

The Varied Intercultural Communication in the Films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider”

Marisol Figueroa

Department of Personalized Learning, Northern Arizona University

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Professor Tenie Zarifian

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Intercultural communication is prevalent in the films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider”. In “To Kill a Mockingbird”, intercultural communication occurs between Maycomb’s black community and the whites that are sympathetic towards them. Intercultural communication also occurs between Maycomb’s racist whites and whites that are sympathetic towards the black community. And lastly, intercultural communication occurs between Maycomb’s racist whites and black community. In the film “Easy Rider”, intercultural communication occurs between the “biker” protagonists (Billy and Captain America) and the “hippies”. Intercultural communication also occurs between the “biker” protagonists and the “rednecks”. Thus, the intercultural communication found within the films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider” is varied - there were times where it was amicable and there were times where it was tense.

In the films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider”, the expression of intercultural communication is assorted; for starters, there are moments in both films where it was amicable. In “To Kill a Mockingbird”, the intercultural communication between Maycomb’s black community and the whites that are sympathetic towards them is very amicable. For instance, the relationship between Calpurnia and the Finch family is amiable. Atticus values Calpurnia’s contributions to his family, and he not only treats her as an equal, but as a member of his family. Furthermore, when Scout makes fun of Walter Cunningham, Calpurnia reprimanded her and Scout responded to her as if she were a mother figure. Another example is

the relationship between Atticus and the Robinson family. Atticus puts his best foot forward to provide a compelling defense for Tom; he also has the courtesy to deliver the news of Tom's death to his wife and father (Mulligan, 1962). For that, the Robinson family is immensely grateful. In "Easy Rider", the intercultural communication between the biker protagonists and the rancher was amicable. When Billy and Captain America pulled over at the rancher's place to fix their flat tire, the rancher was very hospitable to them (Hopper, 1969). The rancher even allowed them to have dinner with his large family (Hopper, 1969). Billy showed his respect to the rancher by agreeing to take off his hat at the dinner table when asked (Hopper, 1969). Captain America also told the rancher that he should be "proud" of the fact that he is able to "live off the land" (Hopper, 1969). In "Easy Rider", the intercultural communication between the biker protagonists and the hippies is also amicable. Billy and Captain America agreed to give a hippie a ride back to their commune (Hopper, 1969). The hippies in the commune welcomed Billy and Captain America with open arms, and the two bikers happily partook in the commune's party and drug-infused culture. In the most joyous part of the film, Billy and Captain America take two "hippie" women skinny dipping in the hot spring (Hopper, 1969). So, as evidenced by the aforementioned interactions in "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "Easy Rider", there is amicable intercultural communication found in both films. After all, in "To Kill a Mockingbird", Maycomb's black and white residents come from different cultures; this is exacerbated by segregation, which further separates them. And yet, Atticus (a white man) maintains a friendly relationship with Calpurnia (a black woman) and the Robinson family (a black family). And in "Easy Rider", the "biker" protagonists espouse a vastly different culture

from both the rancher and the “hippies”. The dreariness of ranch life and struggle of the commune don’t interest Billy and Captain America; likewise, the rancher and “hippies” have no desire to engage in the bikers’ wealth-seeking, on-the-go lifestyle. However, despite these cultural differences, the “biker” protagonists are able to bond with, trust, and accept/feel accepted by the rancher and “hippies”. And so, in that way, there were times in the films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider” where the intercultural communication was amicable.

Although the intercultural communication in the films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider” was mixed, there were times in these films where the intercultural communication was tense. Unfortunately, in the film “To Kill a Mockingbird”, the intercultural communication between Maycomb’s racist whites and black community became tense. After all, even though Atticus put forward a compelling case, Tom Robinson was still convicted by a racist white jury and ultimately shot to death by a racist white law enforcement (Mulligan, 1962). In addition to that, the intercultural communication between Maycomb’s racist whites and whites who were sympathetic towards the black community was also tense. When it became public knowledge that Atticus Finch was defending a black man (Tom Robinson), a lynch mob cornered him outside the courthouse (Mulligan, 1962). Had it not been for Scout approaching Mr. Cunningham (Mulligan, 1962), Atticus would have likely been lynched. Also, after the trial, Bob Ewell (a racist white man) spit in Atticus’ face. Later, he attacked Atticus’ children, breaking Jem’s arm and causing him to be rendered unconscious (Mulligan, 1962). Had it not been for Boo Radley’s intervention, the children would have likely been killed. In “Easy Rider”, the intercultural communication between the “rednecks” and the biker protagonists also became

tense. When Billy, George, and Captain America visited a diner, they fascinated a group of local teenage girls (Hopper, 1969). A group of “redneck” males became threatened and began scheming for vengeance. Because of Billy, George, and Captain America’s unconventional appearances, the “rednecks” referred to them as “troublemakers” and “refugees from a guerilla love-in” (Hopper, 1969). After Billy, George, and Captain America cozied into their sleeping bags for the night, they discovered that the “rednecks” had followed them. The “rednecks” attacked them with baseball bats and ended up killing George (Hopper, 1969). Another tense encounter with the “rednecks” occurs at the end of the film when two “rednecks” in a truck shoot Billy in the stomach (Hopper, 1969). When Captain America tried to help a dying Billy and began following the truck, one of the “rednecks” shot and killed him (Hopper, 1969). His motorcycle then explodes into flames (Hopper, 1969). As demonstrated in the preceding examples, both films showcase tense intercultural communication. In “To Kill a Mockingbird”, it’s clear that Maycomb’s racist whites and blacks come from cultures poles apart: the privileged, racist whites believe blacks are inferior to them and the blacks resent the racist whites for oppressing them. But Maycomb’s racist whites and whites who sympathize with the black community also bear different cultures, despite being of the same race and town. They both differ vastly in how they interact with Maycomb’s black residents and regard racial justice/equality. In both cases, these cultural differences lead to conflict. Similarly, in “Easy Rider”, the “biker” protagonists’ culture differs vastly from that of the “rednecks”: their dress, manner of speaking, transportation, political views, lifestyle, etc. are a far cry from each other. The “rednecks” behave belligerently towards the “bikers” because of their cultural differences. Hence, in such a manner

way, there were times in the films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider” where the intercultural communication was tense.

Thus, the intercultural communication found within the films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider” is varied - there were times where it was amicable and times when it was tense. “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Easy Rider” are both considered iconic American films; interestingly enough, they both center around themes of intercultural communication. Both films were released in the 1960s, a time during which there was great tension between different cultures: between different races, racists/non-racists, “rednecks”, “hippies”, “bikers”, etc. It is crucial to understand the intercultural communication that occurs in these films to better discern the intercultural communication during that time in American history. By examining issues of intercultural communication from the past, we can better figure out how to improve intercultural communication in the future. Fortunately, both of these films - despite being over 50 years old - continue to be watched and studied across the country. They will likely remain iconic for years to come and help shape our socio political agenda.

References

Hopper, D. (1969). *Easy Rider*. Columbia Pictures.

Mulligan, R. (1962). *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Universal Pictures.