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Integrating Theory, Enhancing Understanding: The Potential Contributions of Recent Experimental Research in Social Exchange for Studying Intimate Relationships

The natural rapport between an exchange approach and the domain of family produced a rich literature over time. This article focuses on recent developments in social exchange that are occurring in sociology and explores what these—largely experimental—research programs have to offer those studying family. To facilitate the use of these developments, in this article, I give a brief introduction to the exchange orientation and describe how it has been used previously in work on the family. I then explain the contemporary work in sociological social exchange, which explores the affective and cognitive outcomes of exchange (e.g., trust, solidarity, commitment), in detail and highlight its insight for those studying romantic partnerships.

The history between social exchange and sociology of the family is long. Even before the seminal piece “Familial Behavior as Social Exchange” (Edwards, 1969) appeared 4 decades ago, those often considered the forebears of exchange—Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Homans (1961), and Blau (1964)—had all engaged

examples of romantic or kinship relations in their discussions of social exchange. The natural rapport between an exchange approach and the domain of family produced a rich literature, spanning topics from why women stay in abusive relationships (Pfouts, 1978) to the division of household labor (Brines, 1994) and the informal support poor women provide to others in similar situations to increase their chances of survival (Nelson, 2000). The affinity of the two areas has led to a steady and substantial increase over time in abstracts and articles that mention both family and exchange.¹ Although contemporary work on exchange and family is expansive and interesting, my goal here is not to review it. As a sociological social psychologist, I focus instead on introducing more recent developments in social exchange in sociology and explore what this, largely experimental, research might offer those interested in marital quality or family more generally.

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¹The phrases “family” and “social exchange” appeared in the text of 1,963 peer-reviewed articles and in the abstracts (a more precise measure of focus) of 465. For text, the breakdown is 26 articles before 1980, 97 from 1980–1989, 181 from 1990–1999, and 1,559 from 2000 to the present. The phrases were mentioned in 12 abstracts before 1980, 33 from 1980–1989, 58 from 1990–1999, and 362 from 2000 to the present.

Although rooted in the same seminal works, sociological research in social exchange is different from the psychological work that family research tends to focus on. Interestingly enough, given assumptions about the differences between psychology and sociology, sociological work in exchange is largely laboratory based, experimental research. This is particularly true in work specifically designed to build and test theory. Critics have argued that intimate relationships might have nuances not captured in research on social exchange more generally or in laboratory experiments largely conducted with previously unacquainted undergraduates (for a discussion, see Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, & Hay, 1985). However, there is much of interest to share from the cumulative and rigorous research programs, particularly now that the area is focusing on affective and cognitive relational outcomes like trust, commitment, and social solidarity.

Introducing these theoretical developments is important not because they directly answer important questions about the quality of intimate relationships but because they might stimulate new work and theorizing in research outside the laboratory. Results from laboratory experiments are not meant to be generalized; “experiments are relevant to theory, and *theory* is applied to natural settings” (Zelditch, 1969, p. 539). The findings described here should not be simply assumed in the world outside the laboratory. That said, the experimental method prevalent in the study of social exchange in sociology has significant benefits for those working in family. The incremental approach employed in the sociological exchange tradition has allowed knowledge to develop systematically rather than in the largely “haphazard manner” (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998, p. 358) of other, less experimentally based programs. Furthermore, using relationships created in the laboratory enables researchers to randomly assign individuals to conditions and manipulations that would be unethical and nearly impossible outside of the laboratory (Rusbult, 1980). Finally, the external validity sacrificed in the laboratory ensures an internal validity that enables researchers to posit strong, causal claims in their analyses (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

To effectively locate this recent sociological research in the larger exchange paradigm and to demonstrate its potential for research on family, I briefly introduce the exchange orientation

and describe how it has been used in previous research on family. To this end, this article is organized as follows. I begin with a short primer on social exchange, including why I refer to it as an approach rather than a theory. I then briefly introduce the work of Homans, Thibaut and Kelley, Blau, and Emerson, often considered the forebears of current conceptions of social exchange, and their influence on contemporary family theory and research. After this background, I move on to more contemporary work in sociology on social exchange and highlight the ways this experimental research might relate to marital quality and inform future research on romantic partnerships and marriage.

