Theories relating to Relationships

- Social Exchange Theory
- Dialectical Tensions
- Relational Currencies

Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET)
Cost-benefit analysis: Addresses the following questions

- How do we go about making decisions about what we are willing to give up (time, freedom, money) in order to gain something (love, services, goods)?
- What factors influence our decisions to pursue, sustain, or terminate a relationship?
- Why do we feel resentment when we feel we’ve put more into a relationship or sacrificed more to sustain it than our partner?

Very similar to Predictive Outcome Value theory (Michael Sunnafrank)

Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET)
Cost-benefit analysis

- People make relationship decisions based upon costs and rewards.
- We must forfeit something (cost) to attain a benefit (reward)
- We seek profits in our exchanges such that rewards are greater than the costs
- We are disturbed when there is not equity in an exchange or where others are rewarded more for the same costs we incurred
Social Exchange Theory (SET)
Cost-benefit analysis
- Based upon our perceptions:
  - The kind of relationship we think we deserve
  - The balance between what we put into a relationship (Costs) and what we get out of it (Rewards)
  - The chances of having a better relationship with someone else.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)
Relationships involve Give & Take
- **Rewards vs. Costs**
  - What you “get” vs. What you “give”
- Types of Rewards/Costs
  - Immediate – at the present moment
  - Forecasted - prediction
  - Cumulative – return on investment

Social Exchange Theory (SET)
Relationships involve Give & Take
- **Magnitude vs. (Give & Take) Ratio**
  - **Magnitude**: The “size” of the give and take
  - **Ratio**: Comparison of Give to Take (e.g., 4:1 ratio)
- **Expected** Reward/Costs (a comparison level)
  - We compare against what we perceive to be appropriate relationships
  - We compare against potential relationships
  - Difference between “expected” and “forecasted”?
    - Expected: Comparison against other relationships
    - Forecasted: Specific to this relationship
Exchange Theory

So What?
- Using it
  - When you want to ask someone for something, make sure the balance of exchange is in your favor.
  - You can also work on their perception of how exchanges happen within your relationship.
- Defending
  - When people call in favors, think about what kind of exchange relationship you have with them and whether this is reasonable.

The Dialectics of Relationships
Relational Dialectics Theory
- This approach studies the dynamic created by opposing factors/forces in a relationship
- Relationships are full of ongoing tensions between contradictory impulses
- These contradictions are played out in interactions (dialectical tensions)
  - Dialectical Tensions are normal
  - Problems occur when people fail to manage them properly
- Built on assumptions:
  - We make communication choices
  - Relational factors are best understood in relation to others

Three common dialectics

- Autonomy vs. Connection
  - We want to be close... but separate

- Certainty vs. Uncertainty
  - Predictability vs. Novelty

- Openness vs. Closedness
  - Self-disclosure
Strategies for managing dialectical tensions

- **Denial (AKA Separation):** Responding to only one side of the tension and ignoring the other
- **Alternation:** Going back and forth between the two sides of a tension
- **Disorientation:** Escaping the tension entirely by ending the relationship
- **Segmentation:** Separating out aspects of the tension and dealing with those aspects differently
- **Balance (AKA Neutralization):** Compromise/find a middle ground
- **Integration:** Develop behaviors that satisfy both sides of a tension simultaneously
- **Recalibration (AKA Reframing):** Reframing a tension so that the contradiction between opposing needs disappears
- **Reaffirmation:** Embracing/accepting dialectical tensions as normal

Relational Currencies Theory

**Relational currency** - refers to communication behaviors that carry relationship meaning about the affection or caring dimension of human relationships.

It allows us to define the relationship in terms of importance to us.

Relational Currencies

Two types of currencies

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<th>Intimate focus: intrinsic</th>
<th>Economic focus: extrinsic</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Direct relational statement</td>
<td>Money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive verbal statements</td>
<td>Gifts</td>
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<td>Self-disclosure</td>
<td>Food (preparation)</td>
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<td>Listening</td>
<td>Favors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staying in touch</td>
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Implications for Defining Relationships

- Factors influencing currency use
  - Individual
  - Cultural
  - Dyadic
- Frequency of usage:
  - Frequent use? Probably the currency not highly valued as a relational definer.
  - Infrequent use? Probably the currency is highly valued; used in special relationships.
- Mixed Currencies: Problems can arise when transactions occur with mixed currencies.