

Equity Theory and Relationships

A Type of Reinforcement Theory (e.g., Adams, 1963)

- People aspire to maintain equity in interpersonal relationships. Inequity causes discomfort.
- The degree of equity or inequity can be calculated:

$\frac{\text{Outcomes of Person A}}{\text{Inputs of Person A}}$  vs.  $\frac{\text{Outcomes of Person B}}{\text{Inputs of Person B}}$

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Equitable Relationships

A Has High Outcomes    B Has High Outcomes  
A Has High Inputs      B Has High Inputs

A Has Low Outcomes    B Has Low Outcomes  
A Has Low Inputs        B Has Low Inputs

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Other Equitable Relationships

A Has Low Outcomes    B Has High Outcomes  
A Has Low Inputs        B Has High Inputs

A Has High Outcomes    B Has Low Outcomes  
A Has High Inputs        B Has Low Inputs

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Inequitable Relationships

- A is Overbenefited
 

<u>A Has High Outcomes</u>	<u>B Has High Outcomes</u>
A Has Low Inputs	B Has High Inputs
  
- B is Underbenefited
 

<u>A Has High Outcomes</u>	<u>B Has Low Outcomes</u>
A Has High Inputs	B Has High Inputs

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## When a relationship is inequitable we try to restore equity

- This is true whether we are “underbenefited” or “overbenefited”
  - If we’re underbenefited we feel cheated
  - If we’re overbenefited we feel guilty, or at risk for retaliation
  
- So we:
  - Increase outcomes
  - Decrease inputs
  - Engage in **Perceptual Distortions** of either (overvalue a benefit, or undervalue a cost)
  - Prior to starting a relationship, we judge whether another person will provide us with positive enough outcomes (rewards) for our inputs.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Readings Presentations

- Playing Hard To Get
- Keeping Track of Needs and Inputs

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Gain-Loss Theory in Relationships

- Gain-Loss Theory:
  - Increases in rewards (gains) from a person have more impact than constant reward.
  - Decreases in rewards (losses) from a person have more impact than constant punishment.
  - We habituate (get used to) constant rewards from a person.
  - What does this say for long-term relationships?
  - They become less rewarding, if they're constantly rewarding.
  - If they stop rewarding, it's especially painful.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Evaluating Long-Term Relationships

- In a long-term relationship, because of gain-loss:
  - Our outcomes decrease
  - Our inputs remain constant
  - We may feel underbenefitted.
- We start considering how to increase our outcomes.
- We may look to see if there are any attractive alternatives.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Comparison Levels

- **Comparison Level (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959):**
  - Expectations about outcome/input ratio for a relationship, based on past experiences
  - High comparison level: expect high outcome/input ratio
  - Low comparison level: expect low outcome/input ratio
- **Comparison Level for Alternatives:**
  - Expectations about outcome/input ratio for alternative possible relationships
  - High CLalt: perceive high level of attractive alternatives
  - Low CLalt: perceive low level of attractive alternatives
- Individuals with high CLalt report less commitment to current relationship

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Long-Term Relationships are Valued.  
Why?

- Individuals in highly committed relationships report that alternatives are less attractive.
- Maybe people in **long-term relationships get all the good people** (low CLalt) –they don't need to look elsewhere, there's nothing good out there.
- Maybe people in **long-term relationships end up with fewer alternatives**, so they're overbenefitted or have low CLalt – they become less appealing over time so there's nobody else for them.
- Maybe people in long-term relationships **devalue alternatives for motivational reasons**. Distortions in perception make them feel overbenefitted or low CLalt.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Dara's Presentation

- Married Couples vs. Cohabiting Couples

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Are Married Couples Happier in  
Their Relationships Than  
Cohabiting Couples?

Intimacy and Relationship Factors

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Previous Research on Relationships

- Relationship between aspects of intimacy and dyadic adjustment
- Time spent with the partner are important predictors of relationship satisfaction (Acker & Davis, 1992)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Previous Research cont.

- Intimacy and relationship satisfaction according to length or status of the relationship
- No relationship between marital status and intimacy (Acker & Davis, 1992)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Current Study

- Designed to evaluate the relationship between dyadic adjustment and intimacy among heterosexual couples
- Dyadic adjustment defined as relationship satisfaction, cohesion, as well as level of conflict and affection within the relationship
- Intimacy defined as the level of communication and friendship within the relationship

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Method

- 87 heterosexual couples (87 males, 87 females)
- 10 dating couples, 21 couples living together, 56 couples who were married
- Ages ranged from 19-77; mean age: 41
- Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships Scale (PAIR-R) was used to assess intimacy
- Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was used to assess overall relationship satisfaction

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Results

- Married participants were less engaged with their partner than those not married
- Married participants reported the lowest expression of affection towards each other
- Married & dating participants reported a similar level of relationship satisfaction with each other

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Results cont.

- Participants living together reported the highest level of relationship satisfaction
- All couples reported similar levels of relationship cohesion
- No relationship was found between the duration of the relationship and relationship satisfaction

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Discussion

- Consistent with previous research, there was a strong association between relationship satisfaction, intimacy, and communication.
- Even though dyadic adjustment declines, there is no change in the level of intimacy, and there is greater agreement among the married couples in their views of the relationship.
- External factors (e.g. children, financial obligations) may have contributed to married couples' sense of commitment to stay together despite lower levels of cohesion (e.g. engaging in outside interests together).

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Discussion Questions

- What reasons could there be for more married couples wanting to participate in this study?
- Since there were 10 dating couples, 21 couples living together, and 56 married couples, how could this uneven amount affect the results of this study?
- Would the results be different if replicated using homosexual couples instead of heterosexual couples?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Cold, Calculating Long-Term Relationships



- Rusbult (1980) investment model of commitment
- Rewards and costs influence relationship satisfaction, but there are two other issues that also influence commitment:
- **Investment in relationship**, including financial investments, emotional investments, self-image investment
- **Quality of Alternatives (CLalt)**
- So we may have very low relationship satisfaction but a stable relationship

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Devaluating Alternatives

- How do we delude ourselves into valuing long-term relationships when the reward stops being rewarding?
- One answer: we convince ourselves that nothing else will be any better.

### Resisting Temptation

#### Devaluation of Alternative Partners as a Means of Maintaining Commitment in Close Relationships

- **Dennis J. Johnson**  
Microsoft Corporation
- **Caryl E. Rusbult**

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

- Predictions:
  - Higher levels of commitment associated with higher levels of devaluating alternative partners.
  - This will be strongest when alternative is highly attractive and threat to current relationship is actually present.
- We devalue CLalt to maintain value of current relationship

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Johnson & Rusbult

- Dating game study:
- College students in relationships were told that purpose of study was to assess campus-based computer dating service.
- Subjects completed questionnaires about a dating service, satisfaction with and commitment to their current relationships, and evaluations of a target date, an early applicant for the service.
- Independent Variables:
  - Commitment level to current relationship (Hi vs. Low)
  - Attractiveness of target date (High vs. Medium vs. Low)
  - Relationship threat (High vs. Low)
    - Whether participant was led to believe they could actually date the target date in the future, if they wanted to
- Findings: 3-way interaction: commitment x attractiveness x threat
- Target devalued most in high commitment, high attractiveness, high threat condition

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Mentoring Relationships

- Sara's Presentation

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---