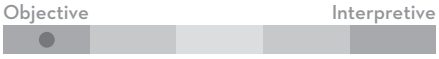
CHAPTER 7



Socio-psychological tradition

Expectancy Violations Theory

of Judee Burgoon

Early in my teaching career, I was walking back to my office, puzzling over classroom conversations with four students. All four had made requests. Why, I wondered, had I readily agreed to two requests but just as quickly turned down two others? Each of the four students had spoken to me individually during the class break. Andre wanted my endorsement for a graduate scholarship, and Dawn invited me to eat lunch with her the next day. I said yes to both of them. Belinda asked me to help her on a term paper for a class with another professor, and Charlie encouraged me to play water polo that night with guys from his house, something I had done before. I said no to those requests.

Sitting down at my desk, I idly flipped through the pages of *Human Communication Research (HCR),* a behavioral science journal that had arrived in the morning mail. I was still mulling over my uneven response to the students when my eyes zeroed in on an article entitled "A Communication Model of Personal Space Violations."[1] "That's it," I blurted out to our surprised department secretary. I suddenly realized that in each case, my response to the student may have been influenced by the conversational distance between us.

I mentally pictured the four students making their requests—each from a distance that struck me as inappropriate in one way or another. Andre was literally in my face, less than a foot away. Belinda's 2-foot interval invaded my personal space, but not as much. Charlie stood about 7 feet away—just outside the range I would have expected for a let's-get-together-and-have-some-fun-that-has-nothing-to-do-with-school type of conversation. Dawn offered her luncheon invitation from across the room. At the time, each of these interactions had seemed somewhat strange. Now I realized that all four students had violated my expectation of an appropriate interpersonal distance.

Because I describe my impressions and reactions to these students, I've changed their names, and replaced them with names that start with the letters *A, B, C,* and *D* to represent the increasing distance between us when we spoke. (Andre was the closest; Dawn, the farthest away.) Figure 7–1 plots the intervals relative to my expectations.

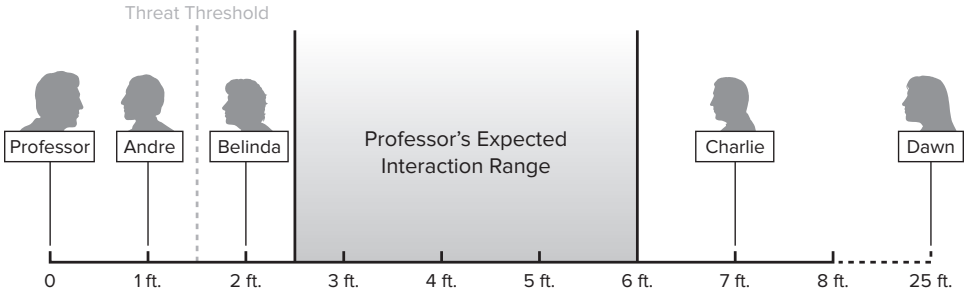


FIGURE 7–1 Expectancy Violations in a Classroom Setting

Judee Burgoon, a communication scholar at the University of Arizona, wrote the journal article that stimulated my thinking. The article was a follow-up piece on the *nonverbal expectancy violations model* she had introduced in *HCR* two years earlier. Since my own dissertation research focused on interpersonal distance, I knew firsthand how little social science theory existed at that time to guide researchers studying nonverbal communication. I was therefore excited to see Burgoon offering a sophisticated theory of personal space. The fact that she was teaching in a communication department and had published her work in a communication journal was value added. I eagerly read Burgoon's description of her nonverbal expectancy violations model to see whether it could account for my mixed response to the various conversational distances chosen by the four students.

PERSONAL SPACE EXPECTATIONS: CONFORM OR DEVIATE?

Personal space
The invisible, variable volume of space surrounding an individual that defines that individual's preferred distance from others.

