

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Nicholas and Alyssa have been dating for about a year—exclusively for the past eight months or so. They are both juniors in college and have been thinking about whether they should get married. Alyssa frequently discusses the possibility with her roommates, and they debate the pros and cons. “He is so handsome and nice to me, and we are totally in love,” says Alyssa. However, she wishes that he were majoring in something more substantial than history—business or law, perhaps. And she knows that he will want them to move back to his rural hometown in the West, which bothers her because she is a city girl. On the other hand, her friends point out that he is nice to children and (they have been told) is a great kisser. But is she really ready to give up dating and settle down?

For Nicholas it is a more private process, but he is also trying to decide. He loves Alyssa and wants to be with her all the time. Their physical relationship is wonderful, and he enjoys her intellect. He is afraid he might not be good enough for her and that if she knew what he is really like, she might think that she can do better. He has no solid job or income to offer and will be in school for at least two more years. She gets upset when he does not want to talk about his feelings, and he worries about having to endure that pressure forever. And with the divorce rate as high as it is, is marriage even worth the effort?

Both of them are trying to be logical about this most important life decision, but it is hard to do. Feelings of love and hormonal urges get in the way. Isn't it too calculating to weigh the pros and cons of the relationship? Won't that just kill the romance? Can they even know what the most important considerations are before they get married?

HISTORY

Philosophers have been discussing the ideas relevant to modern social exchange theory for the past two centuries. The basic concept is that human social relationships can be understood as revolving around the exchange of resources valued by the participants. Utilitarian writers such as Adam Smith taught that people tend to act rationally in ways designed to maximize their profit economically. In the early twentieth century, anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Claude Lévi-Strauss demonstrated how many cultures

engage in the exchange of various goods and services as a central aspect of their social life. The latter took the collectivist position that one's behavior in social relationships tends to be a function of the social system of which one is a part (Ekeh 1974). In other words, the social norms, customs, laws, and values of the culture help to regulate the exchanges.

These early anthropologists explored the relationship between social norms and individual behaviors. James George Frazer (1919) concluded that many social structures result from the economic needs of the individuals within the system. He was investigating the tendency of Australian aborigines to marry cross, rather than parallel, cousins and concluded that because the men were too poor to provide a bride price, they would trade a sister or other female relative for their bride.

Sociologists began to seriously consider the exchange model in the context of human societies and families with the groundbreaking writings of John Thibaut and Harold Kelley (1959), George Homans (1961/1974), and Peter Blau (1964). These writers took us beyond the concepts of economic exchanges and into the more complex world of the social marketplace where individuals negotiated to maximize their profits. In addition to trading such things as food, money, and other services, humans in relationships make exchanges that are harder to quantify, such as status, attractiveness, and love. Although each had a somewhat different emphasis, they all agreed that what people want and need can be obtained only through exchanges with others and that we will try to get those things at the lowest possible cost to ourselves (Turner 1991). Thus, dyadic exchanges are influenced by the costs and rewards associated with them.

Among their many contributions to the development of social exchange (Thibaut and Kelley 1959), social psychologists Kelley and Thibaut (1978) outlined an interdependence theory in their book *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence*. They distinctly noted that actors not only try to maximize rewards that they personally receive from a relationship exchange, but also take into account the needs of their partner. Because relationships are interdependent, both parties rely on the relationship to provide them with rewards. Attraction and dependence in relationships will depend on how individuals assess the degree to which a relationship meets their expectations and how it compares to alternative relationships. When there is asymmetry in dependence within a relationship, they also outline ways in which less powerful people might act in an attempt to minimize their potential for exploitation (e.g., seek alternative sources of rewards; enhance one's own ability to offer rewards). More will be said about Kelley and Thibaut's concepts of dependence, commitment, comparison level, and comparison level for alternatives in the concepts section of this chapter.

George Homans is probably the most influential scholar in bringing social exchange theory to general sociology because he provided an articulation of exchange theory in his book *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Form* (1961/1974). Essentially adapting the principles of behaviorism, he alleged that reinforcement and punishment were the driving forces in human behavior and that sociology should pay more attention to how individuals choose to act within social situations. In his own study of cross-cousin marriages (Homans and Schneider 1955), Homans rejected the collectivist orientation of Lévi-Strauss. He took the position that societal norms result from the needs of individuals, rather than that society regulates interpersonal behavior. One of the most important relationship norms to evolve from Homans's work was the notion of the rule of distributive justice, to be discussed in the concepts section.

