

Research Proposal:

“Rigged,” “MAGA Hats,” and “Socialism” –

The Conflict Triggers That Keep Families from Fighting Well Over Politics

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Introduction

The issue this study addresses is that conflict is inevitable in politics yet certain triggers can create more barriers in dialog. Political conflict occurs in all types of environments but looking at what issues, topics, statements, words, symbols, facial expressions, tone of voice, and behaviors trigger conflict when families with counter-political ideals engage in political discourse is important to understand. Families have a stake in community and must come together even when there is conflict. What instigates or worsens conflict in families is an area of research that needs further study. Conflict triggers can cause dialog derailment, create negative spiraling or suspension of communication creating relationship difficulties within the family unit as well as the extended family.

My family of origin, including my father, mother, two sisters and their families, has had difficulty talking about politics around the “Thanksgiving table.” The common religious base of Christianity is a thread that binds us together, but when it comes to politics, we are very diverse in thought and belief. Political discourse has worn thin and is not on any table of conversation. Much of the difficulty has been centered around using specific words, names of political actors, issues, facial expressions, tone of voice, even symbols. These seem to trigger the conflict or make it worse.

The purpose of this study is to expose the triggers (verbal or nonverbal) used when families discuss opposing political views. Also, it is critical to discover how families respond to being aware of triggers and how the family will collaborate on resolutions to move through and past the triggers.

Literature Review

In the article, “Talking turkey: Effects of family discussions about the 2016 election over

the Thanksgiving Holiday,” researchers looked at the perceived closeness of families with congruent political parties vs. incongruent. Their study looked at families with more congruent political beliefs and stated that conversation seemed to draw the family together after the election (Johnson, Bostwick, Cionea, 2019, p. 72). Their assessment of future study stated that focus should show why families are congruent or incongruent and not just on the relationships and “family communication patterns.” Further, they proposed that future study should incorporate a “desire to avoid future discussions about the election” and include subjects which have more variation in political views than similar ones. This study would propose to do so by the selection of families with political divisiveness. Lastly, the study suggests that “more work is needed to understand the complex dynamics surrounding the discussion of elections and politics in general in the family” (Johnson, Bostwick, Cionea, 2019, p. 73). To fill this gap, the proposed study will delineate the incongruencies that occur when a family member uses a verbal or nonverbal trigger and in so doing will highlight how triggers affect relationships within the family and the patterns of communication. In addition, the study would deal with the “complex dynamics” in political discussions by looking at the types of verbal word choices, tonalities, volume changes, etc., as well as nonverbal behaviors and symbolism displays used by family members.

Clifford (2019) studied how individuals moralize politics through “disgust” and “anger” with verbal “persuasion” and “affect” displays, much like is proposed through verbal and nonverbal triggers in this study, and that this consistently leads to “polarization” (p. 75). However, it was stated that “further research on the interaction between the information environment and individual differences will likely lend new insight into why some people come to moralize some issues while others do not” (p. 88). The specific triggers which family

members might use in this study, identified by those participating, will naturally lead to discussions about moralizing issues within political dialog.

Wells (et al, 2017) states, “Despite the democratic significance of citizen talk about politics, the field of communication has not considered how that talk is weathering stresses facing our civic culture” (p. 131). Their study found that the opportunity to talk about politics during the 2012 election of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker was so contentious that “citizens found it impossible to continue political discussion” and that many, due to personal circumstances, were prone to ‘breakdown’ (p.131). Moreover, this study concluded, “Our results call into question the ability of talk to bridge political and social differences in periods of polarization and fragmentation, with implications for democratic functioning” (p.131). This provides more evidence that further study is needed. While local politics have potential for divisiveness, national elections may have more reach and more impact. This proposed study will be conducted in the summer before one of the most emotional and volatile elections in history. The goal is to create a conducive environment through the collaborative interview process which will lead to the opportunity to talk about politics from all sides.

In reading the literature on conflict in family discussions over politics, there appears to be a gap in the area of relationship outcomes, especially in families with diverse political perspectives. The purpose of this study will focus on these questions:

RQ1. What are the verbal and nonverbal triggers families tend to use when engaged in political discussion?

RQ2. How will the family unit and larger extended family move forward while having political discussions and manage their relationships?

Methodology

The method for this study was qualitative, utilizing interaction and participation by those in the study. Patton (2015) states that this type of inquiry is “practical and pragmatic,” one “in which the researcher is especially sensitive to the perspectives of others and interacts closely with them in designing and/or implementing the study” (p. 213). The focus of the study involved my family of origin in the process of determining the issue as well as the outcome in exploring the processes used and the activities engaged in when triggers are present with four core family members representing the various extended family as well as some extended family (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183).

A combination of reflective practice (Patton, 2015, p. 214-216) and participatory research and evaluation (Patton, 2015, p. 220-222) was conducive in that “The researcher or evaluator acts as a facilitator, collaborator, and learning resource to make the experience meaningful and mutually respectful” (p. 222). The family participants learned about the study in initial meetings and became a part of the process with the group meetings. They were privy to how I was approaching the study and analysis and that they would help to determine the meaning and outcomes of the findings. McDonald (2012) states that “PAR (Participative Action Research) is a qualitative inquiry that is considered democratic, equitable, liberating, and life-enhancing (Kach & Kralik, 2006), and which remains distinct from other qualitative methodologies, particularly concerning the roles played by the researcher and the participants (Gibson, 2002)” (p. 35).

The goal in using this type of qualitative inquiry was to create an equal partnership between me as the researcher/facilitator and the family members in which each was aware of and in agreement with the goals of the study. Participation and collaboration also helped create an environment conducive to open dialog regarding the conflict triggers of which the family groups

generated understanding and which create barriers for political conversations in the family, paving the path forward for conversations with the whole extended family.

In preparation for the role of researcher/facilitator rather than family member, I acknowledged that there had been political disagreements and arguments in the past between me and one sister who had agreed to be a part of the group interviews. I planned to state before the first meeting that our past conflicts would not influence my ability to observe and facilitate the dialog in the interview meetings. However, I planned to state that I had been a part of political conflict in the family in the past and that could be discussed in any way they felt it needed to be discussed in the group.

Process

For the purposes of time and due to the restrictions of COVID-19 social distancing, two groups of family were interviewed through Zoom meetings: 1) four of my core family members, consisting of the matriarch - 96, from the Greatest Generation (conservative Republican); the oldest sister - 75, Baby Boomer (conservative); the middle sister - 73, Baby Boomer (liberally minded independent); and me, the youngest sister - 59, Baby Boomer (conservative Republican), referred to as "Generation One;" 2) five extended family members consisting of a daughter (conservative Republican) 49 - and son (moderate conservative) - 47 from the oldest sister, a daughter (Democrat) - 39 from the middle sister and her husband (undecided, who immigrated from Mexico but is now a citizen) - 38, and a Millennial (conservative Republican) - 25, my daughter. This group will be referred to as "Generation Two."

The Interview Guide (Appendix A) was sent to each participant before each first session conducted with each group as well as an explanation of the study and request for formal consent (Appendix B and Appendix C). Prior to the start of each first group meeting, I explained the

research purposed, the role I would take as facilitator and the expectations of the meetings (Appendix D). I clarified that even though I was the researcher/facilitator and a part of the family, I was taking the position of “empathic neutrality” which, according to Patton (2015) “is understanding a person’s situation and perspective without judging the person – and communicating that understanding with authenticity to build rapport, trust, and openness” (p. 57). Personally, I mentally prepared myself before each interview meeting in order to come from the researcher/facilitator role rather than as daughter, sister, mom or aunt.

Interview Results

The four group interviews with the two groups, “Generation One” and “Generation Two,” were a start to a process of discovering the triggers that create ongoing and increasing conflict in families when discussing politics. To understand the perspectives of these two generations better, the conversations centered around verbal and nonverbal triggers, intentionality, and the plans on moving forward with conversations with the extended family.

Triggers

Regarding the first and second questions I asked in the interview on verbal triggers, there were varying responses on different terminology and phraseology, written and spoken, which individuals in both groups felt were a trigger. There was one area of consensus between Generation One and Generation Two in the use of certain news organization acronyms, primarily on cable, that of “CNN,” “FOX News,” and one mention of “MSNBC.” One individual in Generation One stated that for some people, “CNN represents really liberal viewpoints. Some even go so far as to think it’s made up. I’m not saying it’s not,” while another individual stated in the same group, “It’s the same with FOX News. It’s a trigger. It represents over the top criticism of any democrat led effort . . . A lot of times they seem to perpetuate false news.” This same

member states that she only listens to “unbiased news” to which the matriarch states, “There’s no such thing as unbiased opinion in the news.” One member states, “A trigger for Mom is seeing different news people on T.V. and she says, ‘Oh, I can’t stand so and so!’” said with a big smile.

Another area of consensus between the two generation groups was the use of Trump’s name, however, a Generation One member, politically independent, stated, “For me, if I would use Trump’s name, I would say things like, and I know I have, he lies, he’s a philanderer, he uses women. Those would be triggers for someone else.” Additionally, there were several points throughout the interviews when this member made similar statements like the following: “I don’t believe that Trump is an honest person. I think he is totally trying just to get reelected . . . when coming up with a plan for COVID-19 for the U.S. to save people’s lives. I don’t think you should be putting people in jeopardy.” In Generation Two group, a member states that “the name ‘Trump’ alone gets people really pissed off.” The group, at one point, is asked by one member who they will each vote for, stating:

There’s only one question that’s been on my mind both times (interviews). Who are you voting for? Not that I care who you are voting for, but I want to know where you stand and what you are seeing from your perspective. I’ll ask you anything I want, but I’m trying to be a little more reserved because I know that not everybody can handle the way it is.

This led two members to state that they thought just asking the question, “Who are you voting for?” can be a trigger because they might think that their opinion was being called into question or that the question itself might be couched in sarcasm that it might be a set up with which to use against the person and that the question is “divisive.” Several emotional responses regarding President Trump as the Republican candidate were then stated. One started out by

joking, “I would have thought we were all voting for Kanye,” which caused a lot of laughter in the group. Then, she continued, “I’m going to have to vote for Trump. He’s a total jackass. I’m going to have to stab and vote with my finger in blood. I’m humiliated by him but when I think of the alternative I shiver and shake. I’m horrified either way.”