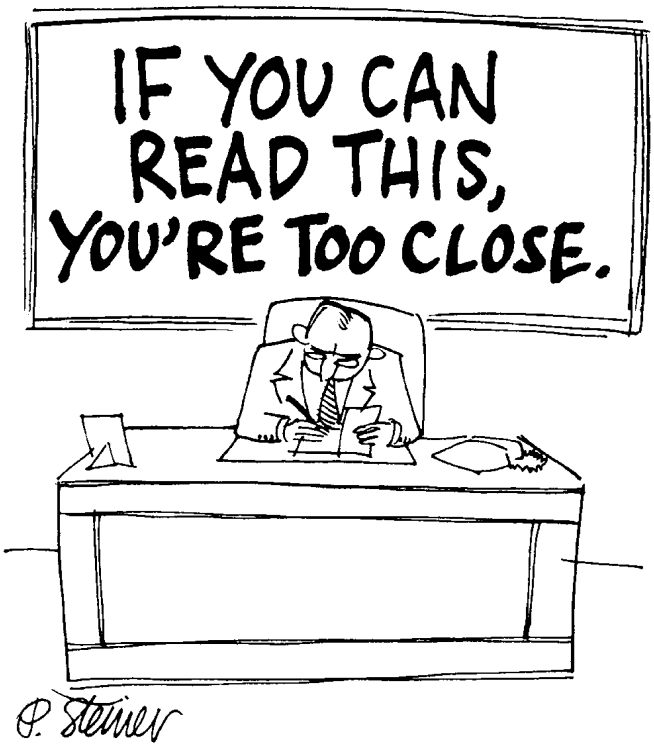
Burgoon defined *personal space* as the "invisible, variable volume of space surrounding an individual that defines that individual's preferred distance from others."[2] She claimed that the size and shape of our personal space depend on our cultural norms and individual preferences, but our space always reflects a compromise between the conflicting approach–avoidance needs that we as humans have for affiliation and privacy.

The idea of personal space wasn't original with Burgoon. In the 1960s, Illinois Institute of Technology anthropologist Edward Hall coined the term *proxemics* to refer to the study of people's use of space as a special elaboration of culture.[3] He entitled his book *The Hidden Dimension* because he was convinced that most spatial interpretation is outside our awareness. He claimed that Americans have four proxemic zones, which nicely correspond with the four interpersonal distances selected by my students:

Proxemics
The study of people's use of space as a special elaboration of culture.

1. Intimate distance: 0 to 18 inches (Andre)
2. Personal distance: 18 inches to 4 feet (Belinda)
3. Social distance: 4 to 12 feet (Charlie)
4. Public distance: 12 to 25 feet (Dawn)

Hall's book is filled with examples of "ugly Americans" who were insensitive to the spatial customs of other cultures. He strongly recommended that in order to be effective, we learn to adjust our nonverbal behavior to conform to the communication rules of our partner. We shouldn't cross a distance boundary uninvited.



Cartoon by Peter Steiner. Reprinted with permission.

Burgoon's nonverbal expectancy violations model offered a counterpoint to Hall's advice. She didn't argue with the idea that people have definite expectations about how close others should come. In fact, she would explain Hall's proxemics classification as based on well-established American norms, plus his own experience. But contrary to popular go-along-to-get-along wisdom, Burgoon suggested that there are times when it's best to break the rules. She believed that under some circumstances, violating social norms and personal expectations is "a superior strategy to conformity."[4]

AN APPLIED TEST OF THE ORIGINAL MODEL

Whether knowingly or not, each of the four students making a request deviated from my proxemic expectation. How well did Burgoon's initial model predict my responses to these four different violations? Not very well. To help you capture the flavor of Burgoon's early speculation and recognize how far her current theory has come, I'll outline what the model predicted my responses would be and, in each case, compare that forecast to what I actually did.

Threat threshold
The hypothetical outer boundary of intimate space; a breach by an uninvited other occasions fight or flight.

Andre. According to Burgoon's early model, Andre made a mistake when he crossed my invisible *threat threshold* and spoke with me at an intimate eyeball-to-eyeball distance. The physical and psychological discomfort I'd feel would hurt his cause. But the model missed on that prediction, since I wrote the recommendation later that day.

Belinda. In the follow-up article I read that day, Burgoon suggested that noticeable deviations from what we expect cause us to experience a heightened state of arousal. She wasn't necessarily referring to the heart-pounding, sweaty-palms reaction that drives us to fight or flight. Instead, she pictured violations stimulating us to mentally review the nature of our relationship with the person who acted in a curious way. That would be good news for Belinda if I thought of her as a highly rewarding person. But every comment she made in class seemed to me a direct challenge, dripping with sarcasm. Just as Burgoon predicted, the narrow, 2-foot gap Belinda chose focused my attention on our rocky relationship, and I declined her request for help in another course. Score one for the nonverbal expectancy violations model.