THE SOCIAL EXCHANGE APPROACH

Although many refer to social exchange as a theory, it is more accurate to think of it as a theoretical orientation or approach (Emerson, 1976)—a way of looking at social life and interaction that is used as a guiding principle in a set of theories, such as equity theory (Adams, 1965), interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), power-dependence theory (Emerson, 1962, 1972a, 1972b), and relational cohesion theory (Lawler & Yoon, 1993, 1996, 1998). In general, these theories explore the benefits that people derive from and contribute to social interaction. The unit of analysis in each is the relation rather than the individual. Theories of social exchange also share certain analytical concepts like rewards, costs, resources, alternatives, and opportunities, as well as four core assumptions (Molm & Cook, 1995). Specifically, exchange theorists are interested in relationships of (1) mutual dependence that (2) recur over time, as actors (3) behave in ways that help them obtain important benefits they prize until the benefits’ (4) value diminishes because of satiation.

Although the earliest conceptions of social exchange emerged in work in anthropology and utilitarian economics (e.g., Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1925), the midcentury contributions of George Homans (1961), John Thibaut and Harold Kelley (1959), Peter Blau (1964), and Richard Emerson (1962, 1972a) have most strongly influenced contemporary research. Although they did not work together, the early theorists’ influential ideas largely converged, bringing to light the importance of the informal actions of small groups and “an economic analysis of [these] noneconomic social situations” (Emerson, 1976, p. 336).

Homans first proposed an exchange perspective in 1958 and expanded on those ideas in his 1961 book, *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms*. In his work, Homans made an important shift from the study of the generalized exchange patterns of entire communities (common in anthropological work) to the direct exchange systems prevalent in dyads and small groups. A reductionist, Homans believed that social groups would be best understood by understanding the individuals involved in those groups. Drawing on behavioral psychology, he developed general propositions about interaction that would be applicable across social contexts (e.g., the more valuable a man perceives the result of his action to be, the more frequently he will perform that action). Although Homans was a sociologist, his theories largely ignored the social context and “assumed many of the conditions in which sociologists are most interested” (Molm, 2006, p. 30). Interestingly enough, a more sociological approach would emerge from the work of two psychologists, Thibaut and Kelley (1959).

In their book *The Social Psychology of Groups*, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) combined the behaviorist approach with an understanding of how context (in the form of the social relation) might influence individuals’ behavior. Although Thibaut and Kelley (1959) never articulated their ideas as social exchange, their work greatly influenced both sociological and psychological research in the area. As did Homans (1961), Thibaut and Kelley (1959) focused on dyadic relations and thought about the role of rewards and costs in exchange. They argued that individuals initiate relationships that are valuable to them and maintain those relationships as long as they continue to benefit from the interactions (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Their focus on the relationship between power and dependence, as well as the role comparison levels play in the evaluation of outcomes, allowed for a more structural view of social exchange than the individualistic analysis set forth by Homans (Molm & Cook, 1995).

Peter Blau (1964), largely because of his interest in merging macro- and microtheories of exchange, formulated the most eclectic exchange approach. As did the others before him, he argued for the ubiquity of exchange, seeing it as an ever present part of social life across all domains. In addition, Blau (1964) suggested that exchange led to both social structure and social change. His most enduring

contributions to the contemporary exchange approach were the role of norms in ordering exchange despite unspecified obligations and a consideration of marginal utility with regard to exchange resources.

