



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 21: Family Communication and COVID-19

****Please note: This is a rough transcription of this audio podcast. This transcript is not edited for spelling, grammar, or punctuation.****

Participants:

Trevor Parry-Giles
Jeffrey Hall
Mei-Chen Lin
Jordan Soliz

[Audio Length: 0:45:27]

RECORDING BEGINS

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Americans have been forced out of work, others have shifted to working from home and many children and young adults are now attending school at home at least part of the time. Romantic relationships have also been disrupted or affected as some people have shifted to long distance relationships or quarantined with new partners. What influence are these changes having on communication in families and romantic relationships. That's what today's episode of *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast* explores. This question is an important at the core of all of our lives as we're living today and we have expert panel of scholars to help us think through how family communication has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Professors Jeffrey Hall, Mei-Chen Lin and Jordan Soliz join me for this interesting conversation.

First, a bit more about today's guests. Jeffrey Hall is a professor of communication studies at the University of Kansas. Dr. Hall is the author of nearly 60 articles and book chapters on flirting and



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dating, humor in relationships and making and keeping friends. Dr. Hall has been interviewed by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Time Magazine* and CNN among other outlets. We're proud to have you on *Communication Matters*. Hi, Jeff. Thanks for joining us today.

Jeffrey Hall:

Hey, it's a pleasure to be here.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Mei-Chen Lin is an associate professor of communication studies at Kent State University. Dr. Lin researches communication in aging, including older adults' identity, intergenerational communication and difficult conversations between aging parents and adult children. Dr. Lin is currently the associate editor of *The Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Hi, Mei-Chen. Thanks for being on *Communication Matters*.

Mei-Chen Lin:

Thank you for having me here today.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Jordan Soliz is professor and Leland J. & Dorothy H. Olson chair in arts and sciences in intergroup and family communication at the University of Nebraska. Dr. Soliz researches communication in multiethnic racial families and interfaith families and Dr. Soliz is the past editor of *The Journal of Family Communication*. Hi, Jordan. Good to see you again. Thanks for joining us today.

Jordan Soliz:

Thank you. Looking forward to this conversation.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, in those introductory remarks, I talked about some of the ways that family life and romantic relationships have been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. What trends have you all noticed in how family life and romantic life have been affected by the pandemic? Was I right? Was I wrong? Or are there other impacts that you want to indicate?

Jordan Soliz:

I think the question really should be what hasn't been affected by this. Right? I think that if we look at our personal lives, if we look at lives of family, friends, colleagues, if we see news reports, it's everything from how we connect with people, how we deal with disconnection. I think for some people it's wow, I got to spend all this more quality time with my family. I got to know my kids more. I got to know my partner more. In other cases, it could be wow, I have to spend so much time with these people, balancing all these things. So, I think that we're still probably not even



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understanding how this is affecting us so much. We're still in the middle of this. I think we're all dealing with the emotional effects, the work-balance effects in all of this. So, I don't know if that's really an answer to the trends as opposed to just saying yeah, it's affecting everything and I think we're still realizing this as we work through this.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I know a lot of our listeners and a lot of colleagues and friends and family members are facing a particular challenge if they have young children at home with the slow opening of schools and the impacts of the coronavirus on education. Many parents are working at home and working remotely and I've even read articles about academic couples with young children and where the productivity, the academic productivity in different sex marriages, the woman in the situation has seen a decline in their productivity. So, could anybody comment, maybe Mei-Chen on the impact of families navigating work and study spaces at the same time?

Mei-Chen Lin:

I think that this question actually related to the first question about the trends that we have seen in the family life. At the beginning, I feel like we were all in crisis mode. It's like what do we do, what do we have to do? And so, like children had to stay at home so how do we deal with the internet issue? How do we deal with grocery shopping? What's the work situation? So, we were trying to sort it out and just deal with it as it came. But throughout the summertime, I think that we started to switch to a different mode. It's more of a planning mode to me. It's like now we know the school is going to remote or it's going to go in-person, that my job is going to be in this situation or unfortunately, many people do not have a job or haven't found a job. And so, now what do we do, how do we plan for the remaining year, for the next four months with regard to kids, with regard to our own job situation and try to find resources and support whenever we can get to sort of plan this. You know, who is going to take the kids to school if that's the case? Who is going to watch the kids while one of the spouse going to? So, I think we spend a little more time on the planning and we continue to be at this planning stage. And just now, I think as we move into November, many families probably will start thinking about what's going next spring? What are we going to do? How should we prepare? So, we are moving into the next stage.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

There's a lot of uncertainty though, isn't there? I mean because if you plan and you've got it all set but then suddenly there's an outbreak in your community and you're back at home. It's got to be difficult for a lot of families to navigate those communication dynamics.

