KAIBIGAN LANG PALA: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON THE CASE OF TEENAGERS WHO EXPERIENCED FRIEND ZONE

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Abstract- This research discussed the violations of teenagers' expectancies of romantic relationship from others (violators) who only treated them as friend. Specifically, the interpersonal communication behaviors, its assigned meanings, violation valance and the communication reward valance were analyzed. The researchers anchored the study to the Expectancy Violation Theory of Judee Burgoon. Ways on how individuals react to the communication behaviors of others who have expectancies of how others should act. When others violate the expectations of another, either positively or negatively, individuals will respond in specific ways. This case study employed the qualitative approach and descriptive method as the design. Through purposive sampling, the researchers chose the six teenage informants namely Erik, Chris, Karl, John, Kath and Raisa. Information was generated from the conducted in-depth interview. Research found out that interpersonal communication behaviors namely communication in social media, holding hands, accompanying to somewhere and verbal exchanges of "I Love You" and "I Miss You" have meanings for the informants of being in the state or getting to a romantic relationship for the informants. As expectancies were violated, informants assigned "friendship" as acceptable meaning of the communication behaviors. At the end, these experiences lead to positive and negative impact to the interpersonal relationship of the informants and the violators.

Keywords- friend zone, expectation, violation valance, interpersonal communication behaviors, reward valance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Friend Zone refers to an interpersonal relationship in which one member wishes to become romantically involved while the other would rather remain friends only (Brad, 2014). To be in the friend zone is to be in that awkward, delusional state of tension in which there is a barrier that is seemingly insurmountable, and literally is, you try to break directly through it. So it is clear that this state has psychological impacts to individuals. According to Ogden and Richards (1923, Cited by Griffin, 2006), meaning resides in people and not in words, either verbal or non-verbal. With that, there are possible different meanings in the messages between two different individuals in an interpersonal communication. In relational communication in particular, romantic love as assigned meaning of individual A maybe different from the close friendship meaning assigned by individual B. This ambiguous meanings assigned by two parties in an interpersonal communication is one of the problems experiences by teen in terms of looking for a romantic relationship. With that, friend zone generally has psychological impacts to individuals. Aside from that, this is developed through interaction specifically interpersonal communication. Meanwhile, adolescence is the period of psychological and social transitions between childhood and adulthood. In common usage in English countries, "adolescent" and "teenager" is synonymous. This stage, which defined as the period between 10 and 19 years of age of World Health Organization or WHO, is the transitional stage of human development in which juvenile matures into an adult (Acero, et. al, 2008). With that, many changes brought by the transition of developmental stages may happen to individuals particularly in their biological, social and psychological aspects.

In terms of the psychosocial perspective from the theory of Erik Erikson, "Relationships" or "Intimacy vs. Isolation" is one of the stages present in the adolescence ages. This psychosocial stage of development is where young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation. Hence, teenagers or adolescence psychosocial aspect started to look for other individuals for a romantic relationship through courting that sometimes tends to be in the state of friend zone.

Discussing adolescence and its psychosocial perspective justified that in the teen age stage, there is a high risk to experience friend zone that tends to have psychological impact to the teenagers.

Moreover, problems have appropriate solution. Hence, there are appropriate interventions for the impacts of friend zone to individuals. Furthermore, this solutions can be applied if the specific problems of individuals who experienced this phenomenon is clear. This is through analyzing the violations in the assigned meanings to the communication behaviors of the individuals involved. So, it is important to conduct this study.

This study concentrated on teenagers who experienced friend zone specifically in the verbal and non-verbal interpersonal communication behaviors, assigning of meanings to the communication behaviors, the appropriate meanings after experiencing friend zone and the communicators' reward valance.

It is important to analyze the case of teenagers who experienced this phenomenon to generally avoid all

levels of conflict. Hence, this study is significant in the field of communication particularly both in Peace Communication and Human Communication.

Specifically, this study will give significance to the following beneficiaries:

Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP). This study will is helpful in achieving the vision of the university into an epistemic community through generation of knowledge in the area of Humanities, Social Sciences and Communication from research undertaking.

PUP College of Communication. This study is helpful in providing inputs in the course Human Communication where one of the competencies focuses on interpersonal communication and/or relational communication. Aside from that, this can be significant in the course Peace Communication where skill in conflict resolutions in interpersonal relationship must be acquired by the learners.