Richard Emerson (1972a, 1972b) integrated and refined this earlier work as he formulated and formalized a theory of social exchange. In doing so, Emerson streamlined an approach that, while vibrant, had previously been fraught with controversy (Abrahamsson, 1970; Bierstedt, 1965). One of the most important contributions Emerson (1972a) made was clarifying exchange’s connection to operant psychology.² Emerson addressed the critique of social exchange as an overly rationalized view of human behavior (Bierstedt, 1965) in two ways. First, he demonstrated that individuals have the ability to learn from the natural consequences of their actions. Second, he showed that they subsequently behave in ways that minimize costs and maximize rewards, either consciously or unconsciously. At the same time, Emerson (1972b) established the importance of the networks in which exchange relations are embedded, thus freeing the approach from a largely dyadic focus (Simpson, 1972). He argued that even when individuals are ignorant about the structure that surrounds them, the larger social structure affects their behavior in dyadic exchange relations (Emerson, 1981). Emerson chose to focus on the causes and consequences of power in relationships (e.g., Cook & Emerson, 1978; Cook, Emerson, Gillmore, & Yamagishi, 1983). However, his theoretical contributions paved the way for others to systematically explore aspects of social exchange beyond power and dependence.

In the years that followed, sociologists working in social exchange (e.g., Lawler & Bacharach 1987; Markovsky, Willer, & Patton, 1988; Molm, 1981; Molm & Wiggins, 1979; Yamagishi, Gillmore, & Cook, 1988) expanded Emerson’s approach to shed light on a variety of social phenomena. As did Emerson’s original work, the vast majority of this research employed laboratory-based experiments. In the beginning, the experiments focused almost exclusively

²Although it was Homans (1961) who originally discussed operant psychology’s role in exchange relations, he was criticized for a tautological argument (e.g., Abrahamsson, 1970).

on structure, power, and the distribution of resources, but more recently there has been a turn toward an interest in the affective and cognitive outcomes of exchange, including valued outcomes like positive emotion and social solidarity (Cook & Rice, 2006), topics of great relevance to those studying intimate relationships.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE AND THE FAMILY

Likely drawn to the dyadic nature of early theory and related research, those studying family and romantic relationships largely ignored the work of Emerson and his colleagues (for exceptions, see Call, Finch, Huck, & Kane, 1999; Elliott, 2008) and focused exclusively on building on the ideas of Thibaut and Kelley (1959; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Two of the most notable theoretical advances that occurred in social exchange and family were those of Ivan Nye and Caryl Rusbult. Nye (1978, 1979, 1980) expanded on early work in exchange—largely Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and Homans (1961)—to articulate a choice and exchange theory, which emphasized the voluntariness of social exchange. 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. He argued that this general theory was particularly relevant to romantic relationships and family (for a number of applications, see Nye, 1982). Rusbult (1980, 1983) made a more circumscribed, yet arguably also more enduring, contribution with her extension of Kelley and Thibaut's interdependence theory (1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959)—the investment model. Although interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) considered satisfaction level and the attractiveness of alternatives as important factors in determining one's commitment to a particular relation, Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model incorporates investment as an additional key contributor to commitment and persistence in relationships. This addition helps explain why people will stay in an unsatisfying relationship even when an attractive alternative is available (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998).

Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) influenced not only the work of Nye and

Rusbult but also the way that social exchange was applied to family more generally in the years that followed. Largely as a result of the appeal of interdependence theory and related ideas (e.g., the investment model [Rusbult, 1980, 1983] and the mutual cyclical growth model of relationships [Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999]), most applications of exchange in the study of family concern relationship satisfaction and divorce. I highlight the work in these two areas and their connection to the seminal works next.