Jeffrey Hall:

I'd say that our entire discipline is committed to uncertainty as a construct that we're interested in resolving. Right? I mean our foundational theories are about uncertainty. And certainly, this is an



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incredible case study in how people are trying to navigate times of uncertainty and the amount of uncertainty is more than I've ever faced in my life. As a parent of two kids of my own, we've had back and forth between the schools' different modalities. Our universities that all of us teach at have gone back and forth on what they're going to do. And we've had huge disruptions to everything from childcare to whether or not we're going to get paid the same amount. And we're actually in many ways the most privileged condition that anyone in this country may be in as being able to work quickly from a remote location, have the means most likely to be able to provide for our kids and not worry about where the next meal's coming from or whether we'll be evicted. So, I think that we really, if we broaden the scope of this conversation, this is a fundamentally different moment of uncertainty and I think it's correct to say that we're looking to plan but I would also say it's correct to say no plans seem to hold up in the climate of this pandemic.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I'm glad you brought up that question of privilege and the relatively privileged position that certainty most of us find ourselves in but many of those of us involved in higher education find themselves in because it's complicated for us. It's doubly, triply, quadruply complicated for a lot of other people in working families and that sort of that.

Jordan Soliz:

Two things that came up, first, when you talked about some of the gender disparities, reports are saying on productivity, I think what this whole pandemic has brought to life is that it just amplifies the disparities that are already there. Right? Which is something that the disparities in family life, the stressors we see in family life, these have really amplified those and what I hope comes out of this is that when we can get back to "the new normal" is that we reflect on why this happened anyway. Right? The pandemic did not create this gender disparity. It simply amplified this. And so, I think there are some things that can come out of this that as scholars, as practitioners, as just people in families that we can work on. The other thing too when Jeff was discussing this, I thought about the notion that if you look at the communal coping literature, for example, this idea that we cope both as units, as family units but sometimes as individuals. And I think that's something that many families are dealing with is that sometimes they have the emotional resources to kind of work together as a family and other times people are dealing with their own emotions, uncertainty, anxiety and can't be part of this. Like this is our problem, we'll solve this. Right now it's this is my problem, I need to focus on this. So, I imagine a lot of us are going through stressors dyadically, as a family, as individuals. And yeah, it's just a really I'll say interesting time in a kind of euphemistic way. And I do think that when we reflect back on this, there's going to be a lot of opportunities to look at what we can do to improve family life and improve these disparities we just mentioned.



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Jeffrey Hall:

The colleagues that I collected data on the ninth week of the lockdown right at the beginning of May and we got a representative sample of Americans to kind of talk about the experience. And you saw more than a third of people saying that they were lonely all the time. We had two-thirds of our respondents say that their social needs weren't being met. We had people who were really suffering in terms of their sense of connection to one another. Many families were feeling trapped in their relationships and in their relationships with their children. And I think what's important about those data is that they told us really something very fundamental which is that, as Jordan was saying, a lot of times this is an amplification of what resources we already have or don't. If you're in situations in which your relationship is already troubled, this create such an incredible amount of stress. And the other part of that data that I think is pertinent to this conversation is that we looked at whether or not being able to communicate through modalities outside the home, video chat, telephone, email, etc. and whether these things tended to be positively or negatively related to the outcomes we're talking about. And what we found was that nothing approximated the strength of a relationship for a face-to-face conversation. So, although phone calls were positively associated and email was positively associated with getting your needs met and feeling less lonely, video chat was less likely to get your needs met as well as social media. But the bottom line in our research was really that face-to-face communication is still extremely powerful and we need that sense of connection to one another. And many folks right now, especially those who are isolated and lonely, I worry as the wintertime comes for most of North America, how many people might feel shut in and isolated as times goes on.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's an interesting insight because the data seems to suggest that technology isn't the fix-all, that a Zoom call doesn't quite do it. I know at NCA, we're planning for a big virtual convention coming up and I've been making the argument repeatedly that it's going to fine but it's not going to be a replacement for the actual thing, that people enjoy that face-to-face contact and that certainly it makes me think of our aging friends, neighbors, family members who I know face double layers of isolation because of their propensity to really suffer from harm from the pandemic and from the disease itself.

