Full Length Research Paper

Analysis of an interpersonal conflict: The office fictitious or non fictitious conflict and ending

Ryan Christopher Morton
Howland High School, University of Toledo United States.

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The Office was analyzed to determine if television shows portrayed believable conflicts and resolutions in real life. One episode was analyzed, “Dinner Party,” and important interpersonal relationship problems were documented for evidence that correlated with the research previously founded. The episode was watched multiple times and patterns inside of the research were corresponded with what occurred in the show. Major aspects analyzed were what began the conflict, depression amongst relationships, and topics argued most amongst couples. It was determined that if these results matched up with the television show, then shows would be life-like to the audience.

Key words: Interpersonal conflict, interpersonal relationship, couples dispute, dissatisfaction, depression.

INTRODUCTION

The television show, The Office, was analyzed to determine if television shows have realistic conflicts and believable endings. A believable show felt authentic to the audience when they applied it based on his or her own personal knowledge and the likelihood it would occur in his or her own life. The same went for the ending; however, it may not always be just for both parties involved because both of them anticipated that they were right. It was critical to analyze why television shows are non fictitious because television is dominant in popular culture today. Everybody owns at least one television and often spend countless hours watching it; therefore, people began to copy the activities and attitudes that are portrayed on the television. Television stars virtually placed an image in people’s minds of how they should act. Therefore, by the analysis of this television show, it would be like analyzing a real life situation since people attempted to act like people on television. In The Office, the episode followed Michael and Jan as they hosted their first dinner party together as a couple. A feud erupted due to events that took place that made them furious at one another. The analysis of a couple helped to see if television shows portrayed real life because romantic relationships and fighting are common in everyday life. The episode was watched multiple times. It was determined if television shows have authentic plots that are believable to the people watching by the analysis of the episode, “Dinner Party,” in the television series The Office which allowed for an in-depth look at how conflicts begin and are resolved in interpersonal relationships.

E-mail: ryan.Morton@rockets.utoledo.edu

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Common terminology

According to Clark and Clinton (1994), interpersonal communication is defined as, “communication between people as individuals. Communication becomes interpersonal to the extent that the people involved can see each other’s uniqueness and can explain and predict each other’s behavior on the basis of that uniqueness” (p. 614). Interpersonal communication occurred between anyone that communicated with each other, in the case of Jan and Michael, they had a unique relationship with each other that no one else had. Conflict was specified by Clark and Clinton (1994) as, “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference form the other parties in achieving their goals” (p. 104). Conflict had to be delineated in order to analyze whether or not Michael and Jan did indeed have a conflict; it was determined that they were in a conflict because they had incompatible goals and scarce rewards that interfered with each other. Finally, resolutions one could have a win-win solutions defined by Clark and Clinton (1994) as, “with this method the goal is to find a solution or solutions that satisfy the needs of all parties involved. Not only do the parties actively seek not to win at the expense of each other, but they actually believe that by working together they can discover a solution that will allow all of them to reach their goals without compromise, a solution where no one loses… Establish communication…Own the problem…Define terms and values…Find common ground…Negotiate” (p. 106). This allowed for an analysis of the resolution of Michael and Jan’s conflict and determined if television shows had believable resolutions.

What commences conflict

Barki examined how conflicts commenced in real life which allowed for the analyzation of conflicts in television shows. He constructed his work because he examined other works done by other researchers and combined their research which analyzes how conflicts begin, but interpersonal conflict was what Barki needed to comprehend. Barki (2004) discovered, “…interpersonal conflict as a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (p. 2). The Effective Communication textbook alined well with the definition provided by Barki; they both involved incompatible goals, interference, and scarce rewards. This determined that this was what was needed to define conflict and The Office should aline with it. Disagreements, negative emotions, and interferences were definite properties that people associated with conflict. Some researchers believed that it only took one of these elements to initiate a feud, but some believed that all three of these aspects took place in some way (Barki, 2004, p. 3). It was determined that only one of these aspects was needed to begin a feud, but the other two played a role as well.