Richard Emerson (1976) made important contributions to the application of social exchange theory for family science by proposing that the unit of analysis in the theory is not the individual, but the relationship between people and the networks in which those

exchange relationships are embedded (Collett 2010). His concepts of "dependence, power, and balance" are not individual properties; instead, they are relational properties that help us focus on interpersonal processes (Sabatelli and Shehan 1993). Emerson's focus on the balance of dependence and interdependence over time is central to understanding power relations and relationship dynamics in interpersonal relationships.

Ivan Nye (1978, 1979) summarized the concepts of the exchange model, calling it a choice and exchange theory. By labeling it as such, "Nye saw exchange as something that was more relevant within a relationship (e.g., doing favors for a partner), whereas choice (e.g., of partners, benefits) was an important component of deciding whether to enter a specific relationship" (Collett 2010, 283). Nye also showed how exchange concepts could be applied to a large number of research questions in family science and offered a series of theoretical propositions and testable hypotheses. His work completed the evolution of exchange from economic to sociological to family science theory. It has been and continues to be a widely used framework in analyzing family issues since the publication of his chapter in *Contemporary Theories about the Family* (1979).

Building on Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory, Caryl Rusbult (1980, 1983) developed an investment model to better understand commitment and persistence in relationships. The model asserts that, as one becomes increasingly dependent on a relationship, commitment to that relationship strengthens, and allegiance is established. Thus, referring to our couple in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, we would anticipate that as Nicholas and Alyssa become increasingly dependent on each other, their commitment to one another will increase, and they will feel psychologically attached to one another. As a result, their relationship is likely to persist. More will be said about commitment in the concepts section.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

In examining the basic assumptions that undergird social exchange theory, we draw from the writings of Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) as well as White, Klein, and Martin (2015) in this section. Although social exchange theory is built on the principles of behaviorism and economics, it goes beyond just explaining individual behavior. It focuses on the dynamics of relationships and how they are formed, maintained, and dissolved. As a result, there are assumptions about the nature of both individuals and relationships that are embedded in the framework.

People are motivated by self-interest. The first assumption is that people are motivated by self-interest. This means that we seek those things and relationships that are beneficial to ourselves. Another way of saying this is that we seek rewards and avoid punishments or costs. Thus, we are most likely to engage in interactions that we find rewarding while avoiding those we do not like.

Individuals are constrained by their choices. A second assumption is that individuals are constrained by their choices, and it is within that range of possible choices that we strive to understand one's motivations. Nye (1979), in fact, concluded that the theory is more about choice than exchange. Social structure leads us to conclude that family life is rewarding to most individuals, because this is a choice most people make.

In interacting with others, individuals will seek to maximize their profits while minimizing costs. Because the actual outcome of an interaction cannot always be known,

humans will use their expectations in making their decisions. This means that we enter into situations we believe will be rewarding, based on our past experiences.

Humans are rational beings. Another important assumption is that humans are rational beings. This means that we have the analytical ability to calculate the ratio of rewards to costs. Based on information that we possess, we consider the alternatives before acting and choose the outcome that is deemed to be the most profitable or the option that carries the least cost. Exchange theorists also accept the fact that how rewards and costs are evaluated varies from one person to another as well as across time. Therefore, what Nicholas finds rewarding may not be rewarding to Alyssa. Similarly, what Nicholas finds rewarding in his relationship with Alyssa today may not be the same as what he considers rewarding in his relationship with her ten years from now.

Social relationships are also characterized by interdependence and reciprocity. This means that, to gain a profit in an exchange, we must provide the other person with rewards as well. All parties must expect some rewards to continue the relationship or interaction. And finally, social exchanges are regulated by the expectations or norms of reciprocity and fairness. Thus, we expect others to meet our needs if we attempt to meet their needs, and we expect them to do so based on what is right or fair.

PRIMARY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

The principal concepts used in social exchange theory are listed by Nye (1979), who draws heavily from Thibaut and Kelley (1959).

Rewards

All of the things in a person's physical, social, and psychological world that are experienced as pleasurable are considered rewards. A reward can be any satisfaction, gratification, status, or relationship that one enjoys and, therefore, would like to experience with greater frequency (Thibaut and Kelley 1959). It includes anything that the individual would choose in the absence of added costs. What is rewarding will vary from one person to the next. Rewards positively reinforce behavior.

Blau (1964) identified six commodities that are capable of rewarding another during interpersonal exchanges: personal attraction, social acceptance, social approval, instrumental services, respect/prestige, and compliance/power. Foa and Foa (1980) added six more: love, status, services, goods, information, and money. Nye (1979) contributed autonomy, security, value and opinion agreement, and equality.