Jeffrey Hall:

Absolutely.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's interesting. Well, while we're with you, Jeff, you study and research romantic relationships and particularly flirting. I've been interested to see how some of the online dating platforms are now advertising new ways of connecting and dating. And what does flirting look like? What does



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dating look like right now? How is that changing? What trends are we seeing? Is Match.com, have they found the answer or what's going to happen here?

Jeffrey Hall:

I'm sure Match.com would love it if I said so if they listened to the podcast, of course. But I'll say this. What's interesting is some of the early literature on this, or at least not literature but *New York Times* reporting and otherwise, was saying that people were turning to was an opportunity to actually spend more time just talking before they actually took the risk of meeting someone in person. And if you think about it kind of from risk assessment point of view, to go out and have a drink with a stranger, someone that you met online in pre-pandemic years was somewhat risky. But you're in public location, you had some sense of who they were based on their online communication and then you could evaluate whether or not there's a potential mate. But in this era, it's like we aren't even sure if we're going to spend time with our friends in person. We're not even sure if we're going to spend time with grandma in person. So, to take a stranger out for a drink in a bar demonstrably one of the most dangerous environments you can go into is really risky. So, what I'm seeing as a trend is a lot of people are actually spending longer periods of time communicating through these modalities for the sake of trying to create connection. Unfortunately, the literature actually says that that's not the best tactic to finding the closest relationship partner. We begin to idealize our partner. We tend to actually not have as successful outcomes the longer time we spend online. So, it's kind of an interesting thing because on one hand I think people are spending more time flirting through conversation, through company and through just basically keeping each other, having someone to be around during this time. But on the other side, I think that it's also kind of interesting because it goes against the literature of what we ought to be doing in order to foster better connections. So, it's a solution but not a great one.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

You also study humor and this feels like kind of a humorless time. I study political communication. I've watched as sort of Saturday Night Live has tried to wrestle with how to make fun of and deal with the politics of the era. How do we do that generally? Can humor help us cope? Of course, we think the answer to that must be yes but where's the humor here?

Jeffrey Hall:

Yeah, there isn't any. And I've heard so people say I've got to laugh because otherwise I'd be crying. I think that that's happening a lot whether you're looking at politics, you're looking at national affairs, if you're looking at the fear and the death rates related to COVID. It is a time we desperately need to be able to laugh. I think a lot of people are turning to jokes and memes about things related to where my four o'clock bottle of wine awaits me and I need to have a moment to check out in the sense of humor allows to create a space of laughing and making fun of ourselves while we cope with all of this. And yes, the literature is really clear that coping through humor is



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one of its most promising functions for creating both an interpersonal well-being and intrapersonal well-being. However, in this time, you're right. Things are so dire, I wonder whether the limits of humor are just keeping us afloat in many ways.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

We were talking earlier about the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on our older family members, our friends and neighbors who are older adults I suppose is the best way to say it. Mei-Chen, this is an area focus for your research. I know that you study older adults. Anyone can be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but the risks of infection are particularly acute for older adults and we've just noticed or seen sort of this all play out in grand almost operatic scale with the President of the United States. Do you have any advice for how maybe adult children can navigate the challenges of speaking with their aging parents, their aging relatives about the pandemic especially in these times when people can feel so isolated?

Mei-Chen Lin:

Yeah. Well, before I answer that question, first of all, it's really hard to find an advice that will work for all. And I will give a couple of examples that I think kind of illustrates how different every family may be facing. But the other thing that is funny and interesting that you're mentioning, Trump's family, I think that the idea of—I'm not going to go into political conversations here. But to give advice about how we navigate these situations, first of all, the assumption is that both sides have to be on the same page. So, meaning that both sides have to think this is a really serious disease, that we need to do something about it. If you have either side that is really dismissing it or is really not thinking about it as we need to care so much about it and still go out and have fun or not really keeping social distancing, this is going to be a totally kind of situation that we're talking about. So, here is assuming that both sides are on the same page. And I can think of a few examples. The first one is my next-door neighbor. She's 97 years old and she fell from her bed last year and went to rehab and then went into the assisted living home. And the assisted living home hasn't opened for any outside visitors since March. So, her, there's no family, no friends that can visit in person. So, what her son has to do is to call her every day and two to three times a week, he will drive to her nursing home and park right outside of her window and then call her so that she can look out the window and then they can hear each other's voice. And when I call her, she told me that she appreciates what everybody's trying to do, everything to keep her safe, keep the residents safe but it's very lonely, it's very hard especially during the weekend. So, we have this kind of situation.

