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# **Chapter 7 Assignment**

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COM-170-OL

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March 13, 2021

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Through most of my life the relationship that I have shared with my Dad has seen many peaks and valleys. I attribute this largely to the fact that our conversations are often enshrouded by an insurmountable level of semantic, psychological, and physiological noise. While I am the first to admit that I have much to learn in terms of communicating, my Dad has struggled to communicate effectively with most of the people that he interacts with, a problem that has only gotten worse over the last couple of years; and he knows it. For context of this assignment, it is important to note that while I am responsible for some of the obstacles that conversations with him must overcome (my mind tends to wander while I am talking with him, and I can be quite stubborn on topics that I am passionate about), many of the obstacles are a result of his mental health: he has been diagnosed and struggles daily with severe depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and dissociative identity disorder. Which each present their own variety of obstacles when talking with him. In addition to this, a couple of years ago to help him rehabilitate, I invited him to live with us so that I could ensure that he would seek treatment for both his mental and physical health. This has presented another set of obstacles in our communication and will be the emphasis of this assignment.

The experience that I have recently had that provoked emotions that I did not express is one that I have experienced several times since my Dad moved in with me and happened again recently. When I arrived home from work a few days ago, I pulled my vehicle into the garage and when I opened the door to get out, I was immediately struck by the scent of cigarette smoke. My Dad has smoked since he was in high school, and even though he has said several times that he is going to quit after being instructed by his doctor, has continued to do so. This in and of itself has been annoying, but it is an annoyance I have learned to forgive; after all he has been smoking for forty years and my hope that he will quit now, while also fighting a daily mental battle with himself is something that I have all but abandoned. The event that provoked my emotional response, however, was that he was smoking behind the house with the back door open, allowing the smell of smoke to enter the garage. This is something that has happened repeatedly, contradicting one of the few rules that I established when he moved in, and on several occasions since. When it occurs, I experience blended emotions. The mixture of my annoyance that he still smokes that turns to anger, the surprise that experience due to the smell of the smoke, and the fear that he will never get better ultimately provokes an overwhelming feeling of grief. Although I would like nothing more than to express these feelings to him, I refrain from doing so for a couple of reasons: cultural customs and fear.

In terms of cultural customs, one of the reasons that I have not confronted my Dad about his smoking with back door open is the fact that I have always been of the mind to respect those who are older than I am. “Respect your elders”, a phrase that we have all heard hundreds of times comes to mind when I consider confronting him, and while I do not think that saying something to him about his actions would be inherently disrespectful, I am apprehensive to do so because of the collectivist culture in which I was raised. By not saying anything to him, I am allowing him to save negative face by not violating his autonomy. Unfortunately, my silence comes at cost of my own face. Whether he realizes it or not, by smoking with the door open and causing the garage to smell he is directly attacking my positive face as it implies that my requests are not worthy of his respect.

The second, more prevalent reason that I have not said anything this time is fear. Both of us struggle in terms of expressing our emotions, but it is especially difficult for him. Likely attributed to his upbringing, generational norms, and deep-rooted mental frustrations, my Dad has two modes when it comes to emotional expression – monotone and emotionless and unjustifiably angry. While I certainly do fear that expressing my feelings will provoke an emotional and angry response from him, my fear of confronting him stems primarily from the fear of emotional blackmail. Often when my Dad is criticized, he will react in a way that is unnecessarily contrary to the behavior that he is demonstrating. For instance, if I were to express that it makes me angry when I get home and the garage smells like smoke, it would not surprise me for him to “slip and fall” while walking further from the house than usual before lighting up his next smoke. The most difficult thing to deal with in these situations is the uncertainty of whether the hypothetical “slip” would be intentional to appeal to my guilt, or a legitimate accident in his attempt to respect my request to be more careful to not allow smoke into the garage.

Because this has happened before though, I am inclined to wonder how the situation would have gone had I immediately expressed my emotions to him, but I think that it would have caused him more grief than I was caused. Part of me believes that I could have communicated my anger effectively using I-messages and by empathizing with the constant grief that he feels, possibly even resolving the conflict- at least until the next time- making me feel better and shedding the anger that I felt through the ways of the ventilation hypothesis. But the other part of me believes that expressing the emotions that I felt would have only been a catalyst to the anger I was feeling, and likely would have created more barriers in the relationship between my father and me, while only resolving the problem temporarily.

**1037 Words**