

The theme for the 107th annual National Communication Association's conference was "Renewal and Transformation" a fitting point of inquiry for our first gathering since the start of the COVID pandemic. During my time at the conference, I had the privilege of participating in several thought-provoking conversations with my fellow communication studies colleagues from across the country. I participated in three paper/panel discussions, all of which centered the intersection of pedagogy and interpersonal and family communication. The objective was for us, as a collective of scholar-teachers, to discuss and consider ways to make our interpersonal and family communication classrooms more inclusive and diverse, and to further consider connections between disciplinary biases and teaching practices.

I first presented during the panel "Theorizing from the Intersections: Developing a Pedagogy of Futurity." Here, I joined various scholars to address some of the ways in which systemic inequalities in our field have trickled into our communication classrooms, and to collaboratively devise potential ways to combat them. At this discussion roundtable I elaborated on what I term a "pedagogy of suspicion," which is a specific mode of pedagogy for interpersonal, family, and relational comm courses, inspired by and working within the framework of the emerging critical interpersonal and family communication (CIFIC) subfield. I addressed issues concerning the private-public conflation, connections between micro practices and systemic inequities, and the project of suspicion as a powerful pedagogical tool.

The next event in which I participated was a paper panel that I had put together and proposed. The panel, titled "Matters in Teaching and Why Teaching Matters: Advancing Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication Pedagogy," specifically situated the role of criticality—in its myriad forms—within an interpersonal and family communication classroom context. We had such vibrant discussions during the panel, which was characterized by an incredibly diverse assemblage of themes. These themes included my paper contribution, which offered a dialectic reading of my teaching experiences as a white queer professor at an HBCU, in addition to topics about resisting allonormativity in the classroom, embracing intergenerational connections through course assignments and content, and the value of Latinx positionalities within the classroom space.

My final panel discussion came on the final day of the conference. Titled "Transforming Family Identity: Recommendations for Renewing Understanding of Family Roles," this panel sought to consider and expand the possibilities for defining "family" in communication research and teaching. Influenced by critical theory and an ethic of social transformation, we facilitated a conversation where contributors each addressed unique challenges faced by IFC and the potential advantages for moving the metaphorical needle as it concerns legitimizing constituents of family and family identity. I took this panel as an opportunity to advocate once again for the growing subfield of critical interpersonal and family communication, to the ways this body of research—and the philosophies guiding it—can serve as a useful framework and toolkit to achieve the aims of the work set forth by the panel. I discussed the importance of conflating the public and private spheres, the attention to centripetal and centrifugal discourses as they play out in everyday relational life, the emphasis CIFIC places on discourse-dependent families, and the inherent connections between micro practices and systemic marginalization. I spoke at length about the ways CIFIC offers useful theoretical and methodological tools to explore—and subsequently, draw attention to—matters of power as they concern family dynamics, rhetorics, and discourses, and how it serves as a welcoming space to house the objectives set forth by the panel's speakers.

In conclusion, the conversations had at the 107th annual convention were humbling, heartening, and inspiring. There appears to be a somewhat widespread sense and sensibility within interpersonal and family communication studies that change needs to happen, and that a sizable amount of it can—and should—occur in our classrooms. It was wonderful to experience so many inventive and creative ideas contributed by a diverse pool of folks as we all seek to expand and make more vibrant not only our discipline, but our teaching and the influence it can have on the broader social world.