The other situation is, for example, like my own father. He lives in Taiwan and he has Alzheimer's and he is already in the advanced stage. And so, in February, he had a stroke and all the three kids are in the United States. So, we had to do a, this is crazy time to try to find people to help and talking with the hospital, the doctors and trying to find relatives and friends, pool all the resources to find an assisted living home for him. But we haven't been able to go back and it's



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been so many months. And he doesn't really know what is going on. He just knows that he was moved from home. So, the first situation will be a lot of grandparents that they usually are able to come out and help. Right? They are usually are coming and if I need a weekend away to go somewhere, then I'll call my parents, coming over to babysit the kids or give me a few hours that I can work. But that is not happening right now. What I'm trying to say is we think of many other scenarios and examples and it's very different. And how you navigate that really depends on how far you are from your aging parent, how many other siblings do you have, what the pre-existing relationship that you have with the parents, should you be the one who actually engages in those conversations or somebody else, what are the resources you have that you can actually put together, who is the neighbor, what's the friends, what's the community and then you have to assess all those family dynamics together before you can actually and even with that kind of assessment, it's still not going to give you a sense of certainty. It's not but that's how complex this is. But I think starting to think about the family dynamics and the resources that you have.

Jordan Soliz:

Do you think that as this pandemic continues to go on, we shift from kind of this orientation where we want to protect our older relatives? So, in my case, I think of my multiple grandparents that are alive, my children's great-grandparents. We shift from wanting to protect them to wait a minute, time is finite with them. At what point is staying away for too long, that cost outweighs the risk? In other words, do you think as this goes on, we start thinking it's time to see people, it's time to take that risk because of that connection, because we want grandchildren or children to spend time with their parents or grandchildren or great-grandchildren? I've started seeing that somewhat anecdotally and I'm just wondering your thoughts on that.

Mei-Chen Lin:

Well, I think you're absolutely right. At the very beginning, like I said, is we were trying to figure, we were trying to understand the disease. We were trying to understand how harmful it is to our older parents. But I think as time goes on and like you'd have seen some anecdotes that people started to want to connect. They will try to do it in a safe way. Go and see their aging parents or their grandparents and keep a good distance and even use technologies to try to bring a sense of togetherness so that they can continue that family relationship. I will see more and more of that. Of course, winter, like Jeff said, is a factor. It's going to be difficult but I think as Thanksgiving and Christmas are coming up, we do have to think about how do we make sure that they are not being left alone and that this is going to be hard too.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

One of the saddest things for me in all of this COVID pandemic narrative I suppose is the stories that you hear of people who are actually dying in hospitals or hospices or other care facilities and because of the pandemic, their family and loved one can't be there. And Mei-Chen, some of what



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you study is also end of life relationships and end of life communication. Are these stories I think accurate of the ways in which these important end of life conversations have changed in this pandemic and what do we do about that? Because I find them just heartbreaking. How do we navigate that?

Mei-Chen Lin:

Well, I think the answer is yes and no. Research already shows the conversation, end of life conversation is very, very minimum. People do have a tendency to avoid those kind of conversations for many different reasons. But research also shows that aging parents do not necessarily want to involve their children in this kind of conversation either because they don't want to burden them, they don't think that their children are level-headed enough to handle a lot of the decisions that they have to make when it comes to that point or they just want to keep their independence and autonomy. This is their private information. They want to keep it that way. So, I don't know for those people who already have everything set up, would they say let's have a conversation now. I don't think so. But they probably would remind their children where everything else is, remember this, remember that. But I'm hoping for other people who haven't had the chance or don't know how to open the conversation, this will be the time because you are right. There are many people that I know that they unfortunately had to say goodbye or didn't even get to say goodbye and didn't even know how to deal with their parents' wishes. And I'm hoping that even if we don't want to start by saying oh, I don't know what's going to happen to you because this pandemic shows that it's not older people that are at risk. Right? Because anybody with underlying condition, anyone could be affected. So, we can always start the conversation by I want to talk about this because it affects everyone. It could be me, it could be you. So, let's talk about what would be the best way then to deal with this if that does happen.