Relationship Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the positive affect that a person directs toward a relationship and is largely influenced by whether a person's needs are being met or could be better met elsewhere (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1998; Sprecher, 1998). When an individual considers whether he or she is satisfied with a particular relationship, the individual weighs the costs and benefits of the relationship and compares that balance with a standard that might be expected given his or her position in the relationship (comparison level [CL]) and what they could likely get in an alternative relation (comparison level of alternatives [CL_{alt}]). Relationships with outcomes that fall above the CL would be generally satisfying and those below generally dissatisfying. The relationship between outcomes and CL_{alt} influences relationship stability. If people believe that they could get better outcomes elsewhere (CL_{alt}), particularly when the current relationship is dissatisfying (CL), they are most likely to leave (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Although individuals often look to cultural norms for comparison standards (Adams, 1965), another important source of a standard may be the partner in the relationship. In other words, an individual might consider the balance between costs and benefits experienced by their partner in the relationship to determine whether the distribution of these outcomes is fair (Homans, 1961).³ Such justice considerations are important for relationship satisfaction. Research has found that people are most satisfied when equity or equality is apparent in their relationships (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999; Huppé

³For a review of exchange and justice, see Cook and Hegtvædt (1983); and Hegtvædt and Markovsky (1995).

& Cyr, 1997; Michaels, Edwards, & Acock, 1984; Sprecher, 2001; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Although equality is about the matching of inputs and outcomes (e.g., a husband and wife divide household tasks evenly), an arrangement is considered equitable when relative outcomes correspond to relative inputs (Adams, 1965). Inputs and outcomes need not be equal (e.g., if a wife earns more than her husband, it may be considered equitable for her to have more say in how the household money is spent), nor do inputs have to be the same (e.g., in the breadwinner–homemaker model, a husband contributes money to the relationship, and the wife contributes time and talent in managing the home and child care).

Divorce and Relationship Exit

Although the decision to exit a relationship is often tied to relationship satisfaction (Sprecher 2001) or lack thereof, exchange conceptions of power, dependence, investment, and access to alternatives illuminate why dissatisfaction is not the sole impetus for exit. As Levinger (1965) said, “Marriage is a function of bars as well as bonds” (p. 20). Although attraction and satisfaction are important to marital stability, so are the attractiveness of alternatives, the potential to gain satisfaction outside of the relationship, and the costs of leaving. To explore the importance of those influences, research on divorce decisions and trends predominantly draw on power and dependence (Emerson, 1962, 1972b), the availability of alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and investment in the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

According to power-dependence theory, one’s power in a relationship is the direct result of the other person’s dependence on them for valuable resources. Therefore, dependence decreases with access to alternative sources of important resources. Many viewed these ideas as a natural fit for explaining the upward trends of divorce rates that came with more financial independence of women. Increases in labor force participation and in women’s ability to borrow and own property (Edwards & Saunders, 1981; Price-Bonham & Balswick, 1980; Thompson & Spanier, 1983)—along with the sexual revolution, which made women (and men) less reliant on marriage for sexual pleasure (Sprecher, 1998)—led to increases in divorce. Individuals are more likely to terminate relationships when

there are attractive alternatives, whether other relationships, sources of pleasure or support, or lifestyles.

Of course, people do not always leave unsatisfying relationships, even in the face of attractive alternatives. Rusbult (1980, 1983) has argued that this is because the resources that an individual has invested in the relationship may be lost or decline in value if the individual exits the relationship. Direct investments are put into the relationship to improve it, such as self-disclosure or time. Indirect investments, however, arise when things originally distinct from the relationship (e.g., friends, personal identity, material possessions) become attached to the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1998). Such investments increase one’s commitment to the relationship and the likelihood of remaining in it by increasing the cost of terminating the relationship. In addition, commitment to a relationship activates powerful cognitive processes and encourages behaviors that enhance the likelihood that the relationship will continue (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). For instance, a committed individual would be more likely to accommodate his or her partner’s bad behavior rather than to retaliate, to sacrifice his or her own self-interest by forgoing desirable things, or to derogate alternative partners (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994).