In our opening vignette, Nicholas's good looks and kindness are rewards for Alyssa. Nicholas finds his love for Alyssa, his appreciation for her intellect, and his enjoyment of their time together rewarding aspects of his relationship with her. They are drawn to each other because of these rewarding capacities.

Costs

In contrast, any status, relationship, or feeling that the individual does not like and would like to avoid is considered a cost. A cost is a factor that would deter an activity, and it can be classified into three categories (Blau 1964). Investment costs are time and energy that

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an individual will expend to gain a new skill that can be used to reward another. Opportunity costs consist of those rewarding feelings or positions that must be given up when selecting some competing alternative. Finally, direct costs are resources that are used up in an exchange. This could be giving up money for a good or service, such as a weekly housekeeper, or marrying an intelligent person who is not all that attractive.

Both Alyssa and Nicholas incur costs as a result of choosing to be in a relationship with one another; for example, their exclusivity means that they are not free to engage in a similar love relationship with another partner. For Alyssa, Nicholas's desire to live in a rural area and his inability to talk about his feelings are costly to her. Her desire to live in the city and discontent with his choice of college major are costs for him associated with this relationship.

Profit

Profit refers to the outcome in terms of rewards and costs. People strive to gain the most rewards with the fewest costs. When they do so, they have profited. We all try to maximize profits and minimize costs in our relationships and interactions. Generally, most rewarding outcomes have some costs attached to them, which must, therefore, be weighed and considered.

Alyssa is weighing the costs and rewards in her relationship with Nicholas. Some things, like his kindness and his strong affection for her, may outweigh some of the potential negative aspects of this relationship, such as his desire to live in a rural area. Nonetheless, just like Alyssa, people make determinations about how profitable or desirable their relationships are to them based on the ratio of costs and rewards.

Comparison Level

The evaluation of the profitability of our relationships against what we feel we deserve is our comparison level (Thibaut and Kelley 1959)—that is, we compare the rewards and costs we are experiencing in a relationship and judge our feelings about them based on our ideas of what should be the fair outcome for us. We might also look at how well we think others in similar positions, such as other newly married or nice people, are doing in comparison to what we are experiencing. We expect our rewards to be similar to those of others in comparable situations. The notion of comparison level affects one's satisfaction in a relationship.

Comparison Level for Alternatives

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) also note that individuals will compare their outcomes in a particular relationship with alternative relationships that may be out there. For instance, Nicholas, fifteen years from now, may meet another woman who is more physically attractive and exciting than his wife Alyssa. Because he determines that divorce, having to share custody of his children, and changing locations and families involve considerable expense, Nicholas may decide that leaving his marriage to Alyssa to be with a beautiful new woman is not worth the cost after all. It is assumed that a new relationship must be sufficiently superior to compensate for any costs incurred in moving from one relationship to another. A subjective assessment, the comparison level for alternatives, then is "the lowest

level of outcomes a member will accept in the light of alternative opportunities" (Thibaut and Kelley 1959, 21); it determines the stability of a relationship.

Dependence, Commitment, and Persistence

Dependence is the extent to which a person needs or is reliant on a particular person for a desired relationship outcome. In Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory, dependence grows when a partner experiences a high level of satisfaction in his or her relationship and when potential alternative relationships are undesirable.

According to Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model, feelings of commitment arise with growing dependence. Commitment is a "long-term orientation toward a relationship, including feelings of psychological attachment and intentions to persist through both good and bad times" (Cox et al. 1997, 80). Rusbult (1980, 1983) asserts that commitment is enhanced by three variables. First, a high level of satisfaction with the relationship is important. When a partner meets one's needs (e.g., companionate, intellectual) and expectations for the relationship, based on experience or comparison with others, satisfaction is likely to be good. Second, commitment is stronger when alternatives are perceived to be unavailable or unattractive. Third, commitment becomes stronger depending on the investments each has made in their partner and the relationship. For instance, partners may invest resources (e.g., effort, self-disclosure, identity, time) directly into the relationship and experience other resources (e.g., mutual friends, children, shared memories, possessions, changed name) that become linked to the relationship. These investments increase the likelihood that a relationship will persist, elevating the costs to terminate the relationship (Cox et al. 1997; Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow 1986). Rusbult and colleagues (Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew 1998) developed an investment model scale to measure commitment, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. It is useful in examining commitment and dependence in close relationships.