Jordan Soliz:

The other thing with this that I don't see a lot of people talking about is the mortality salience that is all around us. Right? For a variety of reasons, perhaps the divergence in views among this polarized population about the significance of this. But we're living in a backdrop of just horrendous loss of life, of suffering in addition to it affecting us emotionally, affecting our family lives. There's a lot of research that also shows when mortality is salient, that can amplify our biases, our attitudes towards others in a negative way. It can create more hostility and I think that's something we haven't also talked about. Especially in the United States which is very much conditioned not to talk about death, not to talk about in the life as Mei-Chen just talked about, I think this is forcing a lot of people to confront or spend a lot of time denying some realities out there. And how is that affecting us? How's that affecting social relations? How's that affecting our children? Right? Because at some point when this is all over, we're going to reflect on this and realize wow, when you look at the numbers, when you realize the stories, Trevor, as you talked about behind these numbers and the narratives of this, we need a national cry just to let the



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emotions out which I think so many people are dealing with so many different things. We have yet to kind of have this on an individual level, community level, even national level.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I also am curious if it's disproportionately overwhelming. And here I'm interested in the research that you do on race and identity particularly because one of the things that I think should be part of our national reckoning, our national cry, our national mourning but may not be and hasn't been as fronted as much perhaps as we might hope is the glaring sort of disparities and the disparate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented minorities, on all sorts of underrepresented folks. And what are the communication challenges that we face I think on that level? Or I guess that's what I'm trying to say is how can we bring that more forward and how can we talk about it more openly as a culture I think?

Jordan Soliz:

Yeah. I think the way you framed that was important. Right? Because at the beginning, we talked about this is a podcast about family and interpersonal and romantic relationships and we have this idea how are these families in minoritized ethnic racial groups managing this, talking about this? But maybe that's not the important question. Right? Because all the pandemic or the BLM movement has done is amplified, as I mentioned earlier, these systemic biases and systemic racism that's there in our structures and our institutions. So, it's not that it created anything new. It's not that all of a sudden families are like wow, there's racism out there or we're disproportionately affected by this. Right? So, many of the communicative processes and messages that we already see out there in terms of preparing for bias, understanding how to deal with the healthcare system that maybe not trust or understand, all of these things that families from minoritized groups have to deal with in everyday life is just, like I said, amplified. So, the question moving forward is not so much what do families need to do? It's what do we need to do as a society looking at these structures, understanding this? Instead of putting it on families, putting it on ourselves, turning the spotlight on these institutions and what is creating this disparity. Racial inequities are health inequities and that's what we need to focus on. And again, going back to what I discussed before is I really hope that coming out of this, this is one of those things that happens, that we realize there are statistics that explain this and then there's the why. And if we don't dive into the why, then that's going to be extremely problematic.

Mei-Chen Lin:

Jordan, I do have a question though. So, I understand that it's very important to have that conversation as a society. But I'm also wondering how do families of minorities talk to their children about all this social inequality, digital divide, racism that they are seeing right now? How do they help children to make sense of what they are seeing and experiencing themselves firsthand?



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Jordan Soliz:

Well, if you look at the literature and the research, not that I've done personally, but in a variety of all other disciplines, they'll look at these specific messages. Right? The again preparation of bias, cultural socialization, who you can trust, who you can't trust, how to buffer against discrimination. And again, there's not always a one size fit all as you mentioned before. Right? But again, it's this extra layer of kind of socialization and role of families that we know occurs in minoritized family whether it's ethnic racial in countries or religious minorities in different countries. And again, going back to what I said before is this is something that's been going on for centuries. Right? I think this also somewhat speaks to this notion of when we talk about race and families. So, Deadric Williams who is a family sociologist at University of Tennessee will talk about that we're all racialized. Right? And we have to understand that white is racialized also. So, some of these questions that we ask, we need to also recognize how is whiteness racialized. So, how are families talking about race in light of the pandemic, in light of the BLM movement? We also need to shift from a tendency to think that only applies to minoritized ethnic and racial families and how are white families talking about this, how are they talking about these structures, how are they talking about what they're doing to create the digital divides, to reify these things. So, again, I think there are, I'm not even say opportunities, there's necessary directions we need to go in understanding this to kind of alleviate this institutionalized bias and racialized structures.