Furthermore, task conflict and emotional conflict are different types of interpersonal conflict. Discrepancies, incompatible goals, or contrasting desires are involved in task conflict; this occurred when both parties involved were aware that there was a conflict. Emotional conflict occurred when the parties involved had disagreements that emerged from anger, frustration, and other negative feelings (Barki, 2004, p. 4). It appeared that emotional conflict occurred between couples while task conflict occurred in people who were acquaintances.

As a matter of fact considering that television shows were produced by writers, it was a form of literature. Literature often discussed disagreement as the most used tool for conflict; this occurred when people anticipated that they had divergent needs, interests, opinions, or values (Barki, 2004, p. 6). It could be acknowledged that this episode had a conflict that began with a disagreement. Often in real life, conflicts also emerges because of disagreements; therefore if this was the case, then television shows are fairly accurate on how conflicts began. Barki (2004) founded, “…conflict contexts…a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceive disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals… interpersonal conflict is viewed as an individual’s perception formed by his or her perceptions of disagreement, negative emotion, and interference that are present in the situation” (p. 9). Conflict contexts occurred in daily life arguments because negative emotions were a common element for conflicts; people who felt hurt or betrayed reflected poor emotions toward a person. These negative emotions often arose because of differences that they had. For everyone, conflict was viewed differently because of different perceptions; people viewed themselves as the victim and not as the cause to the conflict. They were biased because they desired to be correct and not the one who caused the wrongdoing.

Depression

Correspondingly, it was believed that hostility was associated with relationship distress which caused more depression symptoms (Knobloch, 2013, p. 1253). Hostility toward one partner was believed to be an indicator that triggered depression in a person. This was just a hypothesis constructed by Knobloch that acquired further research and investigation. He conducted research on sixty-one couples where twenty-three people had depression. By comparing couples who had one partner with depression to a couple who had no one with
depression allowed for an in-depth examination of the differences in the mannerisms of the couples and led to the ultimate goal of depression in couples.

Additionally all of the couples were analyzed based on the SASB coding scale which analyzed the couples behavioral focus, affiliation, and interdependence (Knobloch, 2013). Once the testing of the couples was completed, Knobloch constructed some accurate results on depression in couples. With respect to the hypotheses previously stated; in depressed couples, the partner who was not depressed showed more hostility towards the depressed individual and the depressed individual also showed more submissive behavior (Knobloch, 2013). With these results in mind, the analysis of how much hostility Michael and Jan showed towards each other allowed for a judgement of whether or not they were in a depressed relationship. After Knobloch (2013) made his results, he developed a theory which stated, “The interactional theory of depression postulates that depressed individuals and their partners engage in repetitive interactional sequences marked by interpersonal hostility, control, and distance” (p.1250). This theory helped shaped future research of depression between couples. Hostility played the largest role in the interaction between these couples and how they acted. Most of the time, the non - depressed individual tried to cope with the situation by avoiding, ignoring, or rejecting the depressed person (Knobloch, 2013, p. 1251). Thus, by just avoiding the person, it made the situation much worse than it already was; running away from problems did not fix them, it only made them worse. This caused the depressed individual to show even more signs of depression and ruined the relationship forever. More research needed to be conducted to accurately depict in couples the signs of depression and how hostility played a role in the destructive behavior.

Couples agitation

This article’s main focus was on communication between couples and what caused the negative interaction that occurred between them. Couples who could cope with conflict better through proper communication had less negative interactions with one another; it also allowed for deeper levels of self-disclosure and led to more intimacy. However, destructive communication caused higher rates of break-ups and more negative interactions between couples (Stanley, 2002, p. 660). Ultimately, couples who could not communicate properly had major problems with their relationships and had higher rates of dissatisfaction. Many hypotheses were created before conducting the research which included a telephone survey where 908 participants were asked the same questions and this determined what couples bicker the most about. The hypotheses stated: the higher the negative interaction with one another, the higher rating of divorce potential the couple faces, couples who state that one of the individuals withdraw will be characterized by greater levels of negative interaction and dissatisfaction, men typically withdraw more than females do, money is the number one issue couples argue about, and more committed couples with think less likely about what it would feel like to be in another relationship and feel less trapped and more satisfied (Stanley, 2002). With these hypotheses, Stanley then conducted his phone survey to determine if his beliefs were accurate. He asked the same questions for all of the participants and after analyzing his results he was able to determine that his hypotheses were fairly accurate.