Another member agreed stating, “I’d rather die than vote for him.” This discussion got the attention, off camera of the husband of one of the members who stated (and voted for President Trump in the last election), “If there was somebody else would you vote for them or is it just that binary for you – it’s only Trump and Biden?” In response, the member explained that she had voted for Hillary in the last election not because she loved Hillary but that she wanted anyone else besides, “that blankety, blank, blank, blank,” that “there’s no way in hell you could get me to vote for Trump.” When asked why, by another group member, she states:

He’s racist. He’s not an idiot. He’s a very intelligent person but he’s intelligent in the manipulative, asshole type of way . . . He does not care about people – he cares about the economy, which is important, but I think people’s lives come first. Everything I hear him say, it doesn’t even make sense . . . I have really tried to listen to others who have voted for him. Not one person has provided clarity about why this guy should be president again.

Her husband, an immigrant from Mexico who came to the U.S. illegally and was living for 14 years before becoming an American citizen, states, “I don’t like Biden, I don’t like Trump . . .” He says, “The guy I was following was Sanders . . .” because of free education for his children, and “Trump has been attacking the Mexican population a lot.” However, he sees President Trump working on immigration reform and thinks that a lot of Latinos will vote for him because, “The Latino population will see who is going to help them more.” He believes that

people shouldn't get anything for free because it makes them "lazy." (This is a confusing statement since he stated he would support getting free education and wanted Bernie Sanders as President.) Two other group members state they will likely vote for Trump even though, one states, "He is a buffoon, a king more than a president" and that "a third option would never win." The other member states, "it depends on how he carries himself" and "despite his stupid venting on Twitter." They reveal the reasons they might vote for him: his way of handling economics, major platform issues such as abortion, getting things done, and as one states, "cutting the political BS."

The conversation about "Trump" as a trigger and how people will vote leads the group to a new level of conversation, that knowing why people are voting for him creates understanding. One Generation Two member states, "I do understand if those are your viewpoints and what you are focusing on, I could see how you would possibly be interested in voting for Trump. It helps me to see it through your eyes a little. Does it persuade me in any way? Absolutely not." Another Generation two member responds, "I like what you said, after listening to [these] arguments why you would vote for Trump. Certainly I can understand why you are voting for Biden because of the issues are important to you. It makes sense."

A revelation seems to have occurred at that point when a Generation Two member states: I think a lot of our viewpoints come from what we know or what we understand about a situation. For example people's viewpoints on immigration. He (husband who immigrated from Mexico) paid taxes for 12 years being illegal. I think little things like that would change their perspective. [Another group member's] talk about abortion - I think that's a big one because you think about girls have who have been raped . . .

Other trigger words, phraseology or statements shared throughout both groups in all four sessions created reactions. For example, a Generation One member stated, “Taking away parent’s rights in schools” and the agenda with the LGBTQ groups in California, “that’s a button, a trigger for me!” Another member thought that talking about legislation or activities by political figures could be a trigger like “Hillary Clinton and Obama were church going people.” Immediately, a more conservative member laughs out loud in response. The laugh is ignored by the family member who made the statement.

In another session with Generation One, the term “black power” and the use of the “the fist held up” is a trigger and that where one member lives in Washington D.C. there are many black professionals who live around her who are concerned with that term yet they may get stopped by a police officer just for their color. Based on these comments, this group member makes it seem that the issues surrounding the black community are very complicated. She shares a story of when she was involved in a suit by a black employee against a white employee who had commented, “Oh, do you do those braids yourself?” when referring to the black woman’s hair. The group member states, “This is why I struggle with race . . . The fact that she wanted to sue me, that was a trigger for me. I felt that was so unjust . . . She wanted money.”

Members of Generation One brought up additional events that have happened in the family where statements have been made that can be triggers. One conservative stated that she couldn’t remember if politics were off the table during her visit to her sister’s house but was sitting on the patio when the brother in law came out and announced, “Look at what Trump has done!” showing her the newspaper article. She mentions that she was just trying to have a nice breakfast (which she mentions again later in another meeting). I recalled a time with the group while visiting that same sister in D.C. when she asked me, “Can I just ask you a question? Why

in the world did you vote for Trump?” (This could have been a trigger at the time, but I viewed it as my sister trying hard to understand my perspective.) After stating this memory and without commenting on it, my sister immediately said, “Let me ask you this question. If there was another Republican who had a similar platform, would you rather vote for that person than Trump. . . that was ethical?” I responded, “Depends on who the person is.” The matriarch responds: “Trump is who he is, and we knew that when we voted for him at least we partially knew it. So we have to accept what he has done even though we do not agree with his remarks. I wish he would keep his mouth shut sometimes.”

The conversation continues as that same sister, an independent, states: “There’s a line you should not cross in my opinion and that’s why I could never vote for him. He’s just way beyond that line, ethically. I think it’s important that the President should be an ethical person.”

This triggers more response and triggering exchanges:

A. “Yes, that’s why I wish any of them would be. That’s why I was going to vote for Ben Carson.”

B. “. . . not Ben Carson!”

A. “You don’t like Ben Carson?”

B. “Oh, no!”

A. “Why? Oh, I shouldn’t say that.”

B. “He hasn’t done anything. He doesn’t have a clue how to run a housing program!”

A. (agreeing) “He should never have been put in that position. That was ridiculous. He should have been the surgeon general or something. That’s what he knows!”

B. “I agree with you.”

- A. “At least he’s on the cabinet. What do you think of him as a person, like what he stood for? He doesn’t want to hand over free stuff to everybody just because they have black skin. He wants them to work like he did; he wants opportunities. Do you believe he’s ethical? All I believe is his story . . . “

The conversation moves on as I ask the group to think of how to move forward with deeply held beliefs about politics. The group asks the more liberal leaning member if she thinks she is at all a conservative. To which, that member says, “No, not at all. Only with anti-abortion” and continues to explain the difference between thinking like a liberal, how it is different from a more conservative, Republican viewpoint.

Generation Two focuses on labels like “liberals,” “conservatives,” “radical right,” “liberal far left,” etc. One group member states that being called a “Millennial” can “discredit” her opinions, “degrading us, like we’re younger and we don’t understand.” She quickly states that it doesn’t apply to her because she is “not some cry baby liberal or something” and then quickly apologizes. She, in fact, comes back to that subject at the beginning of the next group session, stating:

It was not directed at the whole party (Democrats) but a faction within it, (knowing there are more liberally minded people in the group) really leftist people – don’t really get out of their own comfort zone of reference when it comes to their politics. They’re kind of sheep in that herd – they don’t really do their research and then they complain and have to retreat to their safe place. I’m trying to bite my tongue in half, but I don’t go sulk in a corner for five hours. It’s OK to have different opinions. You have to learn to deal with that and have comments of your own.

This triggers a reaction by another member who asks whether her comments include just one side (Democrats) or is it on both sides (including Republicans). The member responds, “It’s on both sides.” This perspective seems to satisfy her.

Generation Two also focused on the label “illegals” as well as “black,” “African Americans,” “brown,” “Hispanics,” and “white.” A group member mentions how quickly society has gone from “we’re in this together” going through COVID to civil “unrest and divide” after the George Floyd incident. This leads to another group member stating, “Here (in Washington D.C.) it’s always been ‘I’m my color and you’re your color,’” and that ‘we’re all separate,’ because, she states, when she’s with her African American friends they talk about being “all in it together,” but “when they’re with their own race they have a different conversation.” She says that one of her black friends has decided that she is not white and wonders why that person gets to make that decision for her. Her husband, who is Hispanic, says that since the riots have started, “They (black people) blame white people taking advantage (of them) and the blacks take advantage of Hispanics,” and that “Hispanics and Mexicans that were born in the U.S. are mad at the African American community because they ask for respect, but they don’t respect other people. It’s not all of them . . . a lot of them . . .” Another group member agrees that “it’s frustrating to hear African Americans talk about racial inequality but then just focus on black this, black that, and there’s no mention of any other races.”

The conversation turns to disappointments with those (the term “immigrants” is not used at first) who come to the U.S. and utilize “all the freedoms” and “the rights that they have” when most countries do not have these amenities, like “free education” (and another member adds “free healthcare”). She states:

This experiment in democracy that the founding fathers put together in some miraculous way, I don't even know how they did, it has become so taken for granted now that people just don't even know what they're fighting for anymore. If people would step outside of this country and get a reality check like people who come illegally (now it is clarified).

They come here for a reason because they know it's a place that's better.

The group member that had immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and lived illegally for many years responded:

I agree with that. I think what I have seen in these 20 years, all these benefits that a lot of people get. Not many other countries give them all that and they keep asking for more and more . . . This country, in my opinion, it's amazing – you can do anything you want; you can work where you want. If I end up losing my job, I won't blame the government it's because I'm getting lazy.

The fourth and fifth questions that were posed to the two groups centered around nonverbal triggers such as behaviors, tone of voice or even symbols on hats. The questions I asked dealt with the nonverbal triggers they had experienced by someone else or what triggers they had used that they believe created conflict or increased conflict.

Generation One talked about facial expressions which would indicate unbelief, for example, someone rolling their eyes would be a nonverbal trigger. One member stated several times that she would have a problem when someone just announces that something is true rather than stating it as an opinion especially if it is a topic she knows well i.e. medical issues (she is an RN). She also admitted that she had just recently used a sarcastic tone in responding to one of her grandsons and knew immediately it was not the right thing to do because of his reaction.

A group member brings up a recent issue, stating:

I really am very concerned about the triggers that Trump is bringing up around the confederate flag and the fact that he has asked Bubba to apologize for that whole incident with NASCAR. . . he's yelling at The Washington Redskins and the Cleveland Indians about changing their name. If I were a Native American, I would be livid about it. I know this is going to trigger some things with you guys . . . he's really trying to go back to the 1850's when the confederacy was still functioning. It's really disturbing.

She continues stating that we should not be destroying statues and that we should learn from history, but that Trump isn't altruistic in trying to stop these sorts of acts. "I think what he's trying to do is to whip up descent among and dysfunction among us and create division. I think that's his whole premise. He's taken it way too far." A conservative member states, "I agree with a lot of what he stands for." To which the more liberal member states, "I don't think he stands for anything. I think he stands for himself to get elected." This triggers the conservative group member to say:

I don't think I can say that I know what someone else is thinking. We really don't know. I don't like a lot of what he says but I like what he's done. I don't like abortion and I don't like gays taking over the country and sex education in the schools and changing history. It's sad they are wanting to tear down Washington's statue.

There is no reaction from the group member to whom she is responding.