PUP College of Social Sciences and Development (CSSD) and Guidance, Counseling and Testing Services (GCTS). Experts like Psychologist, Psychometrician and Guidance Counselors in this office of educational institutions, where most of their counselees are teenagers, can acquire more insight in the communication perspective about one of the common problems encounter by the teenagers to design appropriate intervention.

Friend zoned Individuals and teenagers. This study can be a basis for this group of individuals for the realization and self-intervention to avoid experiencing friend zone.

Parents. Findings of this study can help parents in guiding their teenage children in avoiding this experience.

Future Researchers. Counseling psychologists, social science researchers and communication researchers may use the findings of the study as reference on their future research undertakings. It is mentioned that individuals have expectations in a particular communication behaviors.

In a relational communication, particularly, there are several communication behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, and meanings are assigned to it. However, an attempt to a romantic relationship sometimes experience the violation of expectations if two individuals in a communication system have different assigned meanings in a particular communication behavior. This leads to friend zone.

In this study, the communication perspectives of friend zone were explained through analyzing the case of the teenagers who experience this phenomenon.

Specifically, (1) the interpersonal communication behaviors experienced by the informants with their expected romantic partner or violators; (2) the assigned meanings or expectancies; (3) the meanings of the violators or violation valance; and (4) the communication reward valance were identified and analyzed.

II. STUDY FRAMEWORK

The researchers anchored this study to Judee Burgoon's Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), a communication theory that falls under the interpersonal level of communication. The theory looks at how individuals react to the communication of others. Communication behaviors occur during the exchange of information, either verbal or nonverbal. Individuals have preconceived notions (or expectancies) of how others should act. When others violate the expectations of another, either positively or negatively, individuals will respond in specific ways. (West and Turner, 2004).

The assigned meanings of the informants (expectators) to the communication behaviors of their close friends who are expected to be their romantic partners (violators) are the reactions in this case study. However, if the assigned meanings of the expectators and violators are different, the expectations for a romantic relationship are violated.

There are three core concepts of EVT. These are expectancy, violation valence, and communicator reward valence. The term expectancy is used to describe what both parties in a relationship predict would happen. Expectations arise when individuals' mind automatically process the context, type of relationship, and characteristic of people to predict what they'd do. Thus, people have expectations of and make unconscious predictions about the communication behaviors, verbal or non-verbal, which will occur in a given interpersonal situation.

Context deals with the cultural norms and the setting of the conversation. Relationship includes "similarity, familiarity, liking, and relative status". It assesses how well both parties know each other. Communicator's characteristics include biography, physical appearance, personality, and the way the communicator communicates (Griffin, 2006).

For example in this case, communication behaviors such as always communication through social media, holding hands, going to somewhere together and the responses of "I Love You Too" and "I Miss You Too" to the "I Love You" and "I Miss You" have unconscious predictions and expectations from the informants or expectators which is assigning meanings of getting to or already in the state of romantic relationship with the violators.

Violation valence refers to the value we place on a specific unexpected behavior made by any person within interpersonal communication situation like relationship. Some unexpected actions are easy to identify while others may mean more than the expectation to the relationship (Griffin, 2006). It says that when the expectations in communication behavior are violated, people search for and assign positive and/or negative meaning(s) to those violations.

As applied in this case, informants searched for acceptable meanings in the interpersonal communication behaviors as their expectations of getting to or already to a romantic relationship were violated. This is the reason why communication to violators through social media is interpreted as a habit of entertaining friends while holding hands symbolizes of being a close friend. Likewise, accompanying to somewhere is considered as usual activity while saying "I Love You" and "I Miss You" are usual words deliver to close friends.

Lastly, communicator reward valence refers to our ability to audit or sum up the positive or negative deed and evaluate whether we will reward or punish that person or not. We usually assess people by their features, the nonverbal cues they make, or their verbal replies. In this manner, individuals will likely assign meaning that favors the violator's influence in their lives when meaning the communication violation is unclear (Griffin, 2006).

As expectations were violated and experienced the friend zone, informants still sum it up as either reward or punishment.