Charlie. Charlie was a nice guy who cared more about having a good time than he did about studies. He knew I'd played water polo in college, but he may not have realized that his casual attitude toward the class was a constant reminder that I wasn't as good a teacher as I wanted to be. In her 1978 *HRC* article, Burgoon wrote that a person with "punishing power" (like Charlie) would do best to observe proxemic conventions or, better yet, stand slightly farther away than expected. Without ever hearing Burgoon's advice, Charlie did it right. He backed off to a distance of 7 feet—just outside the range of interaction I anticipated. Even so, I declined his offer to swim with the guys.

Dawn. According to this nonverbal expectancy violations model, Dawn blew it. Because she was an attractive communicator, a warm, close approach would have been a pleasant surprise. Her decision to issue an invitation from across the room, however, would seem to guarantee a poor response. The farther she backed off, the worse the effect would be. There's only one problem with this analysis: Dawn and I had lunch together in the student union the following day.

Although my initial intuition was that Burgoon's theory would explain my reaction to the students' requests, the theoretical scoreboard failed to offer strong support for my hunch. It read:

Nonverbal expectancy violations model: **1**
Unpredicted random behavior: **3**

Burgoon's initial controlled experiments didn't fare much better. But where I was ready to dismiss the whole model as flawed, she was unwilling to abandon *expectancy violation* as a key concept in human interaction. At the end of her journal article she hinted that some of her basic assumptions might need to be tested and reevaluated.[5]

Of course, that was then; this is now. For four decades, Judee Burgoon and her students have crafted a series of sophisticated laboratory experiments and field studies to discover and explain the effects of expectancy violations. One of the reasons I chose to write about her theory is that the current version is an excellent example of ideas continually revised as a result of empirical disconfirmation. As she has demonstrated, in science, failure can lead to success.

A CONVOLUTED MODEL BECOMES AN ELEGANT THEORY

When applied to theories, the term *elegant* suggests "gracefully concise and simple; admirably succinct."[6] That's what expectancy violations theory has become. Burgoon has dropped concepts that were central in earlier versions but never panned out.

Early on, for example, she abandoned the idea of a "threat threshold." Even though that hypothetical boundary made intuitive sense, repeated experimentation failed to confirm its existence.

Arousal, relational
A heightened state of awareness, orienting response, or mental alertness that stimulates a review of the relationship.

Burgoon's retreat from *arousal* as an explanatory mechanism has been more gradual. She originally stated that people felt physiologically aroused when their proxemic expectations were violated. Later she softened the concept to "an orienting response" or a mental "alertness" that focuses attention on the violator. She now views arousal as a side effect of a partner's deviation and no longer considers it a necessary link between expectancy violation and communication outcomes such as attraction, credibility, persuasion, and involvement.

By removing extraneous features, Burgoon has streamlined her model. By extending its scope, she has produced a complete theory. Her original nonverbal expectancy violations model was concerned only with spatial violations—a rather narrow focus. But by the mid-1980s, Burgoon concluded that proxemic behavior is part of an interconnected system of nonlinguistic cues. It no longer made sense to study interpersonal distance in isolation. She began to apply the model to a host of other nonverbal variables—facial expression, eye contact, touch, and body lean, for example. Burgoon continues to expand the range of expectancy violations. While not losing interest in nonverbal communication, she now applies the theory to what's said in emotional, marital, and intercultural communication as well. Consistent with this broad sweep, she has dropped the *nonverbal* qualifier and refers to her theory as "expectancy violations theory," or EVT. From this point on, so will I.

What does EVT predict? Burgoon sums up her empirically driven conclusions in a single paragraph. I hope my long narrative of the theory's development will help you appreciate the 40 years of work that lie behind these simple lines.