Further enhancing our understanding of commitment, Johnson and colleagues (Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston 1999) identified three dimensions of commitment: personal, moral and structural. Personal commitment represents the desire to stay married to one's partner. Moral commitment denotes the values and morals that underlie one's feeling of obligation to remain married. Structural commitment addresses the constraints that encourage one to remain in the relationship, such as quality and availability of alternatives, costs associated with ending the relationship, and the amount of investment in the relationship. Stanley and Markman (1992) identify two key processes in commitment: dedication ("want to") and constraint ("have to"). Their dedication component is similar to Johnson's personal commitment, and their constraint component is synonymous with Johnson's structural (e.g., shared possessions, economic investment) and moral aspects of commitment (e.g., belief that divorce is wrong, belief that you must complete what you started). These notions are useful as we consider how people make assessments about the rewards and costs of staying in or leaving their relationships.

Norm of Reciprocity

A cornerstone of social exchange theory, the norm of reciprocity is the social expectation or rule that dictates that people should help those who have helped them and that they should not injure those who have helped them (Blau 1964). This is an important norm because an

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effective, ongoing society cannot function without it. For social interactions, including but not limited to those found in family life, to take place and continue, they must be rewarding to all of the individuals involved. Others will typically not allow us to reward ourselves at their expense; so, to gain rewards, we must give rewards to others. Some exchanges are reciprocated at about the same time as the initial exchange, known as immediate exchanges. For example, a grandmother who provides regular child care for her two-year-old grandson might receive money or appreciation from her daughter in return for the child care. Other exchanges are repaid over an extended period of time. This type of reciprocity is identified as deferred exchange (Lévi-Strauss 1969), life course reciprocity (Antonucci and Jackson 1990), time-delayed reciprocity (Uehara 1995), or long-term reciprocity (Silverstein et al. 2002) (as noted in Geurts et al. 2012, 240). This long-term reciprocity is evident in Geurts and colleagues' finding that grandparents who provide child care for sons in earlier years are more likely than grandparents who do not offer child care to receive emotional and instrumental support from their sons thirteen years later. As the saying goes, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," but we might add "either now or later."

Rule of Distributive Justice, Norm of Fairness, and Equity

Homans (1961/1974) and Blau (1964) worked with concepts similar to reciprocity and other social norms that offered guidelines about exchange behavior. These relate to the idea that a relationship between two people must be roughly equal. On the one hand, if one person is receiving most of the rewards while the other pays the costs, the latter individual will feel angry or used and may try to end the exchange. The partner doing most of the receiving is likely to feel guilty. On the other hand, when one gives and receives about the same, satisfaction is likely to be the result. In other words, an individual will perceive his or her situation as fair—and distributive justice will exist—when "personal investments in another are equivalent to the personal profits derived from the relationship" (Sabatelli and Shehan 1993, 403). Equity theory, an extension of social exchange theory, posits that equity exists when both parties in a relationship are equally dependent on their relationship. This balance in contributions made to and rewards received from the relationship promotes greater well-being among the partners (Walster, Walster, and Berscheid 1978). Although who gives the most may alternate between partners across time, both partners must feel that the overall balance of give-and-take is equal for exchange relationships to be successful. Relationships are sustained and trust develops as partners reciprocate obligations and rewards.

COMMON AREAS OF RESEARCH AND APPLICATION

Nye (1979), in his seminal summary of the choice and exchange theory, formulated 120 propositions that he deemed outgrowths of the research utilizing the theory. They are in the areas of maternal employment, marital timing and parenthood, sexual behavior, communication, marital dissolution, social networks, intergenerational relations, men's work, family violence, social class, and parental behavior. Although many of his hypotheses have yet to be adequately tested, social exchange theory has proven useful for studying relationship dynamics. We review a few key areas in which social exchange has been used to explore family relationships now.

Relationship Formation

The concept of the "*marriage market*," which is used commonly in regular conversation today, comes from exchange thinking. It is the idea that people make choices about a companion based on what that other person has to offer them that will lead to their happiness. It also implies that the person seeking a companion must have things to offer as well. Therefore, single people list what rewards they want from a relationship, what costs they are willing to incur, and what they have to offer a possible mate. Winton (1995) noted how romantic love is seen as resulting when one feels that he or she is getting a high ratio of rewards with little cost (i.e., the reward/cost ratio affects how we feel about other people). We come to like or love those whose interactions with us are rewarding. Being in love is a rewarding state of being that can even have addictive qualities (Brown 1990). Similarly, we fall out of love with those who cost us too much of ourselves.

Couple formation or mate selection is another topic studied using exchange principles. It assumes that Nicholas (from the chapter's opening vignette) comes to the marriage market with a certain value, which is the sum of what he has to offer in terms of family status, physical appearance, intelligence, and other factors. He will seek someone who is similar to him, because he would lose interest in someone of lesser value and fear being rejected by someone of greater value.