As is clear from the detailed research above, social exchange continues to enrich the study of intimate relationships. I argue, however, that this relationship between family and social exchange is currently falling short of its potential. Research and theory in social exchange has come a long way since the seminal works that are so often cited in family research and is more than the cost–benefit analysis that the perspective is often relegated to in textbooks (e.g., Benokraitis, 2008; Cherlin, 2008; Eshleman & Bulcroft, 2006; Lauer & Lauer, 2009). Although the theoretical developments in sociological studies of social exchange are largely based on experiments, I believe that this work has much to offer those exploring such processes outside of the laboratory. In the next section, I highlight some of the most exciting developments in sociological social exchange—ideas regarding relational cohesion and emotion, forms of exchange, network connections and resources, and new dimensions of justice. To date, such recent work has been almost entirely overlooked in work on intimate relationships. My hope is to briefly summarize the developments and

articulate their relevance for those who are studying relationship quality.

EXCHANGE INSIGHTS ON ENHANCING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

There has been a great deal of research and development in sociological social exchange since Emerson's (1972a, 1972b) formulation and formalization of the exchange approach. With experiments as an ideal avenue for testing and refining theory, much of this work has been experimental (Willer & Walker, 2007). Likely because of Emerson's own interests and his detailed attention to power-dependence theory, many of the early experiments focused on sources of power and its consequences for exchange patterns and relationships (for a review of this work, see Molm & Cook, 1995). This work on power is, without question, of great interest to those working in the sociology of family. However, I focus here on other developments that I see as more specifically related to enhancing relationship quality and that have yet to be incorporated in research on the family. I believe the most relevant research focuses on the more relational outcomes of exchange (Collett, 2008), including cohesion, commitment, trust, perceptions of fairness, and positive emotion and regard. I turn to this research next.

An Affect Theory of Social Exchange

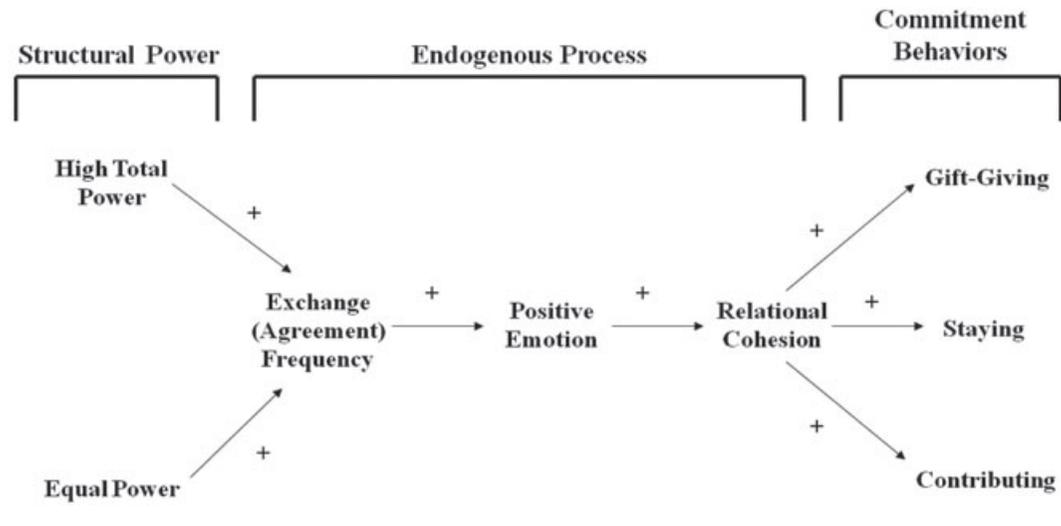
One of the most exciting developments in recent exchange research is Lawler's (2001) affect theory of social exchange. Largely an expansion of Lawler and his colleagues' earlier work on relational cohesion (Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2000; Lawler & Yoon, 1993, 1996, 1998), affect theory explores the important role of emotion in social exchange. Unlike Rusbult (1980, 1983), who posits interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and her investment model as a worthwhile alternative to the role of affect and emotion in relationships, Lawler and colleagues see "affective attachment as one of the key organizing principles of human behavior" (Yoon & Lawler, 2006) and explicitly integrate emotion and exchange in their work. In many ways, this is a move back to original exchange influences. Homans (1961), Thibaut and Kelley (1959), and Blau (1964) each had an interest in emotion. However, these concerns

were underdeveloped in their work, and with time, exchange theories became more cognitive and less affective. Despite the emotion-eliciting nature of exchange and the importance of emotion management in social interaction, contemporary exchange theories viewed actors as "not only self-interested but also unemotional or emotionally vacuous" (Lawler, 2001, p. 324). Lawler and colleagues sought to rectify that.