Generation Two discussed several nonverbal triggers ranging from symbols to guns. A group member that has been mistaken for Hispanic says that how people speak to you can be a trigger. For example, ". . . when people talk to you really slow because they assume you might not speak English," and she retorts, "Well, I'm working on my second master's degree, and I'm pretty good at English." She says that in the summer she looks darker and more Hispanic, and in

the winter she looks lighter, so she is treated differently at different times of the year. Her husband who is Hispanic says that when people talk slowly with him, “it is a benefit” because he has difficulty understanding at times. The group smiles and one member says, “That’s not a trigger for [you].” She states that it becomes difficult when you feel targeted by others because they think you are Hispanic like walking out of Walmart and the white people in front of you are waved on but she consistently is asked to show her receipt before leaving.

The group talked about symbols, for instance, the Trump “MAGA” hat. One member stated that a coworker wore it to work and people got upset. Another member who lives in Washington D.C. sees a lot of tourists wear them; “. . . they come to see the White House and they’re walking like crazy with their hats on and lot people get mad about it. . . especially the African American population get offended with that.” They discuss flag burning, desecrating statues, looting, destroying buildings, reconstructing confederate flags, colors red-blue-purple, signs like “Black Lives Matter,” which one has in their yard. One member talks about being glared at by African Americans just walking down the street as a white person. “What did I do to you? It’s not like every white person is horrible. You can just feel it walking around.”

The conversation then focuses on guns, that it’s an impacting trigger in some families in discussions. One group member states, “The idea of having a gun in your house . . . I don’t get it. Some of my family thinks that owning a gun is an OK thing and we get in lots of arguments about the gun laws.” She reiterates, when asked what sort of nonverbals occur which might make the conversation worse, “The throwing up of arms, the increasing of tone of voice . . . someone just walks away. The not listening, like I may not agree with you but I’m still going to listen.” (In Generation One, her mother, stated in her group meeting that she has had “respectful discussions” on gun rights with their son (the Generation Two’s brother) because “people don’t

want to damage relationships.” The Generation Two member’s husband is conflicted whether to have a gun or not because he says, “he was attacked by some guys who wanted his money” and recalled a time about a year ago when both of their cars were burned in front of their house. He says, “I started thinking about maybe I should get a gun . . . to protect my family. At the same time, I don’t think it’s the right thing, that the law enforcement is here to protect us.” At that moment, a few in the group laugh. (This could be due to the issues with law enforcement lately. I should have circled back to that to discuss it as a trigger and check in with person who made the statement.) He continues, “I’m in between because sometimes it makes you change your mind, and I’ve got boys and they can be stupid at some point.” So, he says he avoids the issue.

Another group member mentions that seeing “furled eye brows” or people “grinding their teeth, waving their middle finger around” can be nonverbal triggers. At the end of an interview, a group member states, “. . . I got to say, when you were talking, I started to grind my teeth. I was like, you’re right . . . , people grind their teeth. I’m like maybe she can’t see me on Zoom though (laughter).” The group member she is referring to says, “I saw you.” The group laughs.

Intentionality

The next two questions in the interview sessions dealt with intentionality of using verbal or nonverbal triggers, whether the group members intended or not to use the triggers or whether they thought others intentionally or unintentionally used them.

Generation Two was not able to get to this subject due to time and Generation One focused on how having strong values can influence how someone may intentionally or unintentionally use verbal or nonverbal triggers. One group member states:

“. . . sometimes whoever is talking is trying to change the other’s opinion. So, it’s intentional a lot of times. It’s because . . . we all have deep-seeded values, like Black

Lives Matter, but a friend of mine says, ‘What about the black babies lives that are being aborted? They matter, too!’ So, it is values on both sides, what values are most important to you.”

The matriarch continues with this thought by speaking about how those rioting don’t care about what anybody thinks that they are going to say and do what they want no matter who it hurts because they do not seem to have values. The more liberal minded sister states that rioters don’t include the peaceful protestors and that we shouldn’t look at them all in one group. The group acknowledges that is true but that the matriarch was not including them in her statement.

This leads the group to discuss how using triggers intentionally or not is because of a lack of understanding, not having all the facts, and depending on the facts you listen to. The more liberally minded group member states:

I think we have opinions about where we get our information. I think that colors how we listen and absorb information and I think there are filters on our ability to hear. . . I think we hear what we want to hear. That is filtered by our values. Our bent toward the political side that we agree with colors everything. It continually builds the experience.

I suggest that what she is talking about is an “echo chamber” to which she agrees. The matriarch finishes the conversation by suggesting that everything in the news must be “sifted” no matter where it comes from (news outlet), that we must figure out whether we believe it or not.

Moving Forward

Questions nine and ten asked the group participants how they would like political discussions to occur in the family and what rules need to be established.

Generation One stated that in order to have political discussions in the family several rules would have to be created. One area they agreed on mirrors the interview regarding triggers,

that they need to be avoided. They also said that it would be helpful if a caveat is given when stating opinions that they are just that, opinions. One member states, “That would put water on the fire if I heard someone who has a strong opinion first say, the reason I have this opinion is When I can empathize with somebody then I don’t judge them - I listen to them, I value their opinion more because I know where its coming from.” There was agreement by the group. Additionally, one member stated that “hard conversations” should not be avoided that people learn through the “exchange of ideas” and dialog but that everyone should “listen before you speak, respecting other people” because they are valued. The matriarch stated that she thought that was possible, that people can have their opinions and be respected for them, but that she thought they should keep their opinions to themselves, that “at age 96, I find it very hard to change my opinions about things.” That led to the group discussing how a rule should be not to try and change people’s opinions because that leads to frustration and “it’s going to get heated.” Instead, it was suggested, to say, “OK, I’m not going to change that person’s mind, but I’d like them to understand my perspective on something and at least listen to me.” Another member added to go into the conversation trying to understand the other person as well, “where that person is coming from and really care why they think that way.” Everyone agreed these were great rules to move ahead with political conversations in the family.

The group also discussed how important it is to understand how people feel about certain issues, talking about their values, how people grew up and their experiences. The more conservative member stated, “If I know why somebody feels that way, that totally changes everything for me.” However, she didn’t think candidate names should be mentioned. The more liberal group member pushed back by saying that it is hard to have political conversations without mentioning who is in the political arena. “If you are going to have an honest

conversation with people you've got to let them express what they feel." She agreed with people talking about their backgrounds because it gives more information about their opinions. The conservative member reiterated that ". . . ten years from now, there will be no 'Trump,' there will be no 'Biden,' but we will still have our opinions and still have the same reason (for voting for that political party)."

Also, a member mentioned that using the words, "must" less and "can" more in political conversations need to be considered that it has to do with a person's motivation. The matriarch stated that it has a lot to do with control, that no one wants to be controlled. Everyone agreed. One member stated, in addition, "People have a hard time coming to the conversation because people are all coming with their "baggage." I added that wanting to have relationship with others more than wanting to be right changes how the conversation will go and that maybe it is fine to come to the conversation with "baggage" because the atmosphere can be one of respect and being heard, that everyone has "baggage." The group seemed to agree with head nods.

One additional point the Generation One group made was about emotions, keeping them lowered so that the conversation does not get as heated. One member asked me, "In terms of the rules, how do you lower the emotions? People get emotional about these sorts of conversations." The matriarch stated that emotions must be controlled, that if we don't do that "we'll be in trouble." I responded that the group had already touched on helping to control emotions by listening to people, trying to understand them and why they think the way that they do. I also suggested to look beyond the issues to maintaining relationships in the family and that helps to bring emotion down.

One member from Generation Two talked about her experience with very liberal leaning coworkers, one an atheist, with whom she would have religious conversations, that the coworker

did not want to hear her views. “I didn’t take her crap, but I let her have her opinion and if she got over passionate, I would just say, ‘that’s what I believe.’” She said at another job she worked with a Democrat (she’s a Republican) and she said, “I just nodded my head and gave my two cents on less sensitive things . . . she did not like Trump which was degrading to me. . . but I didn’t take it as a personal hit . . . I let her talk it out and vent her personal frustrations.” She stated that it’s important to be sensitive and to “mediate herself” to keep the conversation calm. I commented to the group that mediating yourself and staying calm were a great response and important in helping to move the political conversation forward in the family.

When I asked Generation Two, “Do you think it’s important to have open, honest conversations in family get togethers?” members acknowledge that it is. One more conservative member, an educator, states:

I think that it’s essential . . . Education should be coming from the home. I’m talking about character education, how to be a person, how to function in society. How to be a civilized human. How to support yourself. About 44% in our country professes no faith at all . . . agnostic, no faith, which is alarming to me not as a Christian, but as a human. Because if you don’t believe in anything . . . what is the moral compass that you live by then?

Another member and an educator agreed. She stated, “In conversations with family, kids need to see how that relationship works – productive conversations – that are not arguing and walking away - this is how you have touchy conversations in comfortable environments and how you deal with your emotions appropriately.” An additional member agreed and clarified for the group:

. . . talking about these specific touchy issues helps give us a good perimeter where each person is at in our family . . . how to approach them the next time and we can understand where they are coming from. We can have a more in-depth conversation based off those perimeters we set with each other. . . We can challenge each other in those conversations and be able to respect each other.

One group member states that there is a caveat to these kinds of conversations moving forward, similar to what Generation Two had suggested, which is “maintaining a level of sensitivity so that you don’t step on toes . . . that’s what tends to trigger people the most. Once emotions come into play then it starts to get heated and it’s just not productive. Mature and intelligent people can have conversations about anything.” Immediately, after this statement, another member says, “How can you be careful about not stepping on someone’s toes if you don’t know what toes you’re stepping on?” He clarifies and says asking questions is never stepping on toes because everyone likes to be asked what they think.

Finally, a Generation Two member jokingly stated that Zoom might be a good tool to continue having these types of political conversations with the whole family because “I can see World War III happening.” There was much group laughter on that final thought.

Analysis and Interpretation

The experience of observing, witnessing, participating, facilitating and guiding my family through the Zoom interview meetings was interesting and enlightening. I gained several revelations about my family and the dynamics and individual perspectives of which I was unaware before this study. Additionally, many family members stated that they gained insight into other perspectives of family members which has helped them understand the issues our family has had in communicating through conflict, especially over political differences. The

following analysis compiles the family dialog regarding verbal and nonverbal triggers, intentionality in the use of those triggers and moving forward with a guide on how the family wishes to conduct political conversations in the future.