Social exchange theory is valuable as we consider the characteristics people seek in romantic partners. Personal ads are often indicative of the attributes that individuals find rewarding in a partner and reflect the ways in which people evaluate relationship options. Smith, Konik, and Tuve (2011) analyzed 617 personal newspaper and website advertisements to compare partner preferences among butch and femme lesbians and heterosexual men and women. In terms of requests for attractiveness, no differences existed between the groups. Heterosexual women, however, were much more likely to offer physical attractiveness, with butch lesbians the least likely to do so. Heterosexual men were most likely to offer, and heterosexual women were most likely to request, financial status and height. Both butch and femme lesbians were significantly more likely to offer and request honesty.

Over the years, considerable research has been conducted attempting to identify and rank the various traits that are important to couple formation. Although the majority of individuals in Western countries select romantic partners on the basis of love and personal partialities, scholars have also been interested in mate selection preferences in other parts of the world. Employing a social exchange lens, Schvaneveldt and Hubler (2012) surveyed 250 adults from a rural area and 250 adults from an urban area of Bolivia to discover respondents' perceptions of desirable and undesirable attributes in a potential marriage partner. They found that the least desirable or most costly characteristics of a partner for the urban (LaPaz) sample included drug use, sexually transmitted diseases, prison experience, fertility challenges, and health issues. For respondents in the rural area (Altiplano region), costly traits were drug use, rape, divorce, multiple sex partners, getting angry, having a bad reputation, and sexually transmitted diseases. Although being in love was essential for both groups, the urban sample placed greater value on traits such as being taller, skinny, good looking, and a university graduate. Men were more likely than women to be willing to marry someone who thinks the man should be in charge and less likely to want to marry someone taller or older. Compared to men, female respondents deemed the following traits very costly: lazy, drinks alcohol daily, and has raped someone. This and other research confirms that cultural context helps to shape values that dictate which characteristics are costly and rewarding in marriage partners.

Social exchange theory has also been used to examine intermarriage. An early hypothesis suggested that people who have a lower status or disadvantage in one area, compared to their partner, tend to have an advantage or higher status than their partner in another domain. For instance, a physically attractive but socioeconomically disadvantaged woman may want to marry a man with high status and earnings who can improve her standard of living, and she may use her physical appearance as a resource in doing so. In other words, people in the marriage market will seek partners who maximize their rewards. Levchenko and Solheim (2013) examined international marriages between Eastern European-born women (from Russia, Ukraine, Romania, and Poland) and U.S.-born men, particularly as related to status exchange. Eastern European-born women and their U.S.-born husbands were racially and educationally similar and more likely to be remarried. However, the couples tended to be different in key ways. U.S.-born husbands earned more money and, on average, were nine years older than their Eastern European-born wives. These differences in age and income lend support for notions of status exchange; partners appear to prefer partners who maximize their rewards.

In a similar vein, Chen and Takeuchi (2011) analyzed interview data from 589 Vietnamese, Filipina, and Chinese women who were married or cohabiting to determine the consequences of intermarriage on ethnic identity and perceived social standing. They wanted to determine the extent to which intermarriage actually increased the social standing of Asian women. These authors concluded that intermarriage was not associated with higher social standing, thus downplaying this aspect of social exchange.

Vespa (2013) employed exchange concepts of rewards, alternatives, and costs/barriers when examining the role of health, wealth, and family ties in older cohabitators' chances of marrying or separating. Among his sample of 1,136 cohabitators fifty years of age and older, the poorest females were more likely to marry if they were in excellent health. Conversely, female cohabitators were more likely to separate if they were depressed, economically independent, and had large families and close social networks. Unhealthy male cohabitators who are wealthy had a greater chance of marrying, suggesting that older men may exchange financial resources for caregiving. Thus, it appears that social exchange theory affords a useful framework for examining older cohabitators' choices to marry or separate.

Commitment and Relationship Continuity or Discontinuity

Rooted in interdependence (Kelley and Thibaut 1978) and social exchange theories (Homans 1958), there is a growing and rich literature on commitment in romantic relationships. Rusbult's (1980) investment model, which links interdependence to enhanced commitment, has also generated research on the topic.