Lawler's (2001) affect theory is based on previous research with his colleagues on relational cohesion that sought to understand what led people to become committed to exchange relations (for a review, see Thye, Yoon, & Lawler, 2002). Although commitment had been central to other research programs in exchange (e.g., Cook & Emerson, 1978; Kollock, 1994; Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 1998), these approaches were predominantly instrumental. Relational cohesion theory (RCT), in contrast, focused on the role of emotion in commitment and considered how emotions might transform a relationship from instrumental to expressive. A series of experiments suggested that emotion is a fundamental link between exchange and commitment (Lawler & Yoon, 1993, 1996, 1998; Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2000). Repeated exchanges generate positive emotions, which lead to perceived cohesion and commitment behavior.

Research has suggested that exchanges are most frequent when there is a high level of total power and an equal balance of power (Lawler & Yoon, 1996, 1998). In other words, both actors must be equally dependent on each other for valued outcomes, yet have access to attractive alternatives. In a power-imbalanced relation, where agreements are less likely to be reached, powerful actors might turn to more attractive alternatives. The consistency and frequency of agreements leads to both predictability and positive emotion (Lawler et al., 2000). It is the positive emotion, specifically pleasure and/or satisfaction and interest and/or excitement, not the predictability, that leads to group cohesion (Lawler et al., 2000). Lawler and colleagues suggest that this is because those involved in the exchange attribute their positive emotion to the relationship and therefore acquire this sense of relational cohesion, a sense of unity with the group (Lawler & Yoon, 1996), which has little to do with predictability. This sense of cohesion increases commitment to the group. Committed

FIGURE 1. RELATIONAL COHESION THEORY'S THEORETICAL MODEL.



Source: Lawler and Yoon (1996, p. 92).

actors are less likely to leave the group (even in the face of attractive alternatives), more likely to engage in gift giving or symbolic tokens of commitment, and more likely to contribute to joint ventures (Lawler & Yoon, 1996). Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model outlining those connections.

Relational cohesion theory argues that individuals become committed not to another person but to the relation. A microsocial order is created (Lawler, 2002); individuals come to see themselves as part of a group and act accordingly, intent on maintaining the relation that they consider the source of their positive emotion. Lawler's research on relational cohesion is not only noteworthy for its insights; it is also one of the best examples of a cumulative research program in sociological social psychology (Lizardo, 2007; for a review, see Thye, Yoon, & Lawler, 2002).

The affect theory of social exchange (Lawler, 2001) draws from RCT but takes as its focus the emotional component of exchange and specifies when, and how, emotions generated by social exchange will result in stronger (or weaker) connections to relations. Affect theory assumes the processes outlined in RCT's theoretical model: (a) social exchange produces global (e.g. ambiguous, generalized) emotion or feeling; (b) global emotions from exchange are reinforcing (or punishing) stimuli; (c) actors

strive to reproduce positive emotions and avoid negative emotions that are experienced as a result of social exchange; (d) the global emotions produced by social exchange trigger cognitive efforts to understand the sources or causes of these feelings, and more specific emotions, tied to social objects, result from that attribution process; and (e) in the case of joint tasks, like social exchange, actors interpret their feelings partly with reference to social relations (Lawler, 2001). These assumptions serve as the backdrop for the affect theory of social exchange's propositions. The two core propositions are as follows:

Proposition 1: The greater the nonseparability of individuals' impact on task success or failure, the greater is the perception of shared responsibility.

Proposition 2: The greater the perception of shared responsibility for the success or failure of a joint task, the more inclined actors are to attribute resulting global and specific feelings to social units (e.g., relations, networks, groups) (Lawler, 2001).