Triggers

The most intense and lengthy conversations about verbal triggers were centered around the name “Trump” in both Generation One and Generation Two interview groups. A member from Generation One and two members from Generation Two are more liberal leaning in their political perspective so their responses to the “Trump” name, overall, were confirmed i.e. “I’d rather die than vote for him;” “he’s a philanderer,” etc. However, the more conservative members in both groups, but especially in Generation Two, made many references to “Trump” which were just as intense even though they plan to vote for him i.e. “I’m humiliated by him;” “despite his stupid venting on Twitter,” etc.

What can bring these two groups together in terms of being on the same page about how they feel about “Trump” will, at the same time, divide them if they aren’t cognizant of how intense those feelings are. Those that are more liberal and would never vote for him do not seem to be able to understand, fully, why someone would vote for him if they feel disdain for him. Also, those that are more conservative and are probably voting for President Trump in the next national election struggle to understand the alternative, Biden, even though they dislike a lot of aspects of their candidate. This topic of discussion will most likely elicit stronger emotions and heated debates in the future unless more discussion like that of Generation Two occur where asking the “why” can give insight into the background of what the family member most values which is supported by that candidate. The revelation of understanding by this group was a great path forward in exercising what Buber taught as the “I-Thou” and the “narrow ridge,” being true

to one's beliefs yet able to see someone else's beliefs and accept that it theirs while not trying to change it. Generation One reiterated that thought several times, that they realized there is no point in trying to change someone's perspective and that it causes a lot of frustration.

One family member, more liberal in perspective, from the Generation One group, was overt in making negative statements about President Trump throughout both interview meetings even though she knew these statements could be a trigger for those who support him as President in the group. In fact, she made the statement "I know this can be a trigger, but . . ." several times. This could be construed as passive-aggressive behavior to control the narrative which could be an issue, especially knowing the more conservative members do not discourage these statements because of the intensity with which she feels about President Trump (not wanting to engage in increasing the emotions). However, one more conservative member of the group pushed back on these statements on a few occasions. For example, laughing out loud when the more liberal sister stated "Hillary Clinton and Obama are church going people," (which was ignored) and then when the statement, "I think it's important that the president should be an ethical person," eluding to how she thinks President Trump is not, and the conservative member stated, "Yes, that's why I wish any of them would be . . ." These might seem like "fighting words" but standing one's ground is exceptional when trying to navigate the "narrow ridge."

An interesting exchange between these two Generation One members, who are sisters – one conservative and one liberal, occurred at the end of the ethical conversation, above. The conservative said she would have rather voted for Ben Carson which was met with an invalidating response by the more liberal sister, raising her voice stating, "No, not Ben Carson!" The conservative explained why he would have been her choice, asking the sister what she thought, yet not waiting for her to answer. She clearly did not want to hear more negative from

the liberal sister about her choice. The more liberal sister will need to temper her reactions to these sorts of statements and listen without judgement if these two sisters are going to move forward having these conversations.

Generation Two seems to have more open-minded framing of these types of conversations by asking questions, “Who will you vote for?” and apologizing when using terms someone might think is offensive, “cry baby liberal.” However, a topic which seems especially sensitive for political conversations is around the term “illegals” since the husband of one of the Generation Two members was an illegal immigrant for many years before gaining citizenship. What was enlightening for the group was the reason why they were adamant about their support for Obama because they said his administration was instrumental in helping them with the issue of citizenship. Also, it was mentioned outside of the group meetings that one group member, who was particularly disappointed with those who immigrate to America take advantage of the freedoms they enjoy. She found out through the conversation in the group that this member who immigrated had paid taxes the entire time he had been in the U.S. This expanded her view that even illegal aliens are helping to support the life of freedom in America. It seemed to be a paradigm shift for her.

In the same frame, one of the group members in Generation Two who says she looks more Hispanic in the summer and more white in the winter, shared many experiences where she is treated as an illegal immigrant who cannot speak English or she is treated disrespectfully by blacks because she looks more white at times. Race issues are a major trigger for her, and it was helpful for the group to see this side of her for future conversations.

Some disparities seemed to occur between the two groups. In Generation One, one sister states that she has had respectful discussions around gun control with her son who supports the

Second Amendment rights. In Generation Two, his sister stated that the conversations are very argumentative with “throwing up of arms, the increasing of tone of voice . . . someone just walks away . . . not listening.” My guess is that she is describing her brother’s actions. It is interesting that one can experience the issue one way and the other a completely different way. The memories of these conversations could be edited in the mind from the actual experience and/or they just treat the brother/son differently in the conversation. To complicate the issue the member of Generation Two, who does not believe in having guns in the home, most likely argues with her husband who feels he must protect his family, recently experiencing both cars being burned in front of their home. He said he avoids the issue. This will be a sensitive topic which could trigger greater issues in the extended family, many of whom believe in the Second Amendment.

Intentionality

Patton discusses Husserl’s phenomenology as indicative of intentionality which “refers to consciousness, to the internal experience of being conscious of something . . . the act . . . the object of consciousness are intentionally related” (p. 574). Group One was thoughtful in terms of whether people are intentional or not when using triggers, that it is because of what the family members value, what they understand, whether they have all the facts and where they get their facts which sometimes leads members to listen to echo chambers. This is an important discovery for this generation because they have had more years thinking the same things, creating the same patterns, holding the same values, and listening to the same news organizations. It will be a growth step for this group to work to understand before being understood.

Moving Forward

The conversations both groups had about how they want to move forward in having political conversations with the extended family create a positive path with important caveats and rules which will guide the members navigating some tricky political waters.

The common theme the groups discovered which will be pivotal in establishing trust and respect is that each family member needs to be understood first before reacting to triggers. As one member stated, “That would put water on the fire if I heard someone who has a strong opinion first say, the reason I have this opinion is . . .” Building empathy through understanding by listening seemed to be the biggest take away for both groups and that these conversations need to be happening in the family so that all generations can be taught how to agree to disagree. As one Generation Two member stated, “. . . this is how you have touchy conversations in comfortable environments . . .” If not in the family, where?

Generation One and Generation Two provide much hope in future political dialog. Both groups have shown an important understanding in moving the family forward in political dialog.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework for this study was Revised Family Communication Patterns Theory (RFCP) which explores and expresses how a family processes any incoming information, specifically, “labels and operationalizes the dimensions as conversation orientation (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, 2013, p. 224). The patterns speak to how open a family is oriented to expression of ideas and beliefs between family members.

Another theory guiding this study is “Core Communication” which is based upon Lord’s (Marriage and Family Therapy) and Miller’s (Conflict and Family Dynamics) work regarding “General Living Systems Theory” (von Bertalanffy, 1950, p. 134-65) and “Communication

Theory in Systems.” “The behavior (verbal and nonverbal) of system members toward each other in maintaining stability or bringing change communicates the dynamics of their relationship” (Miller and Miller, 2007, p. IV-5-7). This theory illustrates that relationships are maintained by a series of “actions,” “reactions,” and “interactions” which lead to a “chain of exchanges” that either stabilize the relationship or change it, either for better or worse (Miller, 2007, p. IV-6).

The composite theory for this study is based on Martin Buber’s Dialogue, a call to a communication and community, to the “I-Thou” in relationship, “the realm of between” (Arnett, p. 30) The “essential We” (p. 160). Buber’s “dialogue” is based on his idea of communication, “where each of the participants really has in mind or others in their present . . . turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them” (Arnett, p. 7). It is “relationship-centered communication” concerned with what happens to both the self and others.

Buber’s focal point is community, the “community of otherness.” Buber believed in an awareness of the truth from the perspective of the other, that “the true revolution demands a powerful will toward community” (Arnett, p. ix). Arnett interprets this idea through Maurice Friedman who says,

The ‘community of otherness’ permits a struggle over ideas and principles . . . Conflict is not feared in a ‘community of otherness’; it provides the basis for growth of the person and community willing to genuinely keep the triple focus of self, other, and community principle in creative tension” (Arnett, p. 8).

Buber saw the value in conflict between others and “the danger of too much self-protection” which Arnett discusses as polarization, as an “I am right and you are wrong” position (Arnett, p. 8).

Buber calls humanity toward “conscience thinking,” a way in which we move from “control to dialogue, from image to authenticity, from independence to interdependence, and finally from prescription to collaboration” (Arnett, p. 28). It is in this realm which Buber refers to walking the “narrow ridge,” “bridging the chasm between opposing camps by opening up the possibilities of dialogue between persons” (Arnett. 31). It is a balanced perspective, however, whereby a person can stand with their convictions while at the same time learning from an opposing viewpoint. As Arnett explains, it is a balancing “tightrope walk” between the self and other, shifting when needed. Friedman considered the “narrow ridge” to be the “third alternative” to the either/or perspective, the “unity of the contraries” (Arnett, p. 36) and “dialogical courage” (Arnett, p. 166).

Discussion

Generation One and Generation Two were able to dialog together to come to an understanding on what Buber theorized as the “I-Thou” and navigating the “narrow ridge.” Their awareness of political perspectives that have the potential to create conflict or increase it is important as well as realize that understanding others first will lead to “otherness” and the “essential We.”

Limitations

The process by which I elicited my family for this study could have created bias. However, the interviews were established with a set of rules which was shared with the family members. Appendix C details how the interviews and study would be approached with the group

using the tool of “empathic neutrality.” This was a useful way of staying a part of the process while maintaining separation from the statements and events with which I may have been a part as the group members shared their experiences.

The issue which did arise was one of staying silent when further questions could have been asked. This was a result of my intentionally observing to stay more neutral rather than engaging at certain times, in retrospect, when further investigation could have been made into certain statements which were unclear group members.

Overall, I believe I allowed the research process to take place without overt bias while still facilitating dialog.

Future Research

Additional research will need to be conducted with the family in order to fully involve all family members so that future dialog about politics can be engaged by all members. Additional Generation One and Generation Two family members were not able to take part in the group interviews due to scheduling difficulties. Also, combining these groups together would generate much more dialog to understand triggers, intentionality and perspective in moving forward to include the entire family in determining how the family will discuss politics.

Conclusion

The goal of the study was to facilitate the core family member dialog as they collaborate with each other in learning the specific triggers which create debilitating conflict in the family when discussing politics. The secondary goal was to facilitate the core family member dialog as they collaborate to maintain family relationships and respect each other’s views. This is especially important since the next national election is in just a few months.

