

URT Application Discussion

Name

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Date

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory is a theory that explains how people use communication to reduce the uncertainty they feel when encountering something new, like when meeting people (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This theory reaffirms the notion that people feel anxiety towards the unknown so as to reduce this anxiety people use communication to learn as much as they can about the new people they have met (Berger & Bradac, 1982). The Uncertainty Reduction Theory can be applied to the situation I experienced with my random roommate from sophomore year.

I transferred to a new university before the beginning of my sophomore year and I went through the random roommate selection process. At the end of the process I was assigned another incoming sophomore transfer student named Alyssa. Because I did not know if this process was successful at creating good roommate matches and I had never met Alyssa, I was extremely uncertain about the whole situation. In line with what the Uncertainty Reduction Theory states, I used communication to reduce my feeling of uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). According to this theory, there are three types of *info-seeking strategies* that can be used to reduce uncertainty: passive, active, and interactive (Berger, 1986). Since it was still summer when I discovered my fall roommate assignment I was not able to use the *passive* strategy which focuses on observing the person you have just met – although I was able to do this a bit more when she initially moved in. Instead I used the active and interactive strategies. Through becoming friends with Alyssa on Facebook I was able to see what town she was from and where she went to high school. A few of my friends went to the same high school as Alyssa so I reached out to them and asked if they knew her, and if they did, did they like her. (They did know her and they loved her)! By asking my friends about Alyssa I was employing the *active*

strategy that focuses on getting information from a third party. I also used the *interactive* strategy. At this point, we had the *antecedent conditions* of *low intimacy* as well as knowing we could *expect future interactions* with each other. So we took it slow at first. Through email, and later text, Alyssa and I went back and forth asking questions about each other and trying to get to know one another before we moved in to the same room in the fall. We were clearly in the *entry phase* of our uncertainty reduction (Berger & Bradac, 1982). The more we emailed and texted the more comfortable we both began to feel and the questions became more *personal*. We started with the generics, like where we went to high school, but as the conversation progressed we started to talk about why we transferred, our families, what we liked to do, etc.

This progression of conversation is something fits with the hypothesis and results discussed by Antheunis, Schouten, Valkenburg, and Peter (2012) where they found that there is more question/disclosure intimacy and more question asking in computer-mediated communication than in face-to-face communication. If we had not communicated before moving in to our room and had tried to use the same interactive strategy, I am not sure if it would have gone as well as our text conversation did. Overall, these uncertainty reduction strategies were extremely helpful in reducing my uncertainty about living with someone that I had never met. By communicating before school began we were able to “break the ice” and not feel like we were about to share a room with a stranger. Through this communication, with both my friends and Alyssa, our relationship was able to move from the entry stage to the *personal stage*. Alyssa ended up becoming one of my best friends who I truly believe will be in my life forever.

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory has both strengths and weaknesses. Although it originally had a narrow scope, by originally only focusing on the uncertainty people feel towards meeting someone new, it has sparked new research making it heuristic (Eckstein, 2016). This theory is also testable, as shown through the article by Antheunis et al. (2012). It is also high in utility since it can be practically applied to everyday life. For example, it focuses on explaining how people go about reducing the uncertainty that they feel when meeting someone new and since most of us are constantly meeting new people this theory is applicable (Berger, 2011). This theory also seems parsimonious since it is easy to understand the explanation of the theory and the terms relating to it, like the different strategies used to reduce uncertainty and the different relationship stages. One drawback of this theory could be the assumptions it makes. The Uncertainty Reduction Theory assumes that uncertainty is bad and that people feel uncertainty when initially meeting someone; however, this may not always be the case (Eckstein, 2016). There are certain people, my mother for instance, who do not feel uncertainty towards meeting new people. In fact she loves it. Last week while we were in DSW she ended up introducing herself to another mother daughter pair shopping just because she loved the mother's purse. My mother's personality goes against the assumption that people feel uncertainty when first meeting someone new.

References

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