> Expectancies exert significant influence on people's interaction patterns, on their impressions of one another, and on the outcomes of their interactions. Violations of expectations in turn may arouse and distract their recipients, shifting greater attention to the violator and the meaning of the violation itself. People who can assume that they are well regarded by their audience are safer engaging in violations and more likely to profit from doing so than are those who are poorly regarded. When the violation act is one that is likely to be ambiguous in its meaning or to carry multiple interpretations that are not uniformly positive or negative, then the reward valence of the communicator can be especially significant in moderating interpretations, evaluations, and subsequent outcomes. . . . In other cases, violations have relatively consensual meanings and valences associated with them, so that engaging in them produces similar effects for positive- and negative-valenced communicators.[7]

CORE CONCEPTS OF EVT

A close reading of Burgoon's summary suggests that EVT offers a "soft determinism" rather than hard-core universal laws (see Chapter 2). The qualifying terms *may, more likely, can be,* and *relatively* reflect her belief that too many factors affect communication to ever allow us to discover simple cause-and-effect relationships. She does, however, hope to show a link among surprising interpersonal behavior and attraction, credibility, influence, and involvement. These are the potential outcomes of expectancy violation that Burgoon and her students explore. In order for us to appreciate the connection, we need to understand three

core concepts of EVT: *expectancy, violation valence,* and *communicator reward valence.* I'll illustrate these three variables by referring back to my students' proxemic behavior and to another form of nonverbal communication—touch.

Expectancy

Expectancy
What people predict will happen, rather than what they desire.

When I was a kid, my mother frequently gave notice that she *expected* me to be on my best behavior. I considered her words to be a wish or a warning, but that's not how Burgoon uses the word. She and her colleagues "prefer to reserve the term *expectancy* for what is predicted to occur rather than what is desired."[8] In other words, expectancy is like a forecast. Figure 7–1 shows that I anticipated conversations with students to take place at a distance of 2½ to 6 feet. How did this expectation arise? Burgoon suggests that I processed the context, type of relationship, and characteristics of the others automatically in my mind in order to gauge what they might do.

Context begins with cultural norms. Three feet is too close in England or Germany yet too far removed in Saudi Arabia, where you can't trust people who won't let you smell their breath. Context also includes the setting of the conversation. A classroom environment dictates a greater speaking distance than would be appropriate for a private chat in my office.

Relationship factors include similarity, familiarity, liking, and relative status. In one study, Burgoon discovered that people of all ages and stations in life anticipate that lower-status people will keep their distance. Because of our age difference and teacher–student relationship, I was more surprised by Andre's and Belinda's invasion of my personal space than I was by Charlie's and Dawn's remote location.

Communicator characteristics include all of the age/sex/place-of-birth demographic facts requested on applications, but they also include personal features that may affect expectation even more—physical appearance, personality, and communication style. Dawn's warm smile was a counterpoint to Belinda's caustic comments. Given this difference, I would have assumed that Dawn would be the one to draw close and Belinda the one to keep her distance. That's why I was especially curious when each woman's spatial "transgression" was the opposite of what I would have predicted.

We can do a similar analysis of my expectation for touch in that classroom situation. Edward Hall claimed that the United States is a "noncontact culture," so I wouldn't anticipate touch during the course of normal conversation.[9] Does this mean that Latin American or Southern European "contact cultures" wouldn't have tight expectations for nonverbal interaction? By no means. Burgoon is convinced that all cultures have a similar *structure* of expected communication behavior, but that the *content* of those expectations can differ markedly from culture to culture. Touch is fraught with meaning in every society, but the who, when, where, and how of touching are a matter of culture-specific standards and customs.

As a male in a role relationship, it never occurred to me that students might make physical contact while voicing their requests. If it had, Dawn would have been the likely candidate. But at her chosen distance of 25 feet, she'd need to be a bionic woman to reach me. As it was, I would have been shocked if she'd violated my expectation and walked over to give me a hug. (As a lead-in to the next two sections, note that I didn't say I would have been disturbed, distressed, or disgusted.)

Violation Valence

Violation valence
The perceived positive or negative value assigned to a breach of expectations, regardless of who the violator is.

The term *violation valence* refers to the positive or negative value we place on a specific unexpected behavior, regardless of who does it. Do we find the act itself pleasing or distressing, and to what extent? With her commitment to the scientific method, Burgoon may have borrowed the concept of valence from chemistry, where the valence of a substance is indicated by a number and its sign (+3 or −2, for example). The term *net worth* from the field of accounting seems to capture the same idea.

