hoped that this paper will foster increased awareness and discourse surrounding these issues.

As contemporary society continues to transform various aspects, such as social structure and ideological beliefs, conflict and discord among family members are becoming increasingly prevalent in this era of rapid development, diversity, and information exchange. In order to more effectively promote parent-child relationships and foster a harmonious and positive family environment, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the unhealthy and

disharmonious elements present in our surroundings while adopting novel perspectives to view them. Additionally, family education in both Eastern and Western societies should engage in mutual learning and complementarity to construct a family environment that is both harmonious and fulfilling[6].

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