Stanley, Rhoades, and Whitton (2010) offer a review of the psychological construct of commitment, examine the role it plays in securing romantic attachments, and outline how common patterns of premarital relationship development can undermine commitment. Connecting commitment to attachment styles, Stanley and colleagues (2010) posit that, as a person becomes increasingly satisfied with a relationship, anxiety grows in response to the potential loss of one's partner. Commitment serves to stabilize the relationship and heighten a personal sense of security. Individuals are most likely to communicate commitment and foster a sense of security by expressing dedication. Examples of dedication include criticizing alternatives, consistently assuming a couple identity, and conveying a desire to be with the partner for the long haul. Ideally, commitment expressions must be mutual and clear to

secure romantic attachment. Otherwise, relationship imbalance and power differential will result. Although romantic attachment "implies only depth of emotional connection . . . commitment (dedication and constraint) highlights an intention to persist in the relationship" (249). Engagement and marriage are two cultural emblems of commitment. Finally, Stanley and colleagues assert that couples who *slide* into cohabitation before deliberating about their relationship will experience constraints before dedication. Without dedication first, couples are likely to have a more difficult time sustaining internal commitment.

Viewing commitment as a dynamic process, Byrd (2009) employed social exchange theory and a life history interview methodology in understanding the social construction of marital commitment among forty women and thirty-five men between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-five. About one-third of her participants perceived of marital commitment as a life-course goal. About one-quarter deemphasized the value of marital commitment, instead focusing on alternative options of personal fulfillment. Most participants perceived of marital commitment as a necessity, something that must be achieved because it has value as a lifestyle option. However, most recognized the challenges or barriers to doing so. Some obstacles to achieving commitment included material obstacles (e.g., concerns over economic well-being and career attainment); social group membership obstacles (gender, age, religion, social class, race, and ethnic background) and social pressure obstacles (e.g., lack of social support to marry); psychological-emotional barriers (e.g., lack of emotional readiness for marital commitment); and physical obstacles (e.g., concerns about addictions, illness, infertility, physical location). We anticipate a continuing, rich generation of findings and ideas on the topic of commitment.

Social exchange theory is also useful when considering other factors that impact relationship continuity or discontinuity, whether couples stay together or separate. For instance, what role, if any, do personal resources play in the decision to divorce? Kreager and colleagues (2013) used a sample of 914 married women over two waves of young adult data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine the relationship between women's education and their likelihood to get divorced in abusive marriages. The authors discovered that women with higher education and greater earnings were more likely to stay married than those women with lesser education and earnings when their relationships were nonviolent. However, in abusive marriages, women with greater educational and financial resources were more likely to get divorced. From an exchange perspective, wives with more resources were in a better position to assess their relationships to see whether they were getting what they deserved. When that was not the case, they were able to take advantage of other alternatives, including divorce.

Paat (2013) does an excellent job of using social exchange theory to review relationship dynamics and healthy exchanges across the family life cycle. More specifically, he adopts a social exchange perspective in reviewing dating relationships, marital relationships, and adult children-parental co-residence relationships. Paat demonstrates how clinicians and other practitioners can facilitate healthy relationship dynamics in each of these contexts while adopting a social exchange lens.

posit that sex is more profitable for males than it is for females. This is because pregnancy is more costly for women than it is for men, and males achieve orgasm more consistently than do females. As a result, males must make sexual relations more profitable for females by offering them additional rewards. Related to this notion of sex as exchange, Van de Rijt and Macy (2006) used social exchange to examine "labors of love" and discovered that the most intimate of behaviors—sex—has exchange value in close relationships. Sexual effort (e.g., partner's willingness to engage in a variety of sexual activities that would confer sexual pleasure) received and attachment to partner were critical predictors of sexual effort. In other words, sexuality between intimates appears to be governed by the norm of reciprocity.

Baumeister and Vohs (2004) afford a thorough examination of how sex has exchange value for women and not men in the heterosexual marketplace. This value of sex for women is particularly salient in the work done by Hattori and DeRose (2008). Using interview data collected from 1,483 unmarried women in urban Cameroon, Hattori and DeRose discovered that the youngest women and those who had not yet reached secondary school expressed the greatest difficulty in their perceived ability to refuse sex with a man who has paid for their school fees. So, despite the high prevalence of HIV in Cameroon, many young women incur the costs of potential HIV infection in an effort to attain the reward of access to education. Luke and colleagues (2011) discovered a similar pattern in a premarital sample of young women (eighteen to twenty-four years old) in Kenya. When these young women received money, gifts, or material assistance from male partners, they were more likely to have sex with higher frequency and with inconsistent condom use, posing serious ramifications for the transmission of HIV. As their own resources increased, however, young women had more power to negotiate safer sexual behaviors with their partners, particularly as related to condom use.