Mei-Chen Lin:

Yep. You're absolutely right the way you said that. Privileged groups also need to talk about this, not just the minorities that need to talk about it.

Jordan Soliz:

On this note, I was talking to Mackensie Minniear who's a professor University of Georgia in their communication department. There's been more attention than I think in the past with BLM and more of this support from communities you typically didn't see. And she was discussing about what's this going to look like? Is this more kind of performative support or is this something that's going to be long-term enacted? But it's not just about talking about race, talking about privilege but how they're doing it. Right? Are they doing it in this kind of egalitarian colorblind way which there's major issues with that because we know then that these children and people don't see race and people need to see race they need to see racialized structures. So, it's not just about our people talking about this but how they're doing this, how they're talking about this and how do we get families to talk about race and racism and racialized structures in a way that can truly enact change as opposed to kind of this somewhat fantasy way of colorblind, we're all equal, let's just love each other because you're then not respecting the experiences of others.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, imagine that it is five years in the future, it's October 2025 and we're all getting ready to go to Denver for the NCA annual convention that November. We've already signed the contract so that's where we're having the convention in 2025. And the three of you are on a panel and the panel asks the fundamental question, how did the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic change family and relationship communication?

Jeffrey Hall:

I think a lot of this is dependent on what ends up happening in terms of the reckoning that Jordan is bringing to our attention. If it comes to pass that we're at a watershed moment of both issues around politics and issues around racial reconciliation and reckoning, particularly issues that have to do with the problematic situation we're in right now where white privileges now has a president who's a white supremacist, all of these conversations are going to be contingent on what happens next. And I wish that I could say how the election will turn out and I wish that I could say that once that election turns out that way that in two years there'll be landmark legislation that will protect people's health, that will look after the most needy, that there will be healthcare that actually is provided that make sure people aren't having kind of pre-existing conditions and basically structural factors that make them more susceptible to the disease. But I think that it all depends on basically what we all do as a country around politics and I have to admit I lack optimism on these issues for many good reasons and some that really has to do with the problem that there are structural inequities that are built into the way that a representative of government works and those inequities aren't going to be solved easily. So, I fear that our answers to those things are really based on a really big picture question of how harmful this will be depending on how long it lasts, how impactful, how successful that vaccine is and all of those things are yet to be known. But I don't look into that crystal ball and see an optimistic lens on it. I think it's hugely contingent on vaccines, policies, structures and all those things go back to politics.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Okay.

Jordan Soliz:

From the humor scholar.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. That's a joke I'm going to remember.

Jeffrey Hall:

Never been that good at creating humor. Always really good at studying it though. Right?



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Jordan Soliz:

I will say as a family communication sub-discipline, what I hope this does is continue the movement we're starting to see about not looking at families in isolation from the context. Right? That you cannot understand families without understanding the larger structure. So, almost as I've been talking with colleagues and some of my students really bringing in this more socioecological framework and providing a communication perspective on that and understanding families because what we're realizing and everything we've talked about is families are embedded in systems and they're embedded in social structures whether we're talking about gender, racialized, just whatever we're talking about. And what I would like to see coming out of this is really taking that idea and seeing that evident in our research, in our teaching, in our practice as family scholars and I think it applies to interpersonal relational scholarship also.

Mei-Chen Lin:

I'd agree with what Jordan was saying is that I think that because my research really focuses on elderly abuse and this pandemic really shows how prevalent, I mean it's already prevalent but it will continue and will be more prevalent when older people are in isolation. But this is not just a family issue. This is the system issue, this is the community issue and I'm hoping that this will be framed, which it is already being, but more research will be done to really understand that interconnectedness between the family and the caregivers and the community together, to try to minimize the occurrence of elderly abuse for that matter. But in terms of racial issues, I remember showing my students a PBS documentary and it was done in 2016. And there was Black Lives Matter movements, people were protesting, people were marching, people were trying to make a difference. If you didn't see 2016, you can just see it as 2020. And it makes me want there's nothing, we haven't made a lot of progress. So, like Jeff, I'm not so optimistic but I think an interesting direction for family communication will be how do families talk about these social-cultural issues and we tend to study family communication topics more of a relational based or conflicts, for example. But if we can move that conversation to this level and see what the influence of family can be to actually create that activism, create that motivation to want to do something different.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Mei-Chen, that was a great segue to our sort of final wrap-up question which is after all, the podcast is entitled *Communication Matters*. And so, we're always interested in how communication matters and in this pessimistic kind of dystopia that you all suggest is coming five years down the road, can communication make any difference? What do we believe is the future and the hope for our communication in the midst of all of this trauma and death and despair?