Therefore, Stanley founded that, for both genders negative interaction led to higher divorce rates, for previously divorced couples the top arguments starter was, children, followed by money, both genders said that males tend to withdraw more than females, and more committed couples thought less about being with other people. Through his research, Stanley realized that fighting erodes a sense of safety in a relationships and that when both partners withdrew it always ended in divorce or a break-up (2002). It was concluded that couples with more negative interactions faced higher rates of dissatisfaction with one another and led to more divorces. Withdraw from either partner also led to dissatisfaction and harmed a relationship, especially when both partners withdrew.

METHOD

The Office, was an American television show that featured the life of people inside an office. The episode, “Dinner Party,” allowed for an accurate depiction of realistic television. It focused on an everyday couple coping with a terrible relationship, but they were too afraid to leave each other which led to many feuds. Michael and Jan were the feuding couple that was analyzed to answer the research question. Since they were in a relationship, it meant that they were in an interpersonal relationship. Their interpersonal relationship faults developed through bad communication skills. They began to fight about experiences and events that everyday couples fight about, which showed how television shows are realistic. This episode was watched five times on DVD to fully understand the feud. Notes were taken on nonverbal elements, verbal elements, and paralanguage.

REPORT

Jan and Michael were in a relationship for a few months; Jan moved in with Michael after she was fired. They both lived a miserable life with each other and Michael gave up a lot of who he was to try to please Jan. Their terrible relationship status finally exploded into a violent rage of yelling at a dinner party, because they were unhappy and dissatisfied with each other and their relationship. This argument allowed for the research question to be answered because of the analysis of their dispute. After their opposition was analyzed, it allowed for an in-depth
look at resolutions that are fair to all parties.

Jan and Michael's dispute

Throughout the evening, Jan and Michael had little disagreements and bickered slightly. Every time Jan communicated to Michael, her pitch increased and she attempted to sound sincere, but it did not work. She also sped up while talking in hopes of ending the conversation. Michael's pitch and rate changed as well, he talked louder and quicker as he addressed Jan.

Jan and Michael finally showed their true aggression towards each other when Michael hung up his neon beer sign in the dining room. As soon as Michael hung up this sign, Jan's facial expressions showed how much she was displeased; she tried to look very pleasant in front of the guest, but it was obvious that she was faking it and she really was furious. While looking displeased Jan mentioned, "Hey babe, how about we take the beer sign down until our guests leave and then we'll discuss it" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). She had an angry tone, but she was attempting to hide it. After Michael insisted on not taking the sign down, Jan attempted to calm down the only way she knew how, and that was by listening to her ex-assistant's, Hunter's, CD. The lyrics of the song suggested that Jan and Hunter have slept together; "You took me by the hand made me a man, that one night, you made everything all right" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). As Jan listened to the song she caressed her neck and rubbed it and started to sway to the music as Michael commented to the guests, "Jan thinks Hunter very talented. You know what, I don't think he's that good" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). Michael's tone depicted jealousy and envy. After Jan listened to a few lyrics, Michael and her continued to argue as she yelled out, "You are hardly my first" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). She verbalized this to get a rise out of Michael and she was also very displeased with him and wanted to show him that she really was not his.

