CHAPTER II

THEORIES OF INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION
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INTRODUCTION

Asked why they like one person and not another, or why they were attracted to their fiance or spouse, most people can readily answer, "I like her, because she's warm, witty, and well-read." What such explanations leave out—and what social psychologists believe most important—is ourselves. Attraction involves the one who is attracted as well as the attractor. Thus, a more psychologically accurate answer might be, "I like her, because how I feel when I'm with her." We are attracted to those whom we find it satisfying and gratifying to be with. Attraction is in the eye of (and brain) of the beholder.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

The theory credited to Thibaut & Kelley [1959] and Homans [1961] known as 'Social Exchange Theory', is as relevant to interpersonal attraction as to many other aspects of social behavior.

Thibaut & Kelley considered their viewpoint as a 'frame work' rather than a theory, adding that there was a method of looking at interpersonal relationships. We do not assess rewards and costs in absolute terms; we compare them with what we had expected and with what alternatives are available.

The point can be expressed as a simple psychological principle: Those who reward us, or who are associated with rewards, we like. "Minimax" motive: Minimax costs maximize rewards. This implies that if a relationship rewards more than it costs us, we will like it and will therefore, wish to continue. Such will be especially true if the relationship is more profitable than alternative relationships [Burgess & Huston, 1971; Kelley, 1979; & Rusbult, 1980]. (24), (33), & (10)

Homans argues that in all relationships we assess the rewards that can be gained and balance these against the costs: the profits are simply the rewards less than costs. Not surprisingly, people tend to stay in relationships that show an overall profit and withdraw from relationships that are perceived as too costly. People do not necessarily evaluate the profits [or outcomes as they are usually know] very consciously or systematically, but this assessment certainly takes place. (10)

The basic premise of social exchange theory is that interactions are a sort of bargaining and trading transactions. According to the social exchange theory, human behavior is a function of its returns, and depends on the amount and kind of reward and punishment, which it brings about. Having a predilection to economic concepts, social exchange theory, is however, on a firm footing within the behavioristic frame, as would be evident from Homans's assumption that social behavior can be rewarded or punished by the behavior of another person. Or, in Thibaut & Kelley's words: 'Most socially significant behavior will not be repeated unless it is reinforced, rewarded in some way' [1959, p.5] (24)
According to this theory, what matters most are a comparison of the costs as well as the benefits of establishing or maintaining a relationship? What this theory takes into account then are a number of comparative judgments those individuals make in social situations. Being attracted to someone else is not just a matter of, "Is this a good thing?" It's more a matter of, "Is the reward I might get from this relationship worth the cost and what other alternatives exist at the moment?"

**Evaluation**

This theory is intuitively convincing and explains the dynamic qualities of a relationship since rewards and costs and constantly changing relationships are by no means stable. It can explain why friendships don't usually end, due to a single argument but because people 'drift apart' as rewards, costs and comparison levels change, partly because people themselves change. Social exchange theory offers a very plausible explanation of how and why people move through the various phases of relationship.

**EQUITY THEORY**

Walster, Walster, and Berscheid [1978] derive this theory from social exchange theory, but introduce an extra dimension, that of investment. Where as costs and rewards are consequences of a relationship, investments are goods or abilities that one person brings with them to the relationship, such as, the capacity to earn a large salary. According to this theory, profits should be in proportion to the investment made, even if this means that benefits are not equally divided. This may account for the fact that an unattractive, older man who commands a large salary is far more likely to marry a younger attractive woman than a similar man with a much lower income.

Greenberg and Cohen [1982] found that partners who feel they are getting less aggrieved and angry; partners who are over benefited feel uncomfortable and guilty.

Considerations of fairness may be more important in the early stages of a relationship. If the relationship endures, people seem to monitor the relative inputs less closely. (33), (10), (17), & (5)

Homans developed the concept of distributive justice, describing the balance of rewards and costs for two people [p&o]. Distributive justice prevails when:

\[
\frac{P's \ rewards - P's \ costs}{P's \ investments} = \frac{O's \ rewards - O's \ costs}{O's \ investments}
\]

Basically, equity is present when each person receives the same relative outcome compared to how much each invested in the relationship. Equity theory proposes that self-interest motivates everyone, seeking to maximize rewards
and minimize costs. However, society teaches us that if we constantly act selfish, seizing more benefits than we deserve, we will be punished.