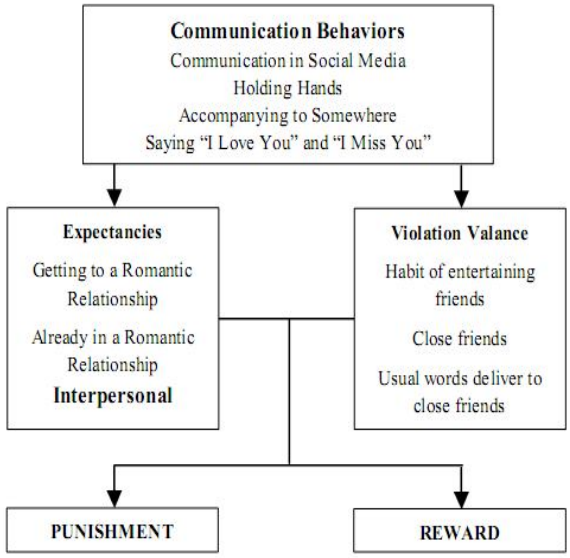


Figure 1: Expectancy Violation Theory as Applied to Study

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To understand the case the teenagers who experienced friend zone, the researchers employed the qualitative research. This approach seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behavior, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues (Woods, 2006). The case of the teenagers specifically the interpersonal communication behaviors experienced with the violators, the teenagers' assigned meanings to it, the violation valance and the communication reward valance of the informants in the violations of expectations were well-understood because the qualitative research is the best approach.

Since most studies conducted focused on the psychological impacts of friend zone, this paper has a purpose of exploration that discovered more in the perspective of communication particularly in the violations of expectations in meaning assignment that leads to friend zone. With that, the researchers used the exploratory research which is explained as an investigation into a problem or situation which provides insights to the researchers (Business Dictionary, nd).

As far as the tradition of inquiry is concerned, this research is a case study which research focus is in the situation of the teenagers who experienced friend zone and how it affects the life of the informants. According to Sanchez (2001), case study is a descriptive record of an individual's experiences and/or behaviors that may be used in a variety of ways to make inferences about developmental process, the impact of life events, a person's level of functioning, and the origin of disorders.

In generating the data, the researchers conducted in-depth interview to the informants. Through this method, the researchers inquired deeply into some aspect of the informants' meaning constructions, behaviors and insights. As Quality Research International (2012) explained, in-depth interview is one in which the researcher tries to go deeply into some aspect of the informant's feelings, motives, attitudes, life history, etc. From this method, the researchers constructed an interview guide which contains all the questions needed to attain the research objectives. Informants in this study are the teenagers, aged between 15 to 19 years old, regardless of gender and experienced a violation of expectation in a romantic relationship or tagged as friend zoned individuals. With these requirements, the researchers purposively selected Erik, Chris, Karl, John, Kath and Raisa.

Erik, Chris and John are male while Kath and Raisa are female. However, Karl admitted that he is part of homosexual community. Though gender is not considered in choosing the informants, it is revealed that teenagers despite of gender can experience friend zone.

In the age, Erik, Karl and Raisa are 19 years old; John and Kath, 18 years old; and Chris is 17 years old. These ages are included in the teenager stage which defined as the period between 10 and 19 years old according to the World Health Organization or WHO (Acero, et. al, 2008).

Informants disclosed that after a period of time of being attached to their friends who are the violators, romantic feelings were established. In a short period of approximately two weeks, Chris started to feel a romantic relationship to his friend. However, three informants felt a romantic feeling to their friends with a time period of more than a month but below a year. Raisa has 1 month before she fell in love with her friend while 3 months for Kath and 6 months for Karl

and John. Meanwhile, it took a year as Erik established a romantic feeling to his friend.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Interpersonal Communication Behaviors Experienced by the Informants with their Expected Romantic Partner or Violators

Informants and their friends who are expected as the informants' relational partner or the violators have interpersonal communication behaviors namely Communication in Social Media, holding hands with each other, accompanying to some place and expressing their love through saying "I Love You" and "I Miss You."

4.2. Assigned Meanings of the Informants in the Interpersonal Communication Behaviors Experienced with Violators

In communication behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, individuals have assigned interpretations or meanings. The same in this case, teenagers have assigned meanings and interpretations in the interpersonal communication behaviors of with the violators. First behavior is the communication in social media. Teenagers assigned meanings in this interpersonal communication behavior as getting to a romantic relationships for Erik and Kath while for Karl, Chris and Raisa expected that they are already in a state of romantic relationship with the violators. These expectancies of the teenage informants are already consistent in some studies. Farrugia (2013) found out that there are elements of relationship and social media affect long-term relationships. Likewise, Gowen (2014) also explained that teens on social media impact their relationship. In addition, Klein (2012) concluded that social media have influenced social behavior and communication particularly in maintaining relationships, whether to stay in contact or express emotions. It therefore implies that a pattern is established that social media has impact to relationship of individuals. Another communication behavior revealed was holding hands to each other, the informants and the violators. In this behavior, Erik and John admitted that with their violators, there is already a romantic relationship. In a happy relationship of couples, holding hands has a reassuring effect by reducing stress hormones (studybodylanguage.com, nd). The explanation says that this non-verbal communication behavior is being done by two individuals in the state of romantic relationship. This idea is considered as the reason why informants expected a state of romantic relationships to their violators.