Why focus on families? One doesn't choose who their relatives are, and there are many reasons families are brought together, voluntarily and involuntarily. This leads to families participating in conversations they might typically avoid which may lead to increased conflict. The family is also the core of society. If dialog can occur with families in which conflict is imminent, then the larger society can benefit from how the family has learned to manage conflict. Talking about politics usually involves one's core beliefs. If families from various views can talk about politics, perhaps other topics can be broached.

Creating a consciousness of the kinds of triggers that are more causal to conflict adds to the gap in the literature on dealing with politically charged conversations in families. As stated in the literature review, further study is needed to prepare for dialog within political discourse between politically diverse perspectives, and the study can start at the nucleus of our society: families.

“ . . . as there is a ‘Thou’ so there is a ‘We’ . . . “ – **Martin Buber**

Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. What words have you used which you think trigger (start) conflict regarding political discussions?
2. What words have you heard others use which you think trigger (start) conflict regarding political discussions?
3. What nonverbal behaviors have you used, symbols displayed or worn, etc., which you think trigger conflict regarding political discussions?
4. What nonverbal behaviors, symbols displayed, etc., have you seen others use which you think trigger conflict regarding political discussions?
5. How are these behaviors, symbols, etc., being used by everyone in the family or larger extended family either intentionally (on purpose) or unintentionally (not intended)?
6. If the behaviors, symbols, etc., were intentional, what reason(s) do you think they were used in the discussions?
7. If the behaviors, symbols, etc., were unintentional, what do you think causes these behaviors, symbols, etc., to be used?
8. How would you like to see your family or the larger extended family conduct political discussions in the future?
9. What “rules” do you think the family will use to talk about politics from here on that will help to avoid trigger words and actions?
10. In what ways do you think the family dialog needs to be conducted that will allow others to feel heard and respected?

Appendix B

Elizabeth Rose <elizros@mail.regent.edu>

Jun 15, 2020, 4:50 PM

Mom, Joan, and Linda -

This will seem very formal, but I need have to have formal consent for my research.

I am emailing to see if you would be willing to participate in doctoral research for a Regent University course called *Communication Research: Qualitative Methodology*. My study is entitled: “**The Conflict Triggers that Keep Families from Fighting Well Over Politics.**”

I would like to set up some Zoom meetings, due to COVID-19, between the four of us to get an idea of the types of experiences our family has in dealing with conflict when we talk about politics. If appropriate and within the time frame, I would propose that one other of your family members be included in a Zoom meeting and then possibly be included in a more extended dialog with other additional family members in some dialog beyond that. Please let me know which family members you think would be willing to participate in any Zoom meetings on this topic.

I am asking for a commitment of at least 1-2 hours of interview time, initially, and perhaps 1-2 hours in with other family members, if possible, for a total of about 2-4 hours over the course of two weeks, somewhere between June 22 and July 6, 2020. The content of our dialog would be for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of this course. However, if this initial research leads to further work toward a dissertation, I would ask for your permission to use the content of our dialog for possible publication. If you or any other family member would prefer anonymity, pseudonyms could be provided.

If you agree to the above research arrangement, please respond to this email with your consent. Once I hear back from you, I will contact you to set up our first Zoom meeting. I appreciate your consideration and hope you will join me in dialog regarding this very important study. I believe it will lead our family to some positive outcomes and possibly help other families who struggle with having conversations about politics.

If you can, please respond within a few days. Thanks!

Linda Hiebert Tue, Jun 16, 1:11 PM

Hi Beth Yes I would be happy to participate. Lin

Terry and Joan Read Jun 20, 2020, 12:24 PM

Thank you for your invitation and careful preparation, Beth. I will be delighted to participate in this study and family conversation.

Appendix C

Elizabeth Rose <elizros@mail.regent.edu>

Jul 6, 3:29 PM

Hi Ann, Dan, Kim and Maddy -

Here is the Zoom invite for tonight. If you have any questions about getting on, let me know - just text. Also attached is a question guide I'm using although we may not get to all the questions. Please read all the way through below and respond as requested before our meeting.

A few helpful thoughts for the meeting:

1. I am a moderator - I will take a very neutral approach in facilitating the meeting. I am required to for the validity of the study if I seem standoffish.
2. The point of this study is not to solve political issues. I'll talk more about it at the beginning of the meeting, but we are only looking at verbals like words and phrases, as well as nonverbals like the tone of voice and facial expressions and symbols (things people wear, hand signals, etc) that cause conflict in political conversations.
3. Politics can be a very personal and potentially emotional topic. If you feel emotional in the interview, that is understandable. However, we want to focus on the content of the interview. I will help to monitor that for us and guide us back on track if we head down any "rabbit trails."
4. This is an experiment of sorts. Go with the flow of the conversation and don't feel that there are any expectations on you for anything.
5. I value you and your opinion greatly! It will be so helpful for my doctoral research. I also value your time and hope we can get this done in an hour or so. If you have to leave the meeting, please feel you can.

One other thing - **if you would respond to this email, it will be the official informed consent to participate in the study.** Thanks!

See you soon!

Dan Read

Got it

Madison Rose

See you in a half hour!

ann.tejeda

Israel and I have read the email and consent to participate.

Appendix D

Zoom Meeting – Agenda – June 27, 2020

1. Welcome to the first Zoom meeting for my qualitative research!
2. I am focusing on our family conflict within the context of political dialog.
 - a. Even though I'm involved I will attempt to be more neutral - "Empathic Neutrality" – understanding without judging, with authenticity to build rapport, trust and openness.
 - i. I am not attempting to fix anything or anyone.
 - ii. My goal in this research is discovery only.
 - iii. What happens after the research may lead us to some answers.
 - b. Your comments about me are welcome – I'm involved!
 - c. I want you to be as honest as you are comfortable being.
 - d. Using what is called Participatory Action Research – collaborative research
3. Don't worry about the analysis of what is being said – we are just exploring at this point.
 - a. Exploration is about discovery – we are going on a journey to find certain things, not everything i.e. a certain shell on the beach but not all shells.
 - i. Conflict can bring up lots of issues, memories, ideas, etc.
 - ii. We are only looking at a certain part of conflict – the triggers (verbal and nonverbal) that you experience in political conversations within our family.
 1. Verbal – a word used i.e. stupid
 2. Nonverbal – a facial expression i.e. eye roll; a tone of voice i.e. condescending; a symbol on a t-shirt i.e. "socialism"
 3. Your perspective is real – it doesn't matter that someone might disagree.
 4. We won't be venturing into qualifying and judging only distinguishing.
 - iii. The "family" means, within the core family (the four of us/your immediate family) and the extended family (Joan's, Linda's, Beth's)
 - b. There are certain questions being asked but if something comes to mind that you want to say or ask, please use that opportunity – you may forget later. If it isn't relevant, I'll redirect our conversation.
4. None of what we talk about is shared at this point outside our group and my professor. This is not for publication.
 - i. It may become a part of my dissertation which would be published.
 - ii. At that point, we can discuss anonymity.
5. If our exploration leads us to include others at the next meeting, let's discuss that at the end.
6. Keep an open mind with yourself – if something comes up and you aren't sure you want to share it, at least consider it.
7. I want to thank you for spending this time with me.

- a. There is no monetary payment for your time, but your participation may pay in dividends for future research, education, and change.
 - b. You are more than welcome to see the research I compile – it is as much yours as mine.
 - c. You can have a copy of the recording today as well.
8. Let's begin.

Appendix D

Zoom Meeting Links and Transcripts:

First meeting with core family members – 6/27/20:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aD1QIIDP0Jpu-4rc6cH0zsNBgcGsByN9/view?usp=sharing>

Joan: "CNN"

Lin: "FOX News"

Joan: For some people in our family CNN represents really liberal viewpoints. Some even go so far as to think it's not made up. I'm not saying it's not. Maybe not even true views.

Mom: I avoid CNN.

Joan: It's a trigger.

Lin: It's the same with FOX News. It's a trigger. It represents over the top criticism of any democrat led effort or anything like that. A lot of times they seem to perpetuate false news. It's a trigger for me.

Lin: Talking about specific pieces of legislation or talking about certain political figures like Obama or saying things like "Hillary Clinton and Obama were church going people." (Joan laughs, Lin ignores. This could have been a trigger but no one ventures into it.)

Mom: Trump's name is a trigger. I try to avoid political stuff as much as possible.

Lin: For me, if I would use Trump's name, I would say things like, and I know I have, things like "He lies; he's a philanderer; he uses women." Those would be triggers for someone else.

In talking face to face with people, if you say something that is a trigger, their facial expression might be something like (face scrunched) "Huh, I don't believe that!" kind of thing.

Mom: or they roll their eyes

Joan: One of the things that I think is a trigger is when someone just announces something instead of an opinion. It's like what you think doesn't matter. (Like it's fact.) When I first got off the plane and we went to Olive Garden and Maddy was there and the first thing she said was "So, what do you think of Trump?!" (said gregariously and Joan laughing)

Lin: With Jon (Linda's son), the question is around gun rights and the second amendment and what does that mean. We've had respectful discussions – people don't want to damage relationships. You listen

and you're really careful about saying things that would make them feel disrespected and not valuing their opinion.

Joan: For me, if somebody says something and announces it and it has to do with medical issue that I'm trained in that's a problem for me. Like the Coronavirus.

Joan: I'm guilty just today. It's an example. I walked into Aiden's room and he has this poster of these two Japanese guys in one of those games. Just seeing that makes my blood boil because of my background (someone told her you have to watch out for these types of games). All I said was, "Well they look happy!" (sarcastically) He looked at me like, "That was judgmental!" He said, "That's why I play volleyball." So, I took the clue and shut up, but it was too late I was already negative about a poster he had hanging in his room.

Beth: (brings up intentionality)

Lin: In some cases it's intentional. People feel very strongly about values, something is really engrained in them. I don't believe that Trump is an honest person. I think he is totally trying just to get reelected. And therefore when coming up with a plan for COVID-19 for the U.S. to save people's lives, I don't think you should be putting people in jeopardy. That's a value for me. I will say things intentionally, but I think it's wrong because I know in my heart of hearts that I'm not going to change anybody's mind. I get really frustrated about that because it is a value - it's deep inside me.

Joan: That's what I was going to say, sometimes whoever is talking is trying to change the other's opinion. So it's intentional a lot of times. It's because of values. We all have deep-seeded values. Like Black lives matter but a friend of mine says, "What about the black babies lives that are being aborted? They matter, too." So, it is values on both sides, what values are most important to you.