We usually give others a bit of wiggle room to deviate from what we regard as standard operating procedure. But once we deal with someone who acts outside the range of expected behavior, we switch into evaluation mode. According to Burgoon, we first try to interpret the meaning of the violation, and then figure out whether we like it.

The meaning of some violations is easy to spot. As a case in point, no one would agonize over how to interpret a purposeful poke in the eye with a sharp stick. It's a hostile act, and if it happened to us, we'd be livid. Many nonverbal behaviors are that straightforward. For example, moderate to prolonged eye contact in Western cultures usually communicates awareness, interest, affection, and trust. A level gaze is welcome; shifty eyes are not. With the exception of a riveting stare, we value eye contact. Even Emerson, a man of letters, wrote, "The eyes of men converse as much as their tongues, with the advantage that the ocular dialect needs no dictionary. . . ."[10]

When a behavior has a socially recognized meaning, communicators can usually figure out whether to go beyond what others expect. If the valence is negative, do less than expected. If the valence is positive, go further. Burgoon validated this advice when she studied the effect of expectancy on marital satisfaction.[11] She questioned people about how much intimate communication they expected from their partner compared to how much focused conversation they actually got. Not surprisingly, intimacy was ranked as positive. Partners who received about as much intimacy as they expected were moderately satisfied with their marriages. But people were highly satisfied with their marriages when they had more good talks with their husbands or wives than they originally thought they would.

Many expectancy violations are equivocal, however. They're open to multiple interpretations. For example, the meaning of unexpected touch can be puzzling. Is it a mark of total involvement in the conversation, a sign of warmth and affection, a display of dominance, or a sexual move? Distance violations can also be confusing. Andre isn't from the Middle East, so why was he standing so close? I don't bark or bite, so why did Dawn issue her invitation from across the room? According to EVT, it's at times like these that we consider the reward valence of the communicator as well as the valence of the violation.

Before we look at the way communicator reward valence fits into the theory, you should know that Burgoon has found few nonverbal behaviors that are ambiguous when seen in a larger context. A touch on the arm might be enigmatic in isolation, but when experienced along with close proximity, forward body lean, a direct gaze, facial animation, and verbal fluency, almost everyone interprets the physical contact as a sign of high involvement in the conversation.[12] Or consider actor Eric Idle's words and nonverbal manner in a *Monty Python* sketch. He punctuates his question about Terry Gilliam's wife with a burlesque wink, a leering tone of voice, and gestures to accompany his words: "Nudge nudge. Know what I mean?

Say no more . . . know what I mean?"[13] Taken alone, an exaggerated wink or a dig with the elbow might have many possible meanings, but as part of a coordinated routine, both gestures clearly transform a questionable remark into a lewd comment.

There are times, however, when nonverbal expectancy violations are quite confusing. The personal space deviations of my students are cases in point. Perhaps I just wasn't sensitive enough to pick up the cues that would help me make sense of their proxemic violations. But when the meaning of an action is unclear, EVT says we interpret the violation in light of how the violator can affect our lives.

Communicator Reward Valence

EVT is not the only theory that describes the tendency to size up other people in terms of the potential rewards they have to offer. *Social penetration theory* suggests that we live in an interpersonal economy in which we all "take stock" of the relational value of others we meet (see Chapter 8). The questions *What can you do for me?* and *What can you do to me?* often cross our minds. Burgoon is not a cynic, but she thinks the issue of reward potential moves from the background to the foreground of our minds when someone violates our expectation and there's no social consensus on the meaning of the act. She uses the term *communicator reward valence* to label the results of our mental audit of likely gains and losses.

The reward valence of a communicator is the sum of the positive and negative attributes the person brings to the encounter plus the potential he or she has to reward or punish in the future. The resulting perception is usually a mix of good and bad and falls somewhere on a scale between those two poles. I'll illustrate communicator characteristics that Burgoon frequently mentions by reviewing one feature of each student that I thought about immediately after their perplexing spatial violations.

Communicator reward valence
The sum of positive and negative attributes brought to the encounter plus the potential to reward or punish in the future.

