

Heather Niedfeldt  
Interpersonal Communications  
Film Study – “The Joy Luck Club”  
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### **Film Study: *The Joy Luck Club***

Family, friends, colleagues, and strangers all affect us throughout our lives. We interact with each group differently, and whether we realize it or not, they each have a way of impacting our lives through how we communicate with them. Communication happens for and with everyone. People are able to meet many needs, including physical, spiritual, and identity needs. Without communication, it is hard to build up the relationships around us. While we usually do not think about how we communicate, it is still a process that takes place all the time.

Through the assigned readings, class discussions, and the film, “The Joy Luck Club”, many elements of communication are evident. By understanding effective listening, communication competence, and gender roles, it is interesting to analyze the issues that are taking place within the film. “The Joy Luck Club” not only emphasizes gender communication, but the inter-cultural dialogue that is taking place as well.

Communication competence, which includes effective and appropriate ways of communicating when interacting with others, allows for good communication between people (Floyd 29). In the film, a character that exhibits most characteristics of communication competence is Jing-mei Woo. While she isn’t perfect in communication competence, she does give us a positive example. Even though her mother has passed away, she is adapting to the changes that are occurring around her. While the other mothers who are a part of the club crowd around their daughters with pride, Jing-mei adapts appropriately to the situation and tries to be happy for them even if she feels somewhat left out.

Jing-mei also has the characteristic of self-awareness. When a person is able to have self-

awareness or self-monitoring, they are able to behave a certain way according to the people they are with (Floyd 31). Jing-mei knows that when she is with the other members of the Joy Luck Club, she is to present herself with poise and show dignity to them because they are her elders. When her mother was still alive, Jing-mei and Waverly had some issues with each other, each trying to be perfect for their own mothers. Jing-mei learned to cope with their competitiveness over the years, even though it is still hard for her to deal with at times. Another example of self-awareness that Jing-mei allows us to see is when she is telling a story to Rose's daughter. Throughout her time with her, she doesn't answer the little girl in ways that are complicated. She tries to explain things in ways that the little girl may be able to understand.

When the older women tell Jing-mei that her twin sisters have written a letter from China, she is somewhat hesitant at first in visiting them, but finally decides to take the trip. This example shows her empathy or other-centeredness characteristic in communication competence. Empathy allows a person to see something from another's perspective in order to understand and act upon it (Floyd 31). When Jing-mei was a little girl, she didn't understand how her mother could abandon her sisters. However, because her mother is gone and the letter was received, Jing-mei realizes that she has to meet them, if only to let them know about their mother. They know nothing about her, so in order to give them answers, she must put aside her insecurities and comply with their wishes to see them.

Jing-mei also has a strong sense of ethical intent. Ethics help a person by treating others fairly, being honest, and avoiding choices that go against their beliefs (Floyd 33). While parts of her relationship with her mother were rough, she learned to be open and honest in her feelings. She was able to open up with her mother after Waverly criticized her during one of their group dinners by confessing that she feels like a disappointment to her. Through these traits, Jing-mei

can be seen as a positive competent communicator.

Cultural communication is a huge part of the film. The differences that are depicted in third culture groups cause difficulty for the mothers and daughters in dealing with their relationships. Whether it is how they view life, their opinions, or how they live, the mothers in the film find it difficult to see their daughters either change from the Chinese cultural norms or to find themselves stuck in the same situations the mothers fought to get out of.

When Jing-mei and Waverly were young, their mothers wanted them to excel in something. Jing-mei had the piano; Waverly had chess. However, the two girls were not having fun. They decided that they did not want to be obedient, because as Jing-mei said in the film, “You can’t make me. This isn’t China.” The daughters don’t understand that the mothers only want them to do things they weren’t allowed to do. They have opportunities that weren’t available to them when they lived in China. In this example, the two generations are having difficulty with cultural awareness because they are thinking differently in their reasoning’s (Floyd 46). They believe they understand each other, but it is difficult to see their differences in how each generation thinks. It is hard for each to respect one another’s experiences.

One major example that is encountered in the film is with Waverly and her mother, Lindo. While values of the culture should be similar, there were instances where they were not. Waverly knew that telling her mother she was living with Rich would disappoint her because it went against her mother’s value, or what should be (Floyd 44). Living with a man before she was married wasn’t something desirable in the Chinese culture; however, in the American culture today, it is seen as acceptable. Waverly also has to worry about the Chinese norms, or rules that guide people in the way they act (Floyd 45). When Waverly brought Rich over for dinner, he failed to show respect to her mother, unbeknownst to him. Because of this dual

cultural movement, it caused their relationship to grow tense. Each felt like they were being judged all the time. They never felt good enough for one another.

Differences between cultures around the world affect communication in important ways. Behaviors are affected by what a culture expects (Floyd 41). In this film, the Asian culture and American culture tend to clash. However, at times, they reflect each other like mirror images.

The relationships that some of the daughters have with their husbands tend to cause the mothers to worry. Ying-Ying's first marriage in China was not a happy one. Her husband used her, only cared about their son, and slept around with other women. Because of this, she killed her son because she wanted to take away the one thing that belonged to him. Ying-Ying sees that her daughter Lena's marriage isn't healthy, either. Lena isn't able to express her concerns with keeping everything equal, which reflects a high-context culture outlook, similar to the Asian culture. In a high-context culture, people tend to not express their true opinions so that they keep peace with the other people (Floyd 49). In order for the marriage to work, she tells Lena that she has to know what she wants because if they aren't sure what the marriage is based on, it will keep breaking down.

An-mei and Rose have similar issues when discussing Rose's marriage. Rose was a person who was independent and expressed her opinions, something that was different from the Asian culture for a woman. In the American culture, it is more of an individualistic culture, where people aren't afraid to be themselves (Floyd 48). However, after marrying Ted, she focused too hard on him and lost sight of her individuality. An-mei tells her that she has lost awareness of her own worth.

Focusing on the individualistic culture, it is easy to see this come out when Jing-mei and Waverly are younger. Referring again to the piano and chess, they decide that they do not need

to be obedient. They want to be self-reliant instead of following their mother's wishes. American influence has changed the way they see themselves. They decide to take their own paths instead of belonging to a group.

In Waverly's situation, the masculine and feminine cultures are an issue to Lindo. In a masculine culture, the men and women have certain roles while in a feminine culture, the roles can be interchangeable (Floyd 51). The American culture is more open to change and equality. Waverly has a very successful career, something that should please her mother. However, when comparing the Asian and American cultures, it may seem a little more drastic than what is hoped for by Lindo. It seems like Waverly cannot please her, but perhaps Lindo feels like she isn't good enough for her own daughter now. By looking at both perspectives, it is easier to see how each side is affected.

As viewed in this film, communication is the basis of understanding one another. Without that openness and willingness to learn about one another, we tend to lose sight of how we are different and what that means for us in the world. By looking at communication competence, cultural group communication, and gender roles, it is easier to see past the uncertainties when communicating.

## Works Cited

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