Mom: The people in the riots more than the peace people, they don't care what anybody's opinion is - they're going to say what they're going to say no matter who it hurts because they evidently don't have any values.

Beth: What else might cause people to create triggers intentionally or unintentionally?

Joan: Not understanding but who has all the facts?

Lin: Not having all the facts and which facts do you listen to? Well, I think going back to the Fox and CNN example, I think we have opinions about where we get our information, I think that colors how we listen and absorb information and I think there are filters on our ability to hear. So, I don't want to hear things about Trump. I get sick and tired of hearing things about him.

I think we hear what we want to hear. That is filtered by our values.

I don't listen to CNN and I don't listen to FOX. Our bent toward the political side that we agree with colors everything. It continually builds the experience. (Beth suggest, like an echo chamber and Linda agreed that was what she was trying to say.)

Mom: I think we have to sift everything in the news no matter where it is. We have to sift and debate whether we believe it or don't believe it.

Lin: I intentionally don't listen to FOX because I don't think they are unbiased, so I try to only listen to unbiased news but that's my opinion. Just because I believe it . . . doesn't mean it's true. (not sure she said this because her WIFI was going out)

Beth: (At that point, Linda's screen freezes, while driving in the car.) You said an interesting thing while you were in the car - "Joan's frozen" when, actually, you were frozen. It's all perspective. Linda comments that it is a comparison for what we had been talking about.

Mom: There's no such thing as unbiased opinion in the news.

We discuss how there is a lot of opinion-based news these days.

Beth: How would you like to see the family discuss politics?

Joan: I think the rules would have to be laid out. Like, I love your topic about triggers that could be very useful to agree not to use triggers or to agree to use open ended questions and that [what we are talking about] is my opinion. What might be helpful what Linda was saying – this is my opinion based on my deep-seeded belief on the sanctity of life. That would put water on the fire if I heard someone who has a strong opinion first say, the reason I have this opinion is . . . When I can empathize with somebody then I don't judge them - I listen to them, I value their opinion more because I know where its coming from.

Lin: That's good. I think also, don't avoid hard conversations because I think people learn through dialog. Exchange of ideas is important and so avoiding those hard conversations is not a good idea. A rule would be to listen before you speak. Respecting other people that they are valued, they are children of God, they have worth, coming from that perspective of respect.

Mom: I think it's possible that we can do that, that we can have our opinions, but we can respect others and, actually, we can keep our opinions to ourselves largely. It depends on how deep you want the conversation to go. I agree with Linda but at age 96 I find it very hard to change my opinions about things.

Lin: That's an important point, Mom, because when we try and change someone else's mind about something you'll get frustrated and it's going to get heated. Whereas if you go into a conversation and say, "OK, I'm not going to change that person's mind, but I'd like them to understand my perspective on something and at least listen to me."

Joan: I like that, Linda, and how about going into the conversation with really try and understand where that person is coming from. And really care, why they think that way. (Everyone agreed.)

(Something shared at the end of the conversation which was funny – Joan brings up another trigger.)

Joan: A trigger for Mom is seeing different news people on T.V. and she says, "Oh I can't stand so and so!" She said it makes her smile – it's not a trigger but it is classic "Mom."

First meeting with younger family members – 7/6/20:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rNuJ3QJ1Barl6NcdDMJqBuu2TV1f4OIM/view?usp=sharing>

Madison: "Radical Right" "Liberal Far Left" – labels on people.

Izzy: I'm not good with politics – I try to avoid it. Liberals or conservatives are labels – people get offended and they start making worse comments.

Ann: I think you can over generalize that to any group.

Dan: For some people not all words are going to be treated the same. There are a lot of words that are a lot hotter. Like if you said the word, "abortion" that typically is the top of the peak as to how to delineate and segregate people in these conversations.

Maddy: The name "Trump" alone gets people really pissed off.

Izzy: Some words I may not completely understand what it means. (Beth commented that it might not be a bad thing.)

Maddy: I think even my generation, it discredits our opinion is being called "Millennials." For my generation, it can be degrading us, like we're younger and we don't understand. This doesn't apply to me because I'm not some "cry baby liberal" or something, sorry. "Snowflake," especially college students, they get called that a lot.

Ann: Another word that's on the continuum is "illegals." And then I think when you label any group as "black" "brown" "white" whatever – never talk about "Asians" – the lack of talking about "Asians".

Ann: I have two triggers: One, when all the white people walk by and they don't check their bags at Walmart and then you walk by and they're like, "Open it up, let me see a receipt." The other one is when people talk to you really slow because they assume you might not speak English.

Izzy: The second one is a benefit for me. I will really appreciate it if they talk slow.

Dan: Not a trigger for Izzy.

Ann: An example would be like school at Parent Teacher Conference and they say (slowly) "Hello, Miss Tejada, would you like to sit?" I'm like, "Well, I'm working on my second master's degree and I'm pretty good at English." That's a generalization based on how you look. In the summer I look Hispanic and in the winter I look white. (Ann is eluding to how she is judged differently depending on how dark she is.)

Ann: Somebody's got to say the Trump hat.

Maddy: I was going to say that. Actually, I had an incident at the bus lot that I was working at last year. One of the people that worked with us wore a MAGA hat into the bus lot and people just lost their s**t.

Dan: That's a big one.

Maddy: It's a hat – relax.

Izzy: In my opinion, I don't feel bad about it. I have seen people really go crazy, like their kids in D.C., teenagers, they come to see the White House and their walking like crazy with their hats on and a lot of people will get mad about it. I guess that it's just that they don't have enough respect for themselves that they don't have enough respect for someone else.

Especially the African American population get pretty offended with that. They have been pushed out of the city because richer people are coming in and pushing them out to the suburbs.

Kim: I don't know where flag burning would fit in.

Maddy: I know it's an ugly part of our past but it's still our history . . . the desecrating of those confederate statues. I know the confederate flag has really bad connotations but that doesn't give you the right to destroy national history. That's ridiculous. Act like an adult.

Ann: We've had experiences where we've had people take photos of us because we weren't supposed to be there. And I've had people take photos of my students and have had to push them away because they thought our kids look different. And that has stood out to me. Every time I go on a field trip, I've had to physically put myself between my students and tourists taking pictures of them. They'll try to take pictures next to them. I don't know if it's because we have such a diverse population at our school. It might be the disabilities that some of our students have. (Beth asks here if the tourists are foreign.) Most Asians do it - Japanese and Chinese. Our personal experience in South Dakota where some people actually moved next to us and then had someone take photos [with us]. It was the most uncomfortable thing on the planet.

Dan: Bumper stickers. Whatever candidate they're supporting. The way the people talk for sure, how you say things like we were talking about earlier.

Kim: Certainly what we've seen in this racial unrest would be the protesting in the streets, the looting, the attacks on cops, the destruction of federal property or government buildings. Those are nonverbal behaviors.

Speaking of news, I would also suggest as far as symbols are concerned it would be Fox, CNN, MSNBC . . .

Ann: And the immediate connotations

Maddy: George Floyd's face is a symbol of it.

Kim: I think it's Mississippi is now having to reconstruct their flag . . . You also have the gay pride flag. I'm wondering how long the Christian flag will stand because certainly in November I don't think this country is going to look the same with COVID. I think our country is going to look a lot different in November.

Maddy: Just the colors – red, blue, purple. If someone is wearing a certain color shirt.

Ann: Yard signs – we have one “Hate has no place here.” I've had some people say I just love that sign and then I can tell others don't love them.

Maddy: Furled eye brows or grinding their teeth, waving middle fingers around – just have a conversation!

Kim: It's been head spinning how quickly we went from showing kindness and taking care of each other and we're in this together with the whole COVID thing to right after the violence with George Floyd it went to civil unrest and divide. It literally is head spinning. In a couple of months from “we're in this together” and “light your light” to whatever.

Ann: Here it's always been “I'm my color and you're your color.” I have so many different friends from different races. From my African American friends I get a totally different response from “Our people are dying more” “Our neighborhoods don't have healthcare.” But I've had friends who felt strongly about

this way before. “We’re all separate.” I got that feeling from a lot of people and then I got a lot of people trying to feel that we’re together but when they’re with their own race they have a different conversation. So, that was interesting.

Izzy: It has made a big difference the Floyd death between African Americans and Hispanics. They blame white people taking advantage and the blacks take advantage of Hispanics. I guess Hispanics and Mexicans that were born in the U.S. are mad at the African American community because they ask for respect, but they don’t respect other people – it’s not all of them. It has to do with education – a lot of them don’t have a good education; they don’t know how to respect people. If you get attacked by them that makes a huge difference.

Dan: It’s frustrating to hear African Americans talk about racial inequality but then just focus on black this black that and there’s no other mention about any other race.

Maddy: I’ve seen a lot of disrespect between cultures down in the city. I usually go down there with my friends and I’ve got black friends and diverse people, too, we are all fine and we don’t really care and we’re walking down the street and I’ll get a glare from an African American across the street or something like that because I’m pale. What did I do to you? It’s not like every white person is horrible. You can just feel it walking around.

Beth – Can we have conversations about politics within the family? If we can’t have political conversations within the family, we certainly can’t have them outside the family. Think about within your own family – when you get together in your separate families. Are there struggles?

Ann: Guns. Huge trigger. The idea of having a gun in your house, legally carrying or whatever that is. I don’t get it. Some of my family thinks that owning guns is an OK thing and we get in lots of arguments about the gun laws.

Beth: When you are in the arguments, can you think of something that is said that makes it worse or nonverbals?

Ann: The throwing up of arms, the increasing of tone of voice, the negative comments toward someone’s opinion, someone just walks away. The not listening, like I may not agree with you but I’m still going to listen and I know for a fact that I’m never going to agree with you but I need to listen to start at least rationalize what you’re thinking in my head. I haven’t known any of those conversations to end even.

Izzy: I’m in between everything because I was attacked by some guys to get my money and then we got the incident with the cars and we didn’t know who burned them. I start thinking about maybe I should get a gun. I should have a gun in the house as a way to protect my family. At the same time I don’t think it’s the right thing, that the law enforcement is here to protect us. (laughter from the group – I should have come back to that to see what the laughter was about and if that was a trigger) You know, whatever. I didn’t grow up with guns in Mexico. I’m in between because sometimes it makes you change your mind and I’ve got boys and they can be stupid at some point and I avoid it.