Depression

It was highly possible that Jan and Michael could have been suffering from depression just by being with each other. This can be determined by the amount of hostility that they directed towards each other. Throughout the evening, when Jan communicated with Michael she sounded angry and rude, but she tried to get rid of her hostility by listening to Hunter’s CD and smelling candles. When she listened to Hunter’s CD, she was at peace and danced seductively to the music; she did this twice during the evening. She also smelled her candles that she made; she mentions in a relieved tone, "When I get frustrated or irritated or angry, I come up here and smell all of my candles and poof it all goes away" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). This showed how Jan attempted to relieve her hostility towards Michael; it was implied that she did this often and during the episode she was caught doing this a few times. Jan's tone changed as she talked to Michael, it went from sounding normal to sounding displeased and unhappy. She tried to sound encouraging to Michael, but it was obvious that she was insincere and her rate increased, her pitch rose, her articulation was more prevalent and she never paused while talking. Jan throughout the episode was rude to Michael and he just took it. Michael did not stand up for himself and backed off when he was about to, this caused Jan to have the ability to walk all over Michael. Michael showed how Jan is hostile towards him, he confessed to Pam, "I hope she didn't do anything to the food…I can’t prove it but I think she's trying to poison me" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). Michael was worried that Jan was going to break one day and try to kill him. The true hostility showed when Jan became so frustrated with Michael that she threw his Dundie Award at his plasma screen television which broke both objects.

Dissatisfaction

Couples who were often dissatisfied with their relationship began to withdraw from each other which led to breaking up and having many negative interactions. Also, this withdraw led to wanting other people and arguing about major topics in life. Jan had many signs of withdrawing from Michael: smelling her candles and listening to Hunter’s CD. She did both of these things to escape Michael and to ignore the problem; however, listening to Hunter’s CD also showed Jan's desire of wanting to be with another person because she danced seductively to the music.

Michael also withdrew, he did so when he was about to speak his mind, but he stopped himself and then looked into the camera and did nothing. He did not speak his mind and tried to forget about the argument. When Jan tried to face the problem, it caused Michael and her to have negative interactions; this is shown as Jan verbalized, "I guess that makes me the devil" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008), she proceeded to laugh harshly. Jan could not communicate properly with Michael and this caused their negative interactions. Michael eventually spoke up for himself and he described in agony,"When I said that I wanted to have kids and you said that you wanted me to have a vasectomy, what did I do, and then when you said that you might want kids and I was not sure we had the vasectomy reversed and then when you said you definitely did not want kids we reversed back. Snip, snap, snap, snap" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). As Michael mentioned this to Jan, his tone was displeased and his facial expression was saddened. They also
argued about money as they commented to each other: "No all you do is get me to work on my rich friends." "For an investment opportunity." "Man I would love to burn your candles." "You burn it you buy it."

"Oh good I'll be your first costumer" (Daniels and Fieg, 2008). These negative interactions with each other occurred throughout the episode which ultimately led to their demise.

Conflict overview

Jan saw Michael as an obstacle to her happiness, but she did not leave him because she was previously divorced and believed that she could not do better than Michael. She forced herself to stay in this unhappy relationship even though she thought that Michael was idiotic. Jan believed that she was always right and that Michael was always wrong. Her main goal was to control every aspect of the relationship. Michael saw Jan as a control freak and was submissive to her. He was very dissatisfied with their relationship, but did not want to leave Jan because he loved her. Michael saw the conflict as Jan not letting him have any say in their relationship.

The conflicts high point was when Jan threw the Dundie award at the television. After this incident, the police showed up and told them to keep the noise down and asked what occurred. Michael explained what happened and the police suggested that Michael should stay somewhere else. Dwight offered Michael to come home with him, he was hesitant at first, but he went with Dwight.

Jan rushes out of the house all worried that the police were present and was worried that Michael was getting arrested. After Michael departed, Jan went back inside and attempted to fix Michael's Dundie award, but failed to do so and gave up. They had a win-win situation because they both received what they wanted: to be happy and free from each other. Michael leaving represented their break-up so now they are free and can live their lives how they desire.

