

W1&2 | Interpersonal Communication – Glossary

Prejudice

On April 26th, 2018, my high school held its annual Spring Music Night. I was relieved that my performance was over. Though, little did I know that one of my closer friends took their own life in the school's library that same night. Students, staff, and the entire community were devastated by the loss.

A week later, rumours started spreading about the incident, primarily among the parents of students all across the Toronto District School Board. Before I continue, some background would be helpful to understand the situation. His name was Oswald. Both him and I were in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which is notorious for its heavy workload. Oswald was on the spectrum for autism. However, Oswald was, in my eyes and many others', a genius. He achieved stellar grades in class effortlessly. He started his own electronics repair shop, and already had more than enough money to support himself, being only 17 at the time.

We were closer of friends. We shared many interests, most of which were computer related. We loved mechanical keyboards. We looked up to Louis Rossman. We hated Apple. We were ThinkPad fanboys. Not many know this, but Oswald was on meds since 7th grade to regulate his emotions. Recently, he had stopped taking them, and appointments with his psychologist were becoming less helpful.

The rumours that spread from parents were followed by warnings to other parents and students. A couple of the most prevalent were the claims that the workload of IB was too much to handle and pressure is what broke him, and that Oswald's parents had conflicts with him. Both of these claims were unfounded, and I was angry and frustrated at the group of parents starting and spreading these rumours. How could people know absolutely nothing about an incident and present speculation as fact? I was disgusted, and immediately developed prejudice toward these parents for being ignorant, uncritical, and harmful.

I believed (and still believe) that it was wrong to spread such rumours, but after I calmed down and set my strong emotions aside, I was able to look past my prejudice to understand where these parents were coming from. When an incident such as a suicide occurs, it's scary to say the least. There are too few answers responding to too many questions. My mother shared her concerns and thoughts of if it were not him and me instead. Judging by her response, I figured that because most parents wanted to keep their loved ones safe, they did what they could to warning others about potential risk factors, such as heavy workloads and stress, that may have led to the unfortunate outcome. I was able to draw these connections and exhibit cognitive complexity by setting my prejudice aside.

Individualistic Culture

Individualism has been present throughout my high school career, especially in the IB program. This specialized program is fairly competitive and requires a lot of work, hence the individualistic culture it fosters. Most students are independent when it comes to course work, and our high school teachers seldom have an equivalent to the "office hours" in university. Personally, as I started in university, I was still accustomed to this individualistic culture, and turned down any help from peers, professors, and ISAs despite my advanced math courses being challenging, believing that I would learn better if I worked on problems independently. I have since changed my view on assignments since I have fallen slightly behind in MATH 145 after our first assignment A1 resulting from my attempted self-reliance. I have come to accept that struggle and help is necessary, and that I should go to office hours whenever I can.

Reference Groups

My mother raised me under the impression that all of my peers were "better than me". This was because whenever she was with other parents, she praised and complimented their children while contrasting them to my shortcomings. I figured that I must have been subpar in my capabilities and characteristics, so I strove to better myself. I have a vivid memory of my mother scolding me for sleeping so late and being slow to brush my teeth. This was in conversation with Ashley's mom, a family friend of ours. My mom also commented on how Ashley slept early, and how I should be more like her. I do not remember how old I was, but I was young. As I got older, I eventually realized that in the reference group of my peers, they all were in fact better than me, but in differing aspects. I realized that my mother didn't put me down to embarrass me, but rather to help identify role models I should learn from.

Now that many years have passed and I find myself older and wiser (or so I'd like to think), I have naturally found different reference groups for different characteristics I wish to develop. I never found myself intentionally seeking out these groups - I suppose I unknowingly sought them out because of the influence from my mother.

When it comes to my academic abilities, I compare myself to the strongest students in my classes. For industry skills, I always look up to those working internships at successful companies (such as Jason, a friend of mine who just completed an internship at Google). When it comes to evaluating my athleticism, I look to those I know in the ultimate community. I had a recent experience with this reference group. I started playing ultimate frisbee in 10th grade, and really enjoyed it. So, I would spend time tossing a disc whenever I could, and eventually worked my way up to being line captain on our high school team. When I first stepped foot on campus here at Waterloo, I had to try out for their ultimate team. However, at the first tryout, I knew the team was way out of my league based on the caliber of athletes trying out. These were people playing in elite clubs every year (such as Toro, Toronto's top junior elites team). I had little to show for compared to them. Regardless, I pushed hard at all three tryouts and tried to match the athleticism of the students there (despite not making the cut in the end). Do I regret attending tryouts? Absolutely not. Sure, it was intimidating, but now I have higher goals and standards to reach for cardio, strength, and athleticism in general.