Basow and Minieri (2011) tested another context in which women's sexuality is also often deemed to have exchange value—on dates. More explicitly, the authors thought that social exchange theory might predict that when a man pays for an expensive date with a woman, he is more likely to expect sexual favors in return. Using a sample of 185 undergraduate students, Basow and Minieri presented four vignettes describing an acquaintance rape situation, with the cost of the date and who paid for the date varying. Results revealed that when the male paid for an expensive date, men agreed more than women that sexual intercourse should have been expected. When the costs of an inexpensive date were shared, both male and female respondents blamed the perpetrator. Regardless of conditions, however, men tended to blame the victim more and the perpetrator less for the sexual intercourse than did the female respondents. More attention must be paid to the potential economic power that men might attain as a result of paying for an expensive date, as well as their general expectations for reciprocity in such dates.

Decision Making

Another area of utility for the theory is decision making (see Kieren, Henton, and Marotz 1975). For instance, Donnelly and Burgess (2008) employed social exchange to analyze the decision to stay in an involuntarily celibate relationship. The authors were interested in the ways in which participants evaluated the costs and rewards of remaining in such a relationship, as well as their perceptions with regard to what they thought they deserved or was normal (comparison level) and the likelihood of getting something more rewarding

from an alternative relationship (comparison level for alternatives). Donnelly and Burgess developed a model depicting the process of involuntary celibacy, including the following components: causes of involuntary celibacy, types of involuntary celibacy, consequences of involuntary celibacy, and making the decision to stay. In sum, the participants in this study stayed because the benefits of staying outweighed the costs of leaving. Participants gleaned alternative, nonsexual benefits (e.g., best friends); had few appealing alternatives; were invested in their relationship (e.g., shared children, home, and finances); and were influenced by social prescriptions and expectations to stay in their relationship. Participants also made decisions about how to cope with their sexless relationships.

Social exchange was used to study dual-earner couples' decision to off-shift. Having collected qualitative data from twelve Canadian dual-earner couples and one individual, Pagnan and colleagues (Pagnan, Lero, and MacDermid Wadsworth 2011) analyzed the perceived costs and rewards of working complementary shifts. Rewards for off-shifting included greater opportunity for involvement with children, increased one-on-one parenting and father involvement, increased time and space for individual interests, and around-the-clock parent care for children. Costs of the work arrangement included isolation and lack of spousal support, sleep deprivation, and decreased family and social time. Despite particularly heavy costs, the respondents reported that off-shifting was the best option for their current circumstance. The authors concluded that "the decision to off-shift was not motivated by an attempt to minimize costs, but rather to maximize benefits" (Pagnan, Lero, and MacDermid Wadsworth 2011, 311).

By recognizing that life is about social exchanges, with their resultant rewards and costs, one can take the time to carefully and clearly evaluate one's logic and decision making. In this way, the theory goes beyond merely analyzing what we do and helps us make good decisions. Any time you have made a list, either physically or mentally, of the pros and cons of a decision, you have utilized the principles of social exchange theory.

Caregiving and Intergenerational Exchanges

Filial relationships are impacted by social exchange norms. Many societies assume that parents will be "reimbursed" for the costs of bearing and rearing children (time, money, worry, etc.) when they are old and their adult children take care of them. If adult children do not fulfill their filial obligations, however, aging parents may feel that distributive justice has been violated, and their morale may suffer. Similarly, if siblings fail to equitably share in the care of an aging parent, concerns about equity arise, and the sibling relationship can be negatively affected (Whiteman, McHale, and Soli 2011). Thus, social exchange concepts have been helpful in assessing caregiving and intergenerational exchanges in later life.

Social relationships require reciprocity. From a social exchange perspective, receiving something from another obligates the recipient to return the favor. Beel-Bates, Ingersoll-Dayton, and Nelson (2007) conducted interviews with thirty-one residents, eighty-five years old or older, who lived in an assisted-living facility to see how increasingly dependent older adults might offer reciprocity in their relationships with family and staff. An analysis of qualitative data suggested that these relatively frail, oldest adults used four types of deference as a form of social exchange: participation, pleasantness, cooperation, and gratitude. Although these various forms of deference become an important resource

for exchange in light of shrinking exchange resources, the authors note that deference has psychological costs, as well as rewards, for older adults.

