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Expectancy violation theory

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Whether someone is standing too close when conversing or an unexpected kiss because it is someone else's cultural norm, expectancy violations happen often. Expectancy Violation Theory understands communication as an exchange of content that violates another person's expectations. This violation is then perceived by the violated person as either good or bad. Understanding the different aspects of this theory will shed light on how people react when their expectations have been violated. To understand this theory this essay will describe Burgoon's understanding of expectancy and violation, as well as give an example of an expectation violation.

This essay will describe the person whose expectations have been violated as person A and the violator as person B, for clarity. Furthermore, for clarities sake Expectancy Violation Theory will be abbreviated EVT.

Expectancy is what is predicted not what is desired. (Griffin 89) A person's expectations are derived from the context of the situation as well as the characteristics of person B in person A's mind, and the relationship between person A and person B. Context is derived from what social norms person A and B follow such as the distance between two people when communicating based on what their culture says is appropriate. Context also includes the situation that person A and B are in. Two examples of this are a one on one conversation at a coffee shop, or in a classroom when person A is a teacher and person B is a student.(Griffin 89) The second part that expectancy is derived from is the relationship between person A and person B. Relationship is based on similarities and mutual likings, as well as the statuses between the two people. (Griffin 89) Examples of this status would be two people in an intimate relationship, or a boss and employee status. The last section that expectations derive from are the communicator characteristics which are the characteristics of age and sex as well as how person A's perception of person B's physical appearance and personality.(Griffin 89) All of these factors are what expectancy is derived from.

A violation is a break in expectancy. Violations that occur are then translated by person A as either positive or negative. If it is perceived as positive, person B will be perceived better by person A, and vice versa. This is called the violation valence. (Griffin 90) Violations however have context too. The sum of the past positives and negatives of person B as perceived by person A as well as what person A wants in the relationship with person B, determine whether a violation is positive or negative. (Griffin 91)

Expectancy violation is not just a stagnant view of communication; it is dynamic in how it interprets communication. People are always adapting to situations and violations. Communication is not always one person is person A and the other person B this role shifts from person to person because communication is a two way street where both parties have their expectancies violated. An example of how communication is adapting is in the usage of

apologies within violations. If there is a perceived negative violation from person A and person B apologizes, the violation may have less of a negative effect and they may be view more positively. (Chiles, Roloff 2)

A critique of this theory is that the empirical tests for this model had differing results and did not necessarily prove this theory to be true. This theory lacks reliable predictions.(Griffin 94) It may have general predictions but it cannot explain every specific situation well. A personal critique is that this model functions as a one on one person model and does not describe large group functions. Though EVT is not good at predicting specifics it does meet the other 5criteria for a good objective theory. (Griffin 94)

To understand this theory better an example is needed to explain some of the details of this theory. This example is the communication between two people in an intimate relationship. Person A will be the girlfriend and person B will be the boyfriend.

This couple had just started dating as was still trying to figure out the details in the relationship like how they were going to make a long distance relationship work and future plans for staying in contact with each other. At the same time they were still getting to know each other better and figuring out boundaries between them. In figuring boundaries out person A did not want to kiss person B yet, even though they were dating and kissing would be a norm for that relationship. The context for this example is the intimate relationship, the desire to grow closer, and the social norm that says kissing part of a dating relationship. The violation was person B did kiss person A even though person A was not sure if she wanted to kiss. She had to then decide if she liked the kiss or if she was going to distance herself from him. She did decide that the kiss was a positive thing and that through the violation she would view him more positively.

To dissect this example, the expectancy was the person B would not kiss person A. The violation was that person B did kiss person A. The context, as mentioned earlier, is the intimate relationship, the social norms, and a desire to grow closer. One other major aspect of context that played a role in this violation was the place that this violation occurred. The location was a beautiful spot by a river that had much of the private, intimate interactions between the couple happened. Because many other positive interactions happened in this place she felt safe and at home. The relationship is an intimate relationship where kissing is acceptable. Also, person A had a positive perception of person B both in physical appearance and personality. Some of the aspects that play into the reward valence, which is the sum positive and negative attributes, are her trust in him, and her past positive experiences that made them a dating couple. All of these aspects guided person A in making the decision to view this kiss in a positive manor.

EVT, in its view of communication, explains how people react to beaches in their expectancy that influence how that person interacts with the perpetrator. It is a good objective theory that satisfies five of the six aspects of a scientific, in its efforts to explain predictions of violations. It takes into consideration the context of the situation, as well as the relationship of the people and how person A views person B in their head, to make decision based on a violation. Lastly, by describing how past experiences effect the current violation it does can successfully describe how one will react to a violation.

Work Cited

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Griffin, Emory A. "Chapter 7 Expectancy Violation Theory." *A First Look at Communication Theory*. Eighth ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006. 89-94. Print.