Andre was a brilliant student. Although writing recommendations is low on my list of fun things to do, I would bask in reflected glory if he were accepted into a top graduate program.

Belinda had a razor-sharp mind and a tongue to match. I'd already felt the sting of her verbal barbs and thought that thinly veiled criticism in the future was a distinct possibility.

Charlie was the opposite of Andre—seldom in class and never prepared. I try to be evenhanded with everyone who signs up for my classes, but in Charlie's case I had to struggle not to take his casual attitude toward the course as a personal snub.

Dawn was a beautiful young woman with a warm smile. I felt great pleasure when she openly announced that I was her favorite teacher.

My views of Andre, Belinda, Charlie, and Dawn probably say more about me than they do about the four students. I'm not particularly proud of my stereotyped assessments, but apparently I have plenty of company in the criteria I used. Burgoon notes that the features that impressed me also weigh heavily with others when they compute a reward valence for someone who is violating their expectations. Status, ability, and good looks are standard "goodies" that enhance the other person's reward potential. The thrust of the conversation is even more important. Most of us value words that communicate acceptance, liking, appreciation, and trust. We're turned off by talk that conveys disinterest, disapproval, distrust, and rejection.

Why does Burgoon think the expectancy violator's power to reward or punish is so crucial? Because puzzling violations force victims to search the social context for clues to their meaning.[14] Thus, an ambiguous violation embedded in a host of

relationally warm signals takes on a positive cast. An equivocal violation from a punishing communicator stiffens our resistance.

Now that I've outlined EVT's three core concepts, you may be wondering which is more important when an unexpected violation occurs—the violation valence or the communicator reward valence? All things being equal, Burgoon says the nature of the violation will influence the response it triggers more than the reward potential of the one who did it. This is especially true if the surprising behavior on its own would be considered by the other as very positive or very negative—wonderful or disgusting no matter who did it.

On the other hand, communicator reward valence may loom large when it's especially strong either way. An unexpected handshake from a total creep might produce a shudder, and even a small sign of disinterest from a potential romantic partner might break your heart. Also, when the unexpected act itself is seen as ambiguous or relatively neutral, communicator reward valence can make the difference. In that case, a highly attractive or powerful violator will get a positive response. But an unexpected questionable statement or action coming from someone who has little to offer and low credibility will get a negative reaction. And for cases of expectancy violations that aren't clear-cut, it's harder to predict the outcome.[15]

So when you want to inform, persuade, or draw closer to someone, what takeaway does EVT offer? If you aren't sure the violation you're considering is the kind the other would welcome, or you think you have little to offer that he or she might want, then stifle your deviant tendencies and do your best to conform to expectations. But if you think the other won't automatically be offended by what you're planning and are sure he or she regards you as a rewarding person, go for it. If your analysis is correct, the expectancy violation you're considering is likely to produce a favorable response.

INTERACTION ADAPTATION—ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS

Burgoon has recognized that "EVT does not fully account for the overwhelming prevalence of reciprocity that has been found in interpersonal interactions"[16] (see Chapter 9). She regards this shortcoming as particularly troubling. So she has reassessed EVT's single-sided view of unexpected communication and now favors a dyadic model of adaptation. That's because she views conversations as more akin to duets than solos. Interpersonal interactions involve synchronized actions rather than unilateral moves. Along with her former students Lesa Stern and Leesa Dillman, she has crafted *interaction adaptation theory (IAT)* as an extension and expansion of EVT.[17]

Interaction adaptation theory
A systematic analysis of how people adjust their approach when another's behavior doesn't align with what's needed, anticipated, or preferred.

Burgoon states that human beings are predisposed to adapt to each other. That's often necessary, she says, because another person's actions may not square with the thoughts and feelings we bring to the interaction. She sees this initial *interaction position* as made up of three factors: requirements, expectations, and desires. *Requirements (R)* are the outcomes that fulfill our basic needs to survive, be safe, belong, and have a sense of self-worth. These are the panhuman motivations that Abraham Maslow outlined in his famous hierarchy of needs.[18] As opposed to requirements that represent what we need to happen, *expectations (E)* are what we think really will happen. Finally, *desires (D)* are what we personally would like to see happen. These RED factors coalesce or meld into our interaction position of what's needed, anticipated, and preferred. I'll continue to use touch behavior to

Interaction position
A person's initial stance toward an interaction as determined by a blend of personal requirements, expectations, and desires (RED).

show how Burgoon uses this composite mindset to predict how we adjust to another person's behavior.