Lowenstein, Katz, and Gur-Yaish (2007) used a cross-national sample of 6,000 urban residents from Norway, England, Germany, Spain, and Israel to determine the effects of intergenerational exchanges on life satisfaction of older adults. As social exchange and equity theory would predict, older adults who were able to reciprocate in exchange relations with their adult children experienced greater life satisfaction. However, parents who were "underbenefitted," providing more help than they received, had the highest levels of life satisfaction, followed by those in balanced intergenerational exchanges and then those in "overbenefitted" relationships. Probably because they have extensive public service networks for older adults, elders in Norway and Israel had the lowest proportion of overbenefitted exchange relationships. Higher proportions of balanced exchanges occurred in Spain and Israel, where adult children provided little instrumental support (e.g., transportation, shopping). Overall, older adults received more instrumental support (e.g., house repairs, shopping) and provided more financial support. The authors conclude that the continuing ability to reciprocate in parent-child relationships is important for aging adults and their life satisfaction.

Geurts and colleagues (Geurts, Poortman, and van Tilburg 2012) used social exchange theory to examine the extent to which adult children enact reciprocity toward their parents for providing child care for their own children. They discovered that adult sons were more likely than adult daughters to provide long-term reciprocity in the form of instrumental and emotional support thirteen years after the initial grandparental provision of child care. Thus, the authors concluded that providing frequent child care to grandchildren can be an effective investment for induction of future support from adult children, particularly from sons.

Using a sample of 5,023 older adults, Lin and Wu (2014) studied how the content, direction, and recency of intergenerational exchanges are associated with whether older adults expect sick or comfort care from their adult children. Most of the young-old participants offered instrumental or emotional support to their adult children, the majority of which were emotional transfers. Although downward transfers decreased as parents got older, so long as respondents were healthy and socially active, they gave more than they received. The majority of the participants anticipated receiving assistance from their adult children when they needed it, more so for sick care than for comfort.

CRITIQUE

The social exchange model does an impressive job of providing a context for predicting and explaining a great deal of human behavior in social contexts. It is just one way of looking at families, but it has a straightforward methodology that is appealing to many scholars. It is clear and relatively easy to "get a handle on" compared with some of the other approaches. Much of its power comes from its emergence from behaviorism; however, the individualistic focus also results in certain limitations.

The assumption that the family is just a collection of individuals is too simplistic for many theorists. For some, the family has too many unique and long-lasting aspects to be reduced basically to an economic system with interchangeable characters (White, Klein, and Martin 2015).

In addition, the key assumption that humans act rationally in decision making is criticized by many. Since Freud's time, practitioners and other scholars have made the case that humans are emotional beings who rarely act in ways that could be classified as truly rational and objective. Family life, in particular, is an emotional world in which many decisions do not seem to make sense rationally. The case can be made (Beutler, Burr, and Bahr 1989) that the rational focus of the theory makes it impossible for it to deal with love and the other emotional elements that make up family life. Nye (1979) responded to this criticism by stating that people act in accordance with the best information available to them. Because such information is often lacking, they may appear to be less rational than they actually are.

Social exchange theory can also be criticized for the way in which it assumes that people are looking out for their own best interests. Although it might be reflective of basic human nature, Hamon (1999) argued that this and other key assumptions are problematic from a Christian faith perspective; Christians are supposed to act out of love and not expectation for returned favors. It would be interesting to measure social exchange concepts against other faith traditions, as well.

It has also been said that social exchange theory, like some other theories, suffers from a tautology in which terms are defined by each other and thus make it impossible to scientifically disprove conclusions. For example, we cannot find a situation in which one's behavior is not a function of reward, because the definition of a reward is the behaviors that one chooses (Turner 1991). So, too, what is rewarding or costly to one person may not be deemed the same by another. Similarly, determining relative value of various rewards and costs is problematic, making the treatment of marital couples within the context of social exchange theory challenging (Nakonezny and Denton 2008).

Feminist theorists also point out a masculine bias in social exchange theory, which seems to assume a "separate" rather than a "connected" self. As a result, the theory is less capable of understanding behaviors that support the group over the individual. The assumption of maximizing profit ignores altruistic behavior, for instance. It elevates the traditionally masculine and modern Western notion that autonomy and independence are more functional than caring and sharing (England 1989). Exchange theorists respond that individuals do engage in group supportive behaviors when the social approval is rewarding.

Social exchange theory has been used considerably by family scholars over the past quarter century. Collett (2010) makes a strong case that social exchange theory is a dynamic perspective with a great deal to offer family scholars and those theorizing about families.

APPLICATION

1. In a small group, play out the roles of Nicholas and Alyssa from the vignette at the beginning of the chapter. Weigh the pros and cons of the relationship and decide whether the two should get married and why. What important ways of viewing the relationship are missed by just focusing on the rational aspects?

- a. Use Stanley and Markman's (1992) key process of dedication to delineate some tangible behaviors in which Alyssa and Nicholas can engage to demonstrate their growing commitment to one another.