

4SP2020 Communication Theory (COM-340-01A) Module Two 2.1 Discussion: Criteria



## Criteria

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### The Three Most Important Criteria to Me

The three criteria that I consider most important to "make a theory good" are the interpretive standard of a new understanding of people, the scientific standard of practical utility, and the scientific standard for predicting future events. Interpretive scholars "seek to gain new understanding by analyzing the activity that they regard as uniquely human-symbolic interaction" (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015, p. 30). I feel like this would be particularly important in developing a theory of communication. The whole point is to understand people and their behavior. If I were looking for a theory about people, I would want it to give me new insight into them. I chose the standard of practical utility because I do not see the point of developing a theory if you cannot put it to practical use. I suppose it goes hand in hand with the interpretive standard of a new understanding of people. "Since an oft-cited goal of social science is to help people have more control over their daily lives, people facing the type of thorny situations that the theory addresses should be able to benefit from its wisdom" (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015, p. 28). This statement makes sense to me, not just referring to social science theories but theories in general. I feel a theory is not worthwhile if it is of little benefit to anyone. I chose the scientific standard of predicting future events because that is what I feel like science is supposed to do. According to Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks (2015), "Even the best theory may only be able to speak about people in general, rather than about specific individuals-and these only in terms of probability and tendencies, not absolute certainty" (p.25). I like the way they worded that sentence. Social science can predict behavior to a certain degree, but there will always be outliers. In any case, I think it is crucial that a scientific theory at least make attempts at predicting human behavior.

## **The Two Criteria Least Important to Me**

The two criteria I feel are the least important are the interpretive standard of a community of agreement and the interpretive standard of aesthetic appeal. According to the text, "we can identify a good interpretive theory by the amount of support it generates within a community of scholars who are interested and knowledgeable about the same type of communication" (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015, p.32). I do not find this completely agreeable because, as we just discussed in our previous assignment, there are many different branches of interpretive scholarship. I feel that it would be difficult to find a significant amount of people who would join in collaborating with your theory. The second criteria I chose is aesthetic appeal. I feel like a theory is a theory. If you were creating it, you could see it as an art form, but it is only a theory to the rest of the world.

## **How Will Knowing This Information Help Me Study Theories**

The information learned in this chapter goes deeper into what exactly goes into a scientific versus an interpretive theory. I think this will help later because I will be able to spot small nuances in the descriptions, and it will help me identify which class the theory falls under. For example, if they mention a survey is given, I will know that it was probably a scientific study, whereas if they discuss the reformation of society, I will know it probably falls under the category of interpretive scholarship.

## References

Griffin, E, Ledbetter, A, & Sparks, G. (2015). *A first look at communication theories*. (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education. New York, NY