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Jeffrey Hall:

I was thinking of a positive, noting that I had been so dire and Jordan called me out on being a humor and flirting professor that's doom and gloom. I thought wait a second, you're right.

Jordan Soliz:

I don't think it was that far.

Jeffrey Hall:

I actually, one of the things that I have noted that could be something very positive and change is that in my own family I've certainly recognized that the importance of slowing down, spending time with my family, recognizing we don't need to rush off to do everything because there is nothing to go to, nowhere to go. In some ways, that being able to just walk in the park or being in a place where we feel comfortable, not around other people but just around each other. And I wonder whether or not we're ripe as a time in our country's history to move away from fast, highly programmed, very chaotic families to maybe ones which are more comfortable spending hours and hours of their days just hanging out, just doing whatever and just kind of just being rather than being programmed. And I will say that all kind of circles around this kind of fundamental belief that I have which is that we can build important relationships and meaningful conversations with one another. Those things are sustaining and nourishing of our well-being and that can be done through humor and affection but it can also be done through play and having fun. But I think it all has to revolve around making time for it and if there's anything that this pandemic taught me is once you take away all of those things we are supposed to do, there's a lot of time. There's a lot of time to have. So, I hope that if the future comes, that we'll go wait a second, we don't have to be this busy, we don't have to be this programmed. We can make time for each other. And maybe that will happen. That would be a beautiful thing if it did.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, I agree. I like the H-word there too, hope.

Jordan Soliz:

Yeah. I mean this has shown one thing is how important connection is. Right? And think about how much of us are going to be so excited the time we need to see some friends or family face-to-face, getting to hug people, getting to show affection to people in ways that—you know, we ran into someone the other day and we just kind of gave air high fives and it seems so just odd. So, I think there's that connection part that Jeff just talked about, that hope. And then what we're also seeing on the kind of larger social cultural part is that we can give voice, we can give recognition to people. Right? Whether it's talking about how families talk about the experience of individuals or groups or whether we're talking about more public protests or these larger social discourses is when you give voice and recognition to people and that happens on a communal level and more



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people are doing it, that's how you start enacting change because people start to care. So, I think we've seen both the negative side of that or the dark side of that. Right? But we've also seen, Trevor, we just talked about the hopeful side of this. Right? And so, that's why we all do this because we know that communication does matter, not to sound too cliché on that. But with connection and with change, that's the only way we do it.

Mei-Chen Lin:

They already said it very well. I'm just thinking about that because I'm teaching synchronously this semester and then I noticed students are really trying to give each other encouragement over chat. They're trying to respond. They are trying to say that's a very good point and I'm sorry you're going through this. I think this pandemic teaching says don't take anything for granted including communication and I hope that we will come out of this to be more intentional with the way that we communicate with other people, knowing that it's not always there. It can be broken right away and then so, we'll be more intentional about the way we connect with other people.

Jordan Soliz:

Yeah, well said.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, I agree. And I'm going to intentionally thank all of you for this great conversation. I really think that we've tackled a number of important and pressing issues confronting our families and our nation and the world as we all confront this COVID-19 pandemic together. And listeners, thank you for tuning in again to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast* and this timely and powerful conversation about family communication and how useful it can be and must be for navigating this ongoing public health crisis.

In NCA news, NCA's Teaching and Learning Council has developed a growing list of online teaching and learning resources that are relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic. The page includes advice and tips for faculty and students as well as course development resources and information about online teaching platforms. The Teaching and Learning Resources page also includes a sampling of free-to-access NCA journal articles that are relevant to communication amid crises and disasters. The resources will continue to be updated. So, be sure to check back for new information. Please visit natcom.org/Online-Teaching. That's Please visit natcom.org/Online-Teaching for this valuable resource page.

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applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Conclusion:

Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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