"We soon learn that the most profitable way to be selfish is to be fair." [Walster et al., 1978, p 15]

The romantic choices of individuals are influenced by equity considerations. Yet individuals also persist in trying to form relationships with partners who are somewhat more desirable than themselves. Our romantic choices thus, seem to be a delicate compromise between the realization that we must accept what we deserve and our insistent demand for an ideal partner.

Equity theory asserts that individuals are most content when they are in an equitable relationship. An equitable relationship is defined as one that would lead an observer to conclude that the participants were receiving equal relative gains from the relationship, in other words, there is distributive justice. (5)

**Evaluation**

Social exchange and equity theories have been criticized for viewing people as essentially selfish and unwilling to give more than they get. These theories tend to ignore evidence suggesting that people are capable of unselfish and altruistic acts. (33), (10), (17), & (5)

**BALANCE THEORY**

Chronologically, Fritz Heider's [1946] balance theory is the earliest and also the simplest. The central construct in this theory is the attitude organization that Heider considers in terms of triadic balance [P-O-X theory]. According to this theory, sentiments are crucial in interpersonal relations, the feelings that one person entertains for another's - likes and dislikes. Love and hate, gratitude, anger, and trust have strong influences on the behavior of that person towards the other [Heider, 1946, 1958]. The P-O-X theory attempted to take care of the diversity of the possible situation's and events where sentiments were involved. (24)

Heider focused on triads involving a person (P), another person (O), and an impersonal object or third person (X). A situation is balanced if the relationship among elements is harmonious and nonstressful. For example, if you (P) like Vikram (O) and you both like liberal political ideas (X), the situation is balanced. As a general rule, a triad is unbalanced when there are one or three negative relations [example, you like Vikram and you like liberal ideas, but he is a strong conservative]. When there is imbalance, something has to give in. You could become negative in your attitude toward politics, or try to change Vikram's viewpoint.
The same principles apply when X is a third person. Aronson and Cope [1968] demonstrated that research subjects were relatively willing to help a supervisor [left hand side of figure 1] when the supervisor had:

1. Praised an experimenter who had been pleasant to the subjects or
2. Criticized an experimenter who had been harsh to the subjects. In other words, "My friend's friend is my friend" [all positive relations in the triad], and "My enemy's enemy is my friend" [one positive relation in the triad]. When the situation was initially unbalanced, the subjects restored balance by disliking the supervisor and being less helpful to him [right hand side of figure 1].

**FIGURE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balanced situations</th>
<th>Imbalanced situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P + Oe</td>
<td>P + Oc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xa</td>
<td>Xb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive P-O Relationship Lead to much Helping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Xa = Nice experimenter  
Xb = Unpleasant experimenter  
Oe = Supervisor who criticized the experimenter  
Oc = Supervisor who praised the experimenter  
Source: From Aronson, E., & Cope, V. [1968]. My enemy's enemy is my friend. Journal of personality & social psychology, 8, 8-12  
Figure 1. |
| P (-) Oe  | P (-) Oc  |
| Xb  | Xa  |
| Negative P-O Relation lead to only a Little Helping |

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**Helping In Balanced & Imbalanced Relationships (5)**

In Heider's theory, the main thrust is that 'strive to make their sentiment relationships with their perception of unit relationship existing between objects.'
Evaluation

The theory seems to fulfill the basic criteria of a social- psychological theory and so has a moderate acceptability. It is logically consistent, simple, and matter-of-fact, and amenable to testing with other accepted theories of interpersonal attraction. The one strong point of the theory is that it has a heuristic value and provides a basis for the development of other attitude theories. But what seems to be the strong point of the theory turns out to be its weakness too. Most of Heider's hypotheses are in the form of X tending to produce Y. These do not consider being important as far as experimental validation is concerned, because the uncontrolled factors may not be related to the hypothesis in question, and there might be the possibility that some factors that are relevant to the hypotheses might have been ignored.

However, the use of diagrams of triads and symbols such as P-O-X seems to be unwarranted for a simplistic theory of this kind. Apparently, the triads are testable empirically only under specific conditions. In Heider's proposition the relations proposed either exist positively or negatively without regard to their strength and extent. The extent to which a relation is positive or negative, which is an important determinant of balance, is neglected in the theory. Osgood and Tennenbaum [1955] took up this point as also Cartwright and Harary [1956] proving for varying degrees of system's balance or imbalance with reference to the principle of congruity. (4)