Dan: Political conversations are not unlike other topics that are hot – button pushers – religion, sports teams. They can cause the same type of reaction because it’s basically stimulating, I think, the part of

the brain that gets you to be emotional and defensive, less cognizant and thoughtful and more just responsive and emotional.

The first thing that comes to mind is sports – having different family in different parts of the country. It's most when that comes up there are parts of the conversations that are more light hearted and joking. Some of it's poking for fun and some of it's not. Different family not talking to each other and that's just sports. (Beth brings up that it's not even talking about politics yet!)

Kim: Particular to our family, politics probably don't play a part . . . I would suggest religion would be the only thing that we probably do have any sort of conversation on. I think that our family, The Reads, have seen growing up that this country takes for granted all the freedoms that they have and the rights that they have. It just seems preposterous to me that anybody takes these things for granted when you go to most countries, they don't have these freedoms. For instance, free education. In November when I think this country is going to be different, I just hope people wake up and can see this country . . . the democracy that we enjoy and the rights that we enjoy now. We're a miracle in the first place. This experiment in democracy that the founding fathers put together in some miraculous way. I don't even know how they did it has become so taken for granted now that people just don't even know what they're fighting for anymore. If people would step outside of this country and get a reality check like people who come illegally. They come here for a reason because they know it's a place that's better. (This could have been a trigger for Izzy since he came illegally from Mexico.)

Izzy: I agree with that. I think what I have seen in these 20 years all these benefits that a lot of people get. Not many other countries give them all that and they keep asking for more and more. I personally think that when you don't have a job . . . in my experience through these years it's been a lot harder for me to get a job because of how I look. For me to get the respect from my boss, I've been working so hard a lot of times I end up doing most of the work for the other guys and I'll get a little more respect. This country, in my opinion, it's amazing – you can do anything you want; you can work where you want. If I end up losing my job, I won't blame the government it's because I'm getting lazy. They (?) just ask too much from the government. They all know me because they work less when I work with them.

I was young when I came, and I didn't know about all the political things. A lot of these guys attack you because you don't know English. It hurts your feelings. I have seen so many things. It's a beautiful country – I love it.

Maddy: I worked at Starbucks with an atheist and when she talked about religion, she did not want to hear it. I didn't take her crap but I let her have her opinion and if she got over passionate, I would just say "that's what I believe." I was talking with a coworker one time and she's a democrat and I just nodded my head and gave my two cents on less sensitive things and she does not like Trump which was degrading to me since I voted for him. I don't take it as a personal hit. It's more about his values and what he does for this country than about his attitude. He can act like a child on Twitter for all I care, it's annoying. I let her talk that out and vent, her personal frustrations. (Maddy stated that it's important to be sensitive –to mediate herself.)

Ann: I've had a really interesting last four years getting to know a new coworker that I've had to work with every day and she's black, and everything that happens to her is because of her skin color according to her. She's decided I'm not white. I don't know why they get to make that decision. It's been interesting to watch – if someone looks at her it's because she's black. I do not argue with her she's one

of the scariest people I know. I disagree with so much of what she says. (Thinking) “People don’t like you, not because you’re black but it’s because you’re a nasty person.”

Maddy, I got to say, when you were talking, I started to grind my teeth. I was like, you’re right. Maddy, people grind their teeth, I’m like maybe she can’t see me on Zoom though. (laughter)

Maddy: I saw you. (the group laughs)

Beth: What would happen if we had these types of conversations with the whole family?

Ann: Zoom might be safer – I can see world war three happening. (laughter)

Second meeting with core family members – 7/7/20: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N-8JPuMkyl-FJcFz75lpRuzatpfyQTAD/view?usp=sharing>

Joan: Pastor Peter has the “fist up” sign which bothers me.

Lin: Agree with you on that – I have a lot of problem with using the term “black power.” I know there are degrees of that in the black community. Our neighborhood is full of professional black people. They are also concerned. I completely understand the issues . . . congressman, professionals are concerned about getting stopped by policeman. Defunding the police concerns me.

I really am very concerned about the triggers that Trump is bringing up around the confederate flag and the fact that he has asked Bubba (NASCAR driver) to apologize for that whole incident with NASCAR. And the fact that he’s yelling at The Washington Redskins and the Cleveland Indians about changing their name. If I were a Native American, I would be livid about it. I know this is going to trigger some things with you guys but like some commentators are saying he’s really trying to go back to the 1850’s when the confederacy was still functioning. It’s really disturbing. It’s part of our history and we should all know about the confederacy and the complexity of Lee and all the others that were a part of that confederacy and why they were. I don’t think we should destroy the statues and I think we should learn from history, but I don’t think that’s what Trump is about. I think what he’s trying to do is to whip up descent among and dysfunction among us and create division. I think that’s his whole premise. He’s taken it way too far.

Beth: That really triggers you when you see his tweets about this.

Lin: Absolutely.

Joan: I agree with a lot of what he stands for.

Lin: I don’t think he stands for anything. I think he stands for himself to get elected.

Joan: I don’t think I can say that I know what someone else is thinking. We really don’t know. I don’t like a lot of what he says but I like what he’s done. I don’t like abortion and I don’t like gays taking over the country and sex education in the schools and changing history. It’s sad they are wanting to tear down Washington’s statute.

Mom: The teachers are not teaching history and you can’t erase history, it’s there!

Linda: We had a woman decided that she was going to sue me and my employee because she said that we were discriminating against her. This is why I struggle with race. Some people try to use the situation and make up stuff. Here’s a trigger for a black person. She said that my employee had commented on

her hair, “Oh, do you do those braids yourself?” The woman said the employee was racist for making that comment. The fact that she wanted to sue me, that was a trigger for me. I felt that was so unjust. She was going to boycott World Vision, but she settled out of court. She wanted money.

Beth: If our family gets together, is having a conversation about politics something we can do?

Joan: Probably. Lin, when I was at your house, I can’t remember if we agreed that we weren’t going to talk about (politics) but Murray came outside (to the patio) and he said “Look at what Trump has done!”

Lin: He gets up every morning and reads the newspaper and gets mad at Trump. (Beth asks what publications he reads.) The Washington Post, The New York Times, and the Wallstreet Journal.

Mom: I hope Mur doesn’t get a hard attack over all this.

Lin: I don’t think he’ll get a heart attack – maybe a stroke.

Lin: Mom has said let’s not talk about politics.

Beth: I remember when we were together in January (visiting Joan in Escondido) and we had a conversation about Trump, an article that was in Christianity Today that the editor wrote and we talked through it and didn’t get upset.

Lin: That’s because you have evolved. Maybe I haven’t evolved as much as you have in terms of expressing emotion. But I think you have come to a point where you just want to have a conversation. You don’t want to try and change my mind.

Beth: I remember visiting last Spring for residency and we were in the car and you said, “I just have to ask you. Why would you vote for Trump?” I said, “I agree with the platform. I don’t like what he does sometimes, but I agree with the platform.”

Lin: Let me ask you this question, if there was another Republican who had a similar platform, would you rather vote for that person than Trump because of who he is as a person?

Beth: Depends on the person.

Lin: That was ethical?

Beth: Someone who we would feel was more ethical and had higher standards? (Lin nods.) Probably.

Mom: Trump is who he is and we knew that when we voted for him at least we partially knew it. So we have to accept what he has done even though we do not agree with his remarks. I wish he would keep his mouth shut sometimes.

Lin: There’s a line you should not cross in my opinion and that’s why I could never vote for him. He’s just way beyond that line, ethically. I think it’s important that the president should be an ethical person.

Joan: Yes, that’s why I wish any of them would be. That’s why I was going to vote for Ben Carson.

Lin: Joan, Joan, Joan not Ben Carson!

Joan: You don’t like Ben Carson?

Lin: Oh no!

Joan: Why? Oh I shouldn't say that.

Beth: Well there are some triggers. Good job! You guys brought it up!

Lin: He hasn't done anything. He doesn't have a clue how to run a housing program.

Joan: He should have never been put in that position. That was ridiculous. He should have been the surgeon general or something. That's what he knows.

Lin: I agree with you.

Joan: At least he's on the cabinet. What do you think of him as a person, like what he stood for? He doesn't want to hand over free stuff to everybody just because they have black skin. He wants them to work like he did; he wants opportunities. Do you believe he's ethical? All I believe is his story – he's a 7th Day Adventist.

Beth: So if we get together as a family what do we want to see happen in these types of conversations?

Joan: What I would like to know is what Izzy and Ann feel about such and such . . . but don't say any names, don't talk about Trump, etc., but talk about values, what makes you want to vote for a person. Why we feel like we do. We need to hear from Murray, the way he grew up, the way Kim and Dan grew up with black people.

Mom: We have two Canadians - we have to consider that too – they will have very different opinions.

Lin: I think it's very hard to have a conversation around politics without bringing up who is in the political arena. I think it's great in terms of sharing each family member's experience but if you're going to have an honest conversation with people you've got to let them express what they feel. But I think what Joan is saying is important is why they feel that way. Where is this coming from? What makes you feel that way? It's almost psychoanalysis. What's behind your opinion?

Beth: Really listening to a person's background and how they developed their perspective to know why they believe the way that they do.

Lin: And any conversation would have to come from the perspective – you're not going to change anybody's mind. Why are we having this conversation? You have to start with that.

Joan: To me, to know why we feel like we do. Because we have strong opinions. To me, to know way back, when Murray was growing up, why it just pushes his button to read that in the paper would make me not [react] "Murray why are you doing that I'm trying to have breakfast here?" If I know why somebody feels that way, that totally changes everything for me. I hear what you are saying about the names, Linda, but 10 years from now, there will be no Trump, there will be no Biden, but we will still have our opinions and still have the same reason. Yeah, we will have evolved but to me that's part of it when you understand where someone is coming from. That changes everything.

Lin: A book Murray is reading that talks about what motivates people. (She tells a story from the book.) The words "must" and "can" are really important. It helps people think about the words I'm using and what's my motivation.

Mom: There's a controlling factor in there – nobody likes to be controlled. (everyone agrees)

Lin: People have a hard time coming to the conversation because people are all coming with their baggage.

Beth: Wanting relationship more than wanting to be right – a lot of this is we haven't been heard. Maybe it's ok to come with the baggage but know we are respected and being heard. When Rich and I were visiting last March in D.C. and we were having the conversation on politics, Rich said he didn't like how he sounded at times, like patronizing.

Mom: I think we are being listened to today.