In a communication behavior that is being accompanied by the violators, however, Chris assumed that he is getting to a romantic relationship with his violator. Aside from that, Karl, Erik and John disclosed that this behavior justified that they are already in a state romantic relationship to their violators.

Lastly, exchanging verbal messages of "I Love You" and "I Miss You" of John and Erik to the violators and vice versa made them expect that there is a romantic relationship between them. But according to Paul (2013), saying "I Love You" and "I Miss You" have different meanings. For the informants of this study, this means that they are already in a romantic relationship.

4.3. Violation Valance of the Informants in the Interpersonal Communication Behaviors

Though informants have meaning assignment in the interpersonal communication behaviors with the individuals who are expected as their romantic partner, these were changed as the informants searched for acceptable meanings (Griffin, 2006) after friend zone was experienced.

In communication through social media, there is existing study indicated that social media also a tool to establish romantic relationship. According to the justification of Rutledge (2013), social media replace offline relationships because of the cited research that social media have enhanced relationships. Since relationship mentioned is not specifically identified, it implies that this can also be applied in other types of relationship.

In connection to this study, expectations of Erik, Kath, Karl and Chris for a romantic relationship though this communication behavior were violated. As friend zone was experienced, however, these informants considered this behavior a habit of entertaining friends.

Holding hands, as another communication behavior, symbolizes close friends and this meaning was assigned by the informants as friend zone was experienced. SayWhyDoI.com (2011) explained that this is not only an expression of closeness that says "I like you," but it also intensifies how much you like a person. This also includes other meanings like "you're not alone," "you're accepted" and "you belong." With that, expectation of being in the state of romantic relationship with the violators of Erik and John is violated.

Usual activity with a close friend is what the informants searched as acceptable meaning for a communication behavior of accompanying informants to somewhere. This meaning is different in the expectations of Chris of getting to relationship, and Karl, Erik and John of already in a state of romantic relationship.

Finally, the verbal exchanges of "I Love You" and "I Miss You" were interpreted as usual messages deliver to a friend. This acceptable meaning assigned can relate to the writings of Paul (2013) that saying "I Love You" and "I Miss You" to a friend means "these individuals are personally important and you always want the very best for them."

4.4. Communication Reward Valance of the Informants in the Violation of Expectation

The communication reward valance of the informants after the expectations were violated are either negative or positive. Chris, John, Karl and Raisa revealed that this experience is a form of punishment. On the other hand, Erik admitted that this experience reinforced him to be stronger.

CONCLUSIONS

The following are the conclusions:

1. There are various interpersonal communication behaviors that establish romantic feelings.
2. Teenagers can interpret meanings in the interpersonal communication behaviors to their peers.
3. Teenagers assigned violation valance or possible acceptable interpretations if their expectation in interpersonal communication behaviors are violated.
4. Violated expectations have communication reward valance

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, commercialization of the findings of this study is important to prove that the university is capable in the generation of knowledge particularly in the fields of Humanities, Social Sciences and Communication.
2. For the College of Communication, this can be additional information to be discussed in the human communication courses including Peace Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication and Introduction to Communication. Other than that, this can be include to be a special topic in their production subjects like Radio Production and Performance; Television Production and Performance; Audio-Video Techniques; Multimedia Production; Communication Campaign; and Public Information with the intention to increase the awareness level of the general public about this experiences of teenagers.
3. Since problem and rejection in interpersonal relationship are involved, it is also recommended to both the Department of Psychology of the College of Social Sciences and Development and Guidance, Counseling and Testing Services to use this study as basis or reference in constructing psychological examinations and assessment that will measure the rejection levels of teenagers. Aside from that, this will serve also as reference in conducting counseling, psychotherapy and other interventions to the individuals who experience this phenomenon.
4. For individuals who experienced friend zone, this study can be a basis for this group of individuals for the realization and self-intervention to avoid experiencing situation.
5. For parents, it is recommended to know details about friend zone to know the proper and appropriate care to be offered in case their children will experience this problem.
6. Future researchers in the fields of communication, counseling psychology and social sciences to use this study as their reference in the conduct of related research.

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