**Using Case Studies as Instructional Resources**

**in Communication Courses**

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Course: any communication course using case studies

Describing the Case Method of teaching as described in my co-edited textbook, [*Casing Sport Communication*](https://he.kendallhunt.com/product/casing-sport-communication). This method is described in many of the “Casing” texts published by Kendall Hunt. A [search for titles](https://he.kendallhunt.com/search?search_api_views_fulltext=Casing) on their website shows 15 different communication discipline “casing” texts. Many also include worksheets in the appendix to help students go through the decision-making process. Each text is full of fictional and/or real cases concerning that area of the discipline. The Case Method comes out of Harvard Law School. I will review the 5-step process developed by Gouran and Hirokawa (1983; 1996) for analyzing a decision-based case. So, this process is best used with fictional (or fictionalized) cases where the students need to make decisions for the main character(s). The five steps are:

1. Identify and understand the main problem in the case. What needs to be fixed or changed?
2. Determine quantitative and qualitative criteria (standards) for making a sound decision on the case.
3. Identify possible solutions for rectifying the problem.
4. Review the various solution possibilities, applying the criteria determined in step 2.
5. Select the best decision/solution.

This decision method can be shortened somewhat to just take place during a class period. Step 2 would be drastically shortened, as might step 4. However, this method also could be drawn out for a semester-long group project, or as assignments for individual papers where students analyze, apply theories, and determine solutions for a case.

Gouran, D.S. & Hirokawa, R.Y. (1983). The role of communication in decision-making groups: A functional perspective. In M.S. Mander (Ed.), *Communication in transition: Issues and debate in current research* (pp. 165-185). New York: Praeger.

Gouran, D.S. & Hirokawa, R.Y. (1996). Functional theory and communication in decision-making and problem solving groups: An expanded view. In R.Y. Hirokawa & M.S. Poole (Eds.), *Communication and group decision making* (2nd ed., pp. 55-80)/ Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**Dakota Horn, Bradley University,** [**dhorn@fsmail.bradley.edu**](mailto:dhorn@fsmail.bradley.edu)

Course: Communication Theory   
This case study allows the students to explore media multiplexity theory, social media, and how individuals navigate this rich world of ability to communicate via different social media outlets. I provide an overview of the theory, guide conversation, and have follow-up questions.  
[Link to Case Study.](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I1LzFyXgNmw8flRXt82n3MSOMth8O9g5/view?usp=sharing)

**Renata Kolodziej-Smith, University of Central Florida,** [**Renata.Kolodziej-Smith@ucf.edu**](mailto:Renata.Kolodziej-Smith@ucf.edu)

Course: Organizational Communication

We use the website developed by scholars in organizational communication, <https://orgcomminthenews.wordpress.com/>, where cases are updated on a fairly regular basis. During the class time we discuss concepts related to the particular case. In addition, students are responsible for writing two case analysis during the semester where they apply learned concepts.

Examples:

Critical theory – silenced voices of employees of Amazon - <https://orgcomminthenews.wordpress.com/2021/03/31/fired-interrogated-disciplined-amazon-warehouse-organizers-allege-year-of-retaliation/>

Racial stereotyping in advertising - <https://orgcomminthenews.wordpress.com/2021/02/10/aunt-jemima-finally-has-a-new-name/>

**Shawn Starcher, Muskingum University,** [**shawns@muskingum.edu**](mailto:shawns@muskingum.edu)

Course: Interpersonal Communication

The case study exemplifies the concepts of communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2010; 2013), including the concepts of ownership of private information, boundary management of that private information, and the rationale for why people choose to reveal or conceal private information.

The case, which I authored, is featured in [*Casing the Family: Theoretical and Applied Approaches to Understanding Family Communication*](https://he.kendallhunt.com/product/casing-family-theoretical-and-applied-approaches-understanding-family-communication) (Kendall Hunt), and was edited by Sarah Symonds LeBlanc. Societal-based stigmas dictate that individuals should avoid talking about a mental illness because they often fear that others will label, judge, or reject them. Do those same rules apply when sharing depression-related struggles with a spouse/partner or a child? Individuals must consider the risks and benefits of sharing with both when talking about depression. If individuals do decide to disclose, how much information should they share and what kind of expectations should they impose on partners/spouses or children for the management of that sensitive information? Using a Communication Privacy Management (Petronio, 2002, 2013) theoretical perspective, this case study explores the different dynamics that individuals must consider when managing their depression-related private information with family members.

**Simon Rousset, College of Wooster,** [**srousset@wooster.edu**](mailto:srousset@wooster.edu)

Course: Intro to Comm, Interpersonal, Comm & Terrorism

I use the front cover of Le Monde, a national newspaper in France, published on 11 January 2015. The Charlie Hebdo case started with the mass murder of journalists and cartoonists at the headquarters of a satirical newspapers and continued two days later with a hostage situation at a kosher supermarket. What is highlighted in this case study is the socio-political repercussions of such acts and the dominant responses by the body political such as the incessant demand to be Charlie and the use of laicité as a tool to bring into the fold those who do not identify as Charlie. I draw from an article I co-authored to demonstrate to students how to make sense of such attacks of extreme violence through the prism of studies on terrorism, social drama, moral panic, and Orientalism.