Lin: In terms of the rules, how do you lower the emotions? People get emotional about these sorts of conversations.

Beth: You guys have touched on it in our conversation, and something I'm learning is that we have to look beyond the issues and look at the person and how they see things.

Mom: We have to learn to control our emotions. If we don't do that we are in trouble.

Beth: We have to see beyond the emotions. Lin, when you asked the question, "Why would you vote for Trump?" and you heard my answer, I think you respected it from the conservative perspective.

Mom: Lin, do you think you are a conservative?

Lin: No, not at all. Only with anti-abortion. (Lin went on to talk about how she is more of a liberal and how she views issues.)

Beth: Lin, it sounds like we are more alike in what we want.

Lin: (She goes on to talk about the difference - that conservatives want lower taxes which doesn't pay for all the programs that liberals want.)

(The conversation turned to issues with sex education in schools with the LGBTQ agenda in California where Joan lives.)

Joan: Taking away parent's rights from being involved in school and sex education-what's the agenda? LGBTQ – that's a button, a trigger for me.

Lin: I agree. You can't take away parent's rights in schools. But we can't label them as bad – that's separates them from God.

Mom: If we don't have God, we don't have love.

Second meeting with younger family members – 7/7/20:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JxatJBbBTfsjNb9ITE02pTgjJSLrJfh/view?usp=sharing>

Madison: (was checking in with the group because she had made a statement the week before when she said, "Cry baby liberals") It was not directed at the whole party but a faction within it - really leftist people – don't really get out of their own comfort zone of reference when it comes to their politics – they're kind of sheep in that herd – they don't really do their research – and then they complain - and have to retreat to their safe place. I'm trying to bite my tongue in half – but I don't go sulk in a corner for

5 hours. It's OK to have different opinions. You have to learn to deal with that and have comments of your own. It's on both sides.

Izzy: At work talking in a group, most are Republicans – “talking crap” – frustrated about school situation – they are going online - my wife is a teacher and she thinks that's the best thing to do – he said they were wanting to just get the kids in school for childcare.

Question: Do you think it's important to have open, honest conversations in family get togethers?

Dan: It depends on the family – there are some personalities within the family – it can get heated very quickly and some people just fly off the handle and it starts to escalate and then things can get ugly. Fortunately, I'm not in a situation in any part of my family where that has been a significant issue, but I've seen it in other families and friendships become an issue. It really depends on how the personalities coexist – on the dynamic and the individual characteristics if they can handle that and how it affects them.

Kim – I think that it's essential . . . Education should be coming from the home. I'm talking about character education, how to be a person, how to function in society. How to be a civilized human. How to support yourself. About 44% in our country professes no faith at all . . . agnostic, no faith, which is alarming to me not as a Christian, but as a human. Because if you don't believe in anything . . . what is the moral compass that you live by then? What is checking you? Why should you obey any law then? It's alarming to me as a person who lives in this country. I think it's essential that we have generational conversations like that where the older generation is living by example or teaching. You go back to Native Americans, tribes, civilizations in the past. That's how it was done by word of mouth . . . It was passed down, they were living together, in that sort of society. It's essential that we have those conversations where our young people can hear how to be a moral person, how to be ethical.

Izzy – (Talked about how they are trying to teach Niko how to manage his own money that he wants to spend it on video games – \$200. He said he got upset that he wants to teach kids values and respect and how to behave.)

Ann – In conversations with family, kids need to see how that relationship works – productive conversations – that are not arguing and walking away - this is how you have touchy conversations in comfortable environments and how you deal with your emotions appropriately.

Madison – I agree with that – making sure they are aware of how to carry themselves with adults in their family and be able to hold a conversation that's challenging – especially challenging their own beliefs - be able to ask questions and be curious. Besides that, talking about these specific touchy issues – helps gives us a good perimeter where each person is at in our family when we talk and have these conversations at family functions –how to approach them the next time and we can understand where they are coming from. We can have a more in-depth conversation based off those perimeters we set with each other. Get to know the other person better . . . be able to talk about those hard things – who else can you talk about that with than your own family. I think we are really lucky to be so diverse in our own family and to be able to have those different perspectives. We can challenge each other in those conversations and be able to respect each other.

Dan: There are differences in our own family. Our extended family is pretty well in step but there are some tangential things like political views and religious views that are different.

(Kim wanted to hear Dan's thoughts on morality.)

Dan: We are all normal people – all normal people have a compass. A lot of agnostics and atheists have higher morals than some Christians . . . it's ingrained in us to be supportive and to help each other coexist.

Maddy: I'm in an ethics class right now. Egoism – describes our society. We all look out for our own self-interest than we used to . . . more individualized.

Beth – Dipping our toe in these kinds of conversations. Maddy said something interesting - how do we know what people think unless we ask them? We might have opposing views but that doesn't mean we don't love each other. (Brought up the conversation with Lin – “I just need to know why you would vote for Trump.”) We had an open conversation about that. If we can hear each other, listen, and understand. Can we have these deeper conversations in families?

Dan: Having these kinds of conversations is important to a family. To figure out what everyone thinks. The biggest thing is how to have them (conversations) and just maintaining a level of sensitivity so that you don't step on toes or you don't have the whole emotional thing going because I think that's what tends to trigger people the most. Once emotions come into play then it starts to get heated and it's just not productive. Mature and intelligent people can have conversations about anything.

Maddy: How can you be careful about not stepping on someone's toes if you don't know what toes you're stepping on?

Dan: Asking a question about what they think about something is never going to step on anybody's toes because everybody has an opinion, and everybody likes to be asked about what they think. It's when it's confrontational when you back them in the corner like when Linda asked Beth, “Well why in the world would you vote . . . ?” If you start to get backed in a corner, you're going to get something different.

Ann: I'll be honest what I thought both times on these conversations. There's only one question that's been on my mind both times – who are you voting for? Not that I care who you are voting for, but I want to know where you stand and what you are seeing from your perspective. I'll ask you anything I want but I'm trying to be a little more reserved because I know that not everybody can handle the way it is.

Dan: If you ask, “What the hell is wrong with you? Why did you do that?” That might cause a little more consternation.

Maddy: I think the question in itself, “Who did you vote for?” or “Who are you voting for?” is a trigger in itself, that right there. A lot of people get defensive with that because they think, “Are you questioning my opinion?” “Is this a sarcastic question?” (heads nodding at that point)

Dan: I agree, it's a divisive question.

Kim: I would have thought we were all voting for Kanye. (sarcastically) (the group laughs – the group does not delve into Ann's question yet at this point)

Izzy: A guy was laid off at work, he was mad because they brought him back to work – the guy was making more money staying at home. In my opinion, it triggers you – makes you feel bad. You have to work hard but other people don't want to work. I will do what it takes.

Kim: I'm going to have to vote for Trump. He's a total jackass. I'm going to have to stab and vote with my finger in blood. I'm humiliated by him but when I think of the alternative I shiver and shake. I'm horrified either way. I think there's going to be anarchy.

Ann: I'd rather die than vote for him (Trump).

Travis (Kim's husband steps into the conversation off camera): If there was somebody else would you vote for them? Or is it just that binary for you – it's only Trump and Biden?

Ann: "I voted for Hillary not because I loved Hillary but because I wanted anybody other than that blankety, blank, blank, blank. If Obama came back, I would vote for Obama in a heartbeat. I know not everybody feels that way about Obama. There's no way in hell you could get me to vote for Trump."

Kim: So say why.

Ann: He's racist. He's not an idiot - He's a very intelligent person but he's intelligent in the manipulative, asshole type of way. Sorry for my language. There's no other words I can think about to describe that guy. He does not care about people – he cares about the economy, which is important, but I think people's lives come first. Everything I hear him say it doesn't even make sense. He speaks out of his ass constantly. I have really tried to listen to others who have voted for him – not one person has provided clarity about why this guy should be president again.

Dan: I'm a moderate – for me there isn't a good option. I would vote for a third option, but that third option would never win. I won't waste a vote on a third option. It comes down to where I align myself – I think Trump is a complete buffoon, a king more than a president. He is a strong leader from the perspective that he's got a successful track record and he knows how to make decisions on a corporate level. That appeals to me. For me the most important thing is the economy – I want a sound economy. He is a better candidate from that perspective. I haven't decided yet, but I'm leaning more right but it's going to come down to the debates for me.

Maddy: I'll probably vote for Trump, but it mostly depends on how he carries himself. It's for me cutting the political BS and getting things done. He's making economical differences and I appreciate that, and I value that. He's pro-life – things like that matter. He has kept a lot of his promises, not all them, but he's done a lot. Despite his stupid venting on Twitter.

Ann: I think it's interesting – Dan is looking at it from economy point of view and Maddy sees abortion and his views on abortion. I do understand if those are your viewpoints and what you are focusing on, I could see how you would possibly be interested in voting for Trump. It helps me to see it through your eyes a little. Does it persuade me in any way? Absolutely not.

Kim: Ann, I like what you said, after listening to Dan's and Maddie's arguments why you would vote for Trump. Certainly I can understand why you are voting for Biden because of the issues are important to you. It makes sense.

Ann: That's where Obama comes in. Because of the laws he passed, Izzy was able to become a citizen without him leaving the country for a period of time. I know Obama deported a ton of people, but I'll be honest, I remember the good that he did for us and I'll forever love him for it. I think that's what happens to a lot of people, they remember that. Trump would be really smart to pass another stimulus check right now.

Izzy: He's working on getting immigration reform. I'm not on either side. For me, the guy I was following was Sanders because of college education for kids. I don't like Biden, I don't like Trump. I don't know. Trump has been attacking the Mexican population a lot. Now that I have become an American citizen – I was here 14 years illegally; the paperwork wasn't a problem. I don't think people should get free stuff because it will make them lazy. The way Trump is doing this reform I think it's smart because he will end up getting a lot of the Latino vote. The Latino population will see who is going to help them more.

Ann: I think a lot of our viewpoints come from what we know or what we understand about a situation. For example people's viewpoints on immigration. He paid taxes for 12 years being illegal. I think little things like that would change their perspective. Economy is not my thing.

Maddy: Whoever is the most closely aligned is who you're going to vote for.

Ann: Maddy's talk about abortion I think that's a big one because you think about girls have who have been raped by their father. I mean, how are they ever going to say they don't agree with abortion? If you know that has happened to someone, I completely understand their point of view. Or you were saved because you didn't have an abortion then I can see why you would think the other way.

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