In her course application log, Lindi briefly describes a roommate's unanticipated interaction with a casual friend:

> At the end of last year my roommate was hanging out with a bunch of our friends late at night and one of the guys started playing with her hair and continued to do so for the rest of the night. This unexpected violation of her personal space surprised her, but turned out to be a very pleasant experience. She was forced then to reevaluate their relationship. Even though they didn't develop a romantic relationship, this violation brought them closer together and helped them redefine their friendship.

Although details are sparse, it's possible to approximate the roommate's interactional position at the start of the evening. Her willingness to spend the night hanging around with a group of friends suggests she has a high need or requirement for affiliation and belongingness (R). Given her surprise at the guy fiddling with her hair, we can assume that this ongoing touch was definitely not the behavioral norm of the group, nor what she expected based on his past behavior (E). Yet her pleasure with this fellow's continual touch indicates that she had a strong desire for this kind of personal attention from him (D). Her initial interaction position would therefore be a mixture of what she needed, expected, and preferred.

With the help of hindsight, we can see that the valence of the guy playing with her hair was more positive than her interaction position. According to IAT, the pattern of response would therefore be one of reciprocity or convergence. *Reciprocity* would mean that she then ran her fingers through his hair. There's no hint that this happened. Yet since the whole group of friends could monitor her response, it's unlikely he would have continued with this form of touch unless she encouraged him with a smile or words indicating pleasure. That would be convergence.

Reciprocity
A strong human tendency to respond to another's action with similar behavior.

If, on the other hand, the valence she assigned to him messing with her hair was more negative than her interaction position, Burgoon predicts some form of compensation or divergent behavior. She might lean away from him, excuse herself to comb her hair, or simply look at him and say, "Cut it out." Unlike EVT, IAT addresses how people adjust their behavior when others violate their expectations. There's obviously more to IAT than I've been able to present, but hopefully this brief sketch lets you see that for Burgoon, one theory leads to another.

CRITIQUE: A WELL-REGARDED WORK IN PROGRESS

I have a friend who fixes my all-terrain cycle whenever I bend it or break it. "What do you think?" I ask Bill. "Can it be repaired?" His response is always the same: "Man made it. Man can fix it!"

Judee Burgoon shows the same resolve as she seeks to adjust and redesign an expectancy violations model that never quite works as well in practice as its theoretical blueprint says it should. Almost every empirical test she runs seems to yield mixed results. For example, her early work on physical contact suggested that touch violations were often ambiguous. However, a sophisticated experiment she ran in 1992 showed that unexpected touch in a problem-solving situation was almost always welcomed as a positive violation, regardless of the status, gender, or attractiveness of the violator.

Do repeated failures to predict outcomes when a person stands far away, moves in too close, or reaches out to touch someone imply that Burgoon ought to trade in her expectancy violations theory for a new model? Does IAT render EVT obsolete? From my perspective, the answer is no.

While we might wish for *predictions* that prove more reliable than a long-range weather forecast, a review of expectancy violations research suggests EVT may have reached that point. For example, a comparative empirical study tested how well three leading theories predict interpersonal responses to nonverbal immediacy—close proximity, touch, direct gaze, direct body orientation, and forward lean.[19] None of the theories proved to be right all the time, but EVT did better than the other two.

The fact that other researchers employ the theory to understand expectancy violations that occur when using digital technology suggests EVT is a valuable resource. Perhaps you've experienced an awkward moment when a close friend pulled out a cell phone in the midst of an intimate conversation and started playing a game or responding to a text. Communication researchers Aimee Miller-Ott (Illinois State University) and Lynne Kelly (University of Hartford) discovered that most people consider cell phone usage during an intimate interaction a violation of their expectations. It's not a pleasant surprise, and some who are bothered will make a comment to try to halt the multitasking behavior. In contrast, they found that friends who are just "hanging out" together aren't violating expectations if they use their phones during casual conversation.[20]

Burgoon's expectancy violations theory continues to meet the other five criteria of a good scientific theory as presented in Chapter 3. Her theory advances a reasonable *explanation* for the effects of expectancy violations during communication. The explanation she offers is *relatively simple* and has actually become less complex over time. The theory has *testable hypotheses* that the theorist is willing to adjust when her *quantitative research* doesn't support the prediction. Finally, the model offers *practical advice* on how to better achieve important communication goals of increased credibility, influence, and attraction. And based on what the revised EVT predicts, the scoreboard for my responses to the proxemic violations of Andre, Belinda, Charlie, and Dawn shows four hits and no misses.