Analysis

The articles were accurate with what occurred throughout the episode. Jan and Michael feud began with a disagreement: the beer sign. Jan viewed the beer sign as dispersant and tacky. This one disagreement sparked negative emotions to occur and also showed how they interfered with each others lives. These three aspects are what Barki founded in his research of what began conflicts. He was also right because literature did focus on disagreement as the main conflict catalyst. Emotions such as anger and frustration occurred due to Michael and Jan's disagreement which meant that they were in an emotional conflict. It could be inferred that Michael suffered from depression by being with Jan. She showed high rates of hostility towards Michael by the rude comments she made and the constant negative gestures she processed toward him. Her hostility reached a maximum when she developed a fit of rage which caused her to throw a trophy at Michael's television, which destroyed both objects. They constantly argued, which developed more distance between them; this distance caused even more hostility to generate. More research and evidence needed to be conducted to fully determine if Michael was depressed or not, but the findings so far gave good implications that he was depressed.

Therefore what couples argue the most about was the next article analyzed. Stanley reported that coupled argued mostly about money; previously divorced couples argued about children the most. Both of these arguments were seen throughout the episode; Jan got Michael to attempt to get his friends to invest into Jan's candle making business because they had no money. They also argued about wanting children or not; Michael wanted children, but Jan was unsure and changed her mind many times. Jan and Michael also did not know how to communicate properly which led to multiple negative interactions. These negative interactions occurred even more when Jan or Michael withdrew from each other. Jan would withdraw to smelling candles or listening to music and Michael would not talk at all. When they withdrew from each other, it only made the problem worse because they would not try to fix anything. This all led to Michael and Jan breaking-up which Stanley proposed what would occur. Men were thought to withdraw more than females, but this did not occur in the episode. Jan, the female, withdrew way more than Michael did.

DISCUSSION

This conflict was realistic because it began how normal couple's conflicts usually begin. Jan and Michael experienced many disagreements throughout the episode all of which resulted in negative emotions and interference with their happiness. Everyday life conflicts usually involved one of these three elements, and in this case it involved all three. They had a disagreement about the beer sign which ultimately caused a downfall in their relationship. The fight in the scene was a realistic conflict because it was based on a disagreement that led to negative emotions and interferences in their lives. They both showed signs of hostility towards each other, which led to even more negative emotions. Conflicts in real life involve someone feeling he or she has been wronged, which both parties in this instance thought. Jan and Michael achieved a win-win situation even though it did appear this way, and the resolution was realistic. They both ultimately got what they wanted; to be free from each other and happy. In the end when Michael left with Dwight, it was the beginning of the end for them.

In addition when Jan attempted to fix Michael's Dundie...
Award that she broke, it symbolized their relationship: it could not be fixed no matter how hard they tried. They were better off without each other and are much happier when they are not together. The resolution was fair to both parties because Michael and Jan were both happier by not being together. When they were together, their relationship was toxic and it destroyed their lives. They obtained their ultimate goal which was to find happiness. The resolution was authentic because couples in real life would break-up after the constant arguments and fights that occurred throughout the relationship. Everyday people desired to please themselves, and constantly being in fights with their loved one would not make them joyous; therefore, they would end their relationship.

Conclusion

It was important to know if television shows had realistic endings because society lived in a world that is run by the media. Popular culture wanted shows to be realistic so people could relate to it, and if they related to it more, the more they watched and the more money that a show would make. This helped show why society loved to watch television; the conflict and the resolution was realistic and people could connect as a group to similar experiences that they shared with television shows. By understanding these aspects of relationships it helped teach people how they should act in conflict. People should not withdraw instead they should face his or her problems because it could end better for him or her. Also it improved relationships between people because he or she knew when they were in the wrong and it led to a higher possibility that someone analyzed their situation and realized it is their fault; thus, they would not be so closed minded. There still needs to be research on the depression in couples and what it actually causes for their relationship. Further investigation into interpersonal relationships and conflicts needs to be done to allow people to obtain the knowledge of conflicts and how they should be solved and how solving it poorly may end relationships.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES