

Ethnography: Parent and Child Communication

This ethnography focuses on a conversation between parent and child, Jerry and Caitlin Close. Caitlin, 22 years old, graduated from the University of Florida's nursing program in Spring 2017. Since then, she's been working at Tampa General Hospital as a nurse on the ICU stepdown floor. In this section, patients are under critical care after traumatic incidents and/or surgeries. Most patients depend fully on the nurses and staff for all their needs; most cannot move on their own, and almost all are hooked onto IV drips. As a young employee, Caitlin decided to take night shifts. She starts at 7 in the evening and works until 8 in the morning. Not only is this physically demanding, but this is also critical hours for patients. Unfortunately, many deaths occur in the night when patients are sleeping. Because of this, nurses on hand must be hyperconscious of patients' conditions. Jerry, 55 years old, is an aerospace engineer working for Orbital ATK. He received his bachelor's degree at the University of Illinois, and his master's degree in engineering from the University of Wisconsin. He has been working in the space industry in central Florida for some 30 years and is well known for his accomplishments.

The dialogue between Jerry and Caitlin was held over dinner at a small pub in Ireland. Our family had taken a trip to Ireland for my spring break, and we made a stop in Cliften for the night. The restaurant was warm and lit with gas lamps. We were situated in a small corner booth, so the music was background noise between talks. When I was given this prompt, I had initially thought of the conversations I would want to listen in on. I know that my father and my sister have some opposing views when it comes to politics, so I figured that would be something easy to analyze. At the same time, those conversations often become heated and emotionally charged, and that is not quite the mood you look for in family vacations. As time passed, I realized how much I can get out of normal table talk. My sister and I live in Tampa while my father is over in Melbourne, and we only make

it home about three or four times each year for the holidays. When we do talk, normally mundane conversation about work and school is interesting and full.

J = Jerry

C = Caitlin

(Speaking about another private company buying a floor at TGH for an in-house hospice center, which would move the ICU stepdown to a new section and have technicians on a different floor reading monitors)

C: There's nothing new or innovative about it. It's just the same thing, you just need qualified people to do it.

J: They don't need new and innovative. You only need new and innovative if it means less mistakes and better patient care. I mean, that's the way it should be.

C: Yeah, well-

J: (cutting her off) That's the frustrating part about it. This new company came in and they made a better offer and they're [the hospital] making money off it.

C: Right. It's technically allowed, but I don't like it. It's not what we're used to, but it's technically safe. They're [the patients] are still being monitored, but I don't know. (three second pause) And it's dumb because you can have the screen be mirrored on us, like the monitor tech would be on the other floor and the screen would be mirrored at our section

J: (cutting off) Exactly, they only need to duplicate that

C: Yes, but our manager doesn't want that because she says "Oh, if there's a monitor at our station, that means we're liable for it. If there's a monitor, then someone should be watching it at all times

because what if, you know, something happens and we could have seen it but we didn't do anything because we were waiting for someone to call

J: (cutting off) Well, the sad thing about it is that's the reality of the industry.

C: The legal barriers-

J: (cutting off) The lawyers come into medicine and make things difficult for everyone.

This portion of the talk happened in one minute and forty-one seconds. While it seems that there is not any conflict, there is an unspoken play with power done with nonverbal communication. Jerry dominates the conversation that is a topic relating to Caitlin's work. In just this short amount of time, Jerry cuts Caitlin off four times. I decided to stop my written analysis at that point since the topic shifts slightly, but the same pattern continues for the next five or so minutes.

Knowing my father, I am aware that he talks a lot and has many opinions that he wants to share, but I wanted to focus on how this habit applied specifically in conversations with his children. Jerry is a well-educated man, and he keeps himself updated on news and current events, but his professional concentrations are in engineering. Yet, he through his speech, he makes it seem as if he is an expert in hospital management and medical work. While it is insightful to bring in different perspective to create solutions, such as engineering management to hospital management, making inferences about other fields is not enough to make definite statements.

Throughout the entire conversation, I noticed that Caitlin looked down a lot when Jerry was talking and avoided eye contact when voicing her own side of the case. Caitlin and Jerry are not even on opposing sides in this conversation, but it seemed that Caitlin struggled to fit in her own comments. Her voice would begin to drop off whenever she was interrupted, not because she felt that she was unconfident in legitimacy, but because she knew that she would not be able to finish once Jerry

started speaking again. I have seen her speak of this possible change before with our mother, and she spoke with a very different style. With that, though, my mother also has experience in working with healthcare and with medical organization and management, so she had a more similar level of insight to the topic.

When it comes to Jerry and Caitlin and communication between parent and child, I think it is difficult for parents to understand that their children sometimes know more than they do. It is the parent's responsibility to teach children at home, and children listen to their parent's like the bible. But roles change when children go off to high school and university and begin learning on their own. At one point, Caitlin will be just as, if not more, decorated than Jerry, but he will still probably talk to her as if he knows as much or as if he is teaching her a lesson. While he should teach us lessons as a father, he will never be able to teach Caitlin about medicine and nursing.

I believe that this conversation between parent and child shows the difficulty parents have in understanding the changes made by their children's experiences and knowledge. Along with education, maturity comes with age, and sometimes that confuses parents when they are dealing with older children. There should always be that respect for the parent from the child, but the parent should also realize that they do not have to speak to the child as a kid anymore.