QUESTIONS TO SHARPEN YOUR FOCUS

1. What *proxemic* advice would you give to communicators who believe they are seen as *unrewarding?*
2. EVT suggests that *violation valence* is especially important when it's clearly positive or negative. What verbal or nonverbal expectancy violations would be confusing to you even when experienced in context?
3. Using the concepts of *expectancy, violation valence,* and *communicator reward valence,* can you explain how the final version of EVT accurately predicts Em's response to the four requests made by Andre, Belinda, Charlie, and Dawn?
4. EVT and coordinated management of meaning (see Chapter 6) hold divergent views about *ways of knowing, human nature,* and *communication research.* Can you spot the different assumptions?

CONVERSATIONS

View this segment online at www.afirstlook.com.

A few minutes into my discussion with Judee Burgoon, you'll notice that one of us violates a communication expectation of the other. See if you think the violation is accidental or strategic. How does this event affect the rest of the conversation? Burgoon's love of theory is apparent throughout the segment. Do you think her enthusiasm is bolstered by a view of theories as systematic hunches rather than timeless principles chiseled in stone? As a scientist, Burgoon believes that much of human behavior is genetically programmed, yet she insists communication is also a choice-driven, strategic behavior. As you watch, decide whether you think these beliefs are compatible.

A SECOND LOOK

Recommended resource: Judee K. Burgoon and Jerold Hale, "Nonverbal Expectancy Violations: Model Elaboration and Application to Immediacy Behaviors," *Communication Monographs,* Vol. 55, 1988, pp. 58–79.

Original model: Judee K. Burgoon, "A Communication Model of Personal Space Violations: Explication and an Initial Test," *Human Communication Research,* Vol. 4, 1978, pp. 129–142.

Expectancy: Judee K. Burgoon and Beth A. LePoire, "Effects of Communication Expectancies, Actual Communication, and Expectancy Disconfirmation on Evaluations of Communicators and Their Communication Behavior," *Human Communication Research,* Vol. 20, 1993, pp. 67–96.

Communicator reward valence: Judee K. Burgoon, "Relational Message Interpretations of Touch, Conversational Distance, and Posture," *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior,* Vol. 15, 1991, pp. 233–259.

Extension of the theory: Walid A. Afifi and Judee K. Burgoon, "The Impact of Violations on Uncertainty and the Consequences for Attractiveness," *Human Communication Research,* Vol. 26, 2000, pp. 203–233.

Cultural violations: Judee K. Burgoon and Amy Ebesu Hubbard, "Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Applications of Expectancy Violations Theory and Interaction Adaptation Theory," in *Theorizing About Intercultural Communication,* William B. Gudykunst (ed.), Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2004, pp. 149–171.

Interaction adaptation theory: Judee K. Burgoon, Lesa Stern, and Leesa Dillman, *Interpersonal Adaptation: Dyadic Interaction Patterns,* Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1995.

Interaction adaptation theory application: Keri K. Stephens, Marian L. Houser, and Renee L. Cowan, "R U Able to Meat Me: The Impact of Students' Overly Casual Email Messages to Instructors," *Communication Education,* Vol. 58, 2009, pp. 303–326.

Explanation and comparison of EVT and IAT: Cindy H. White, "Expectancy Violations Theory and Interaction Adaptation Theory: From Expectations to Adaptation," in *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives,* Leslie A. Baxter and Dawn O. Braithwaite (eds.), Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2008, pp. 189–202.

Critique: Peter A. Andersen, Laura K. Guerrero, David B. Buller, and Peter F. Jorgensen, "An Empirical Comparison of Three Theories of Nonverbal Immediacy Exchange," *Human Communication Research,* Vol. 24, 1998, pp. 501–535.