Although this theory certainly captures the essence of earlier work, Lawler moves beyond previous research (Cook & Emerson, 1978; Emerson, 1962, 1972b; Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) to explore the mechanisms that link power and exchange to both instrumental (e.g., investment, joint ventures) and expressive (e.g., gift giving) commitment (Lawler et al., 2000).

To date, the entirety of Lawler and his colleagues' research (Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2000, 2006, 2008; Lawler & Yoon, 1993, 1996, 1998) has employed laboratory experiments with previously unacquainted undergraduate subjects. A typical exchange experiment recruits students who value a particular resource (most often money). The students are brought into the lab and randomly assigned to particular conditions (perhaps varying on the type of exchange process or the distribution of power). After periods of repeated exchanges over computers (to control for status effects), questionnaires are administered to measure various affective and cognitive outcomes. After completing the questionnaire, students are paid for the points they accrued in the exchange and debriefed. The quantitative data from the questionnaires, coupled with behavioral information and occasionally qualitative responses, is then analyzed to explore the effects of the treatment conditions.

Although the findings from such experiments should not be uncritically assumed, given issues of external validity, the theory developed in the laboratory should provide a bridge to inform research outside the laboratory. In fact, ideas from both relational cohesion theory and affect theory are being used outside of the laboratory. However, they appear most often in work on organizational settings, not on intimate relationships (e.g., Robison & Pillemer, 2007; Sierra & McQuitty, 2005; Tse & Dasborough, 2008). This is unfortunate. Insights from both RCT and affect theory are well suited for exploring marital quality. They demonstrate that the roots of relationship commitment run much deeper than the outcomes of exchange, access to alternatives, or even investment. Emotion plays a key role in commitment, and jointness of task determines whether the relation is the source the emotion is attributed to.

To consider how such ideas might apply to marital quality, imagine an attractive professional woman who is married to a man who brings home a comfortable salary and has the talent to fix up their starter home on the weekends. Although they could likely be financially independent, they both contribute financially to the relationship and to raising their two children. Her attractiveness garners both status in relations outside the marital relationship, and he provides home improvement savvy that she lacks. They work together to achieve their desired outcomes, including emotional support, raising

their children, and turning their starter home into something more. This is just one example of an equal relationship with high total power. They share the cooking, cleaning, child care, and other household responsibilities. These are examples of exchanges—generating a benefit for another that he or she cannot achieve alone (Emerson, 1972b; Homans, 1961)—and they are frequent in this relationship. To have each partner uphold his or her end of the deal and engage in such acts creates positive emotion, including interest and satisfaction. Because both partners feel that teamwork is required to support the family and raise the children, there are high levels of jointness of task in this exchange relationship.⁴ Therefore, the positive emotions generated in such exchanges are attributed to the relationship, creating a sense of unity and teamwork, and they lead the husband and wife to invest in the relationship and in one another (Lawler, 2001). In this case, the couple might work together to fix up their home on the weekends to create a place of their own and foster further commitment to the relation.

Future research on marital quality could draw on Lawler's work to explore the role of exchange on emotion or of emotion on commitment. Family researchers might consider how various household arrangements (e.g., breadwinner–homemaker, dual career) affect the perceived jointness of task present in a relationship and how those perceptions may vary even within those arrangements. For example, the breadwinner–homemaker model might seem more like a joint task for some religious groups—in which belief systems make explicit that men should work to support the family, that women should work to nurture the children, and that the two shall value the contributions of the other as essential to the success of the family—than for others who see these as distinct endeavors. Perhaps the key to attributions is not the actual jointness of task but the perception of such, and it is important to understand how this varies across relationships. Other research, targeted more actively toward enhancing marital quality, might explore the role of couples' counseling in teaching clients to work together

⁴Lawler also referred to jointness of task as task interdependence. I use the former here so as not to confuse this task interdependence with relational interdependence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

in ways that increase perceptions of a shared responsibility for the outcome.