I focus on this case for two main reasons. The first reason is for the conceptual approach to the case, and the other reason is for the practical application of analysis techniques.  
The first and primary use of this case is to ask students to focus on (1.a) the study of representation, (1.b) the intersectionality of identity in the French context, and (1.c) Orientalism, the sequences of a moral panic, and social drama analysis as theoretical frameworks. The second and final use for this case is to discuss ways to conduct analyses in research and to learn how to make inferences from the study of a front cover.



**J.J. De La Cruz, Pennsylvania State University,** [**jxd847@psu.edu**](mailto:jxd847@psu.edu)

Course: Introduction to Human Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Persuasion, and Communication and Negotiation (any time the terms ‘culture’ or ‘co-culture’ are introduced in a course.

Rather than using a specific case study, I offer a description of coming out conversations, in which people with LGBTQ+ identities disclose their sexual/gender minority identity to others. I explain to students that the LGBTQ+ community is a culture brought together by shared beliefs, attitudes, values, and lived experiences. Moreover, I discuss that this cultural group is faced with a unique communication event (i.e., coming out) that other cultural groups do not typically have to execute. I continue the illustration by suggesting that the LGBTQ+ community has distinguishable co-cultures that also affect how they approach the same communication event. For example, when approaching coming out, lesbian women must face issues of fetishization, gay men face issues of disgust, bisexual people face issues of non-commitment, and trans people face issues of “passing.” The goal of this illustration is to show how (co)culture affects communication in very concrete ways.

I use this example any time I introduce 'culture' and 'co-culture,' so it has been used in classes such as.

I discuss 'culture' as a group brought together by shared beliefs, attitudes, and values, and I discuss 'co-culture' as a subset of a culture distinguishable by a more specific set of beliefs, attitudes, and values. These lectures usually focus on how cultures and co-cultures influence how people approach communication.

**Anum Ahmed, Texas A&M University,** [**anum.ahmed@tamu.edu**](mailto:anum.ahmed@tamu.edu)

Course: Public Speaking

In 2019, Youtuber Eugene Lee Yang (formerly employed by Buzzfeed) created and published [**a video titled “I’m Gay”**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpipLfMiaYU&ab_channel=TheTryGuys) to the Try Guys’ main Youtube channel. To date, the video has garnered over 20 million views, and has raised over $150,000 for the Trevor Project, the “world’s largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people”. Written, directed, and choreographed by Yang, the music video documents Yang’s coming out journey and some of the challenges (and violence) members of the Queer community face; this is done through thoughtful choreography, set and costume design, and other nonverbal markers (i.e. facial expressions, body language). The video consists of no actual verbal communication – in either the stories shared or the music selection, but the audience is still able to learn about Yang's experiences as a Queer, Asian-American man (from a religious family) through what is shown, rather than told to them.

I show this video when teaching the difference between verbal/non-verbal communication, the use of non-verbal communication in delivery, and whether all public communication is ephemeral. It can be a helpful example when teaching students how much can be shared with others (either intentionally or otherwise) through our non-verbal choices.

**A.G. Hughes, Chadron State College,** [**ahughes@csc.edu**](mailto:ahughes@csc.edu)

Course: Communication in Groups & Teams

Small group communication can be a challenging topic to effectively teach with realistic examples, as the instructor may feel limited to describing and analyzing their own experiences (e.g., communication with department colleagues). Further, though group communication in television and film can be useful for simple exploration of some concepts, fictional content often lacks the realism of group communication *in situ*.

After a few initial semesters of teaching a course on communication in groups and teams, I have since been successful in explaining various group roles (formal, informal, task, and maintenance) as well as group norms (including those that are outside of the mainstream) by using the case of a political comedy podcast: “Chapo Trap House” (First episode is available here: <https://youtu.be/V0w4JxBEOXU>). Each episode of the show is structured as a conversation among friends about current events and political news. In playing short clips from the first and most recent episodes, then applying course concepts to each individual in the group, I have found success in using the podcast to show how in even the most casual and permissive of groups, each member falls into a particular habit of communication and participation towards the shared task. That is, each member finds an informal role to play.

**Reginald Bell Jr., Miami University in Oxford, OH,**[**bellr2@miamioh.edu**](mailto:bellr2@miamioh.edu)

Course: Strategic Communication 159 (public speaking)

I use two pieces about a poor, Appalachian community on the outskirts of Cincinnati, OH to explore such concepts as silenced voices, stereotypes, audience analysis, informative speaking, beliefs, and values. As students prepare their speeches, the article, coupled with a discussion of the concepts, equips students to consider both their primary/actual audience(s) and the people often excluded.

Links to Articles:

<https://jonathantilove.com/poor-whites/>

<https://journals.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_ejcsearch/r/1507/99?p99_entity_id=29902298&p99_entity_type=MAIN_FILE&cs=31t1qB3u1ExrNa0TrpRu80LweUhd-HN_8b2t3f2QOP5nBAU-BQ5kGoNE1Ml4Lnb7A0IHJdFVDdqaKXCmzCMWIUA>

Main points in the article**:** 1) The people in Lower Price Hill are stereotyped as lazy, stupid, bad genes, bad teeth, bad English, and white trash. 2) Poor whites are invisible and do not get respect. 3) Poor whites are the last acceptable ethnic fools. 4) Poor whites do not see themselves as a cohesive grievance group. 5) There is little difference between poor whites and Blacks. 6) Efforts are being made to organize poor whites.