Forms of Exchange

Although the central propositions of the affect theory of social exchange (Lawler, 2001) are rooted in the effect of shared responsibility for outcomes and the attributions related to those, other propositions concern the form exchanges take. Some types of exchange inherently produce more shared responsibility, and the relevant relations absorb more positive emotion, than do other types. Research suggests that the form of exchange—“the way that transactions are structured and organized over time” (Molm, 1994, p. 163)—has important implications for cognitive and affective outcomes of exchange. Even with all else being equal (e.g., type and value of benefits exchanged, frequency and equality of exchanges), the form of exchange affects cohesion and solidarity (including measures of trust, affective regard, social unity, and commitment) in important ways (Lawler & Yoon, 1996, 1998; Lawler et al., 2000, 2008; Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2007).

Recent research exploring the variations in exchange processes is experimental and has yet to be explicitly integrated with work in family. However, I see family dynamics as an ideal example of these various exchange forms. For example, a couple working together to raise a family or fix up their home is an example of productive exchange, “coordinating efforts or combining resources to create a joint good” (Lawler, 2001, p. 334). Such tasks, with a high degree of interdependence and a shared outcome, produce the strongest emotional cohesion (Lawler et al., 2008). People enjoy being members of groups that work together to achieve their goals. Although the desired outcomes in many relationships may be feats of such collaborations (e.g., buying and decorating a home, having and raising children), productive exchange has been largely neglected in research (Lawler et al., 2000). Instead, the vast majority of experimental work in sociological social exchange explores negotiated and, more recently, reciprocal exchange.

In negotiated exchange, actors engage in a joint decision process, like bargaining, to establish the terms of exchange (Molm, 1997). Expectations are explicit, and each person’s contribution is clear. Imagine a couple, the

Browns, who negotiate a plan for cooking and cleaning—when one of them makes dinner, the other will wash the dishes. They have an agreement. Even if they switch roles from cooking to cleanup, the expectations of each party are unambiguous. In reciprocal exchange, in contrast, there is no direct negotiation, and contributions are performed separately. Actors contribute to the relation without knowing whether or when the other will reciprocate. Imagine another couple, the Pinks, with a similar trend of one cooking while the other one cleans, who might have established that norm without an explicit agreement. One night that he cooked, she got up to clean, and later, when she made dinner, he took charge of the dishes, setting off a seemingly natural sequence of exchange in which when one cooks, the other cleans.

Although, on the surface, such exchanges might be equivalent divisions of meal responsibilities, they likely have very different effects on the couples’ relationships. According to the reciprocity theory of social exchange (Molm, 2010; Molm, Schaefer et al., 2007), the structure of reciprocity (i.e., whether acts are voluntary and uncertain or the result of bilateral agreements) affects social solidarity in three ways—through risk of nonreciprocity, the expressive value of acts, and the salience of conflict (Molm, Schaefer et al., 2007). The Pinks, who are engaged in a type of reciprocal exchange without explicit bargaining, experience an increased risk of nonreciprocity. They are uncertain whether one will reciprocate the other’s act (e.g., cooking, or cleaning the night before). Research shows that it is precisely that risk that helps build trust, an important component of social solidarity. Unilateral exchanges offer the opportunity for an individual to either exploit his or her partner or demonstrate trustworthiness by reciprocating the other’s contribution in some way (Molm, Schaefer, & Collett, 2009; Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000). Exchange form affects the type of trust as well. Trust established in reciprocal exchange is more resilient and affect based than the trust established in negotiated agreements, which is more fragile and cognition-based (Molm, Schaefer et al., 2009).

The Pinks also experience increased social solidarity through the expressive value of exchange. For the first couple, the Browns, balancing the duties of cooking and cleaning is following through on an agreement. “I cook, she cleans. That is the agreed upon division

of labor around here,” thinks the husband in the first couple. Each person’s contribution is valued for its instrumental benefit to the other, or the relation, and for following through on his or her end of the bargain. However, for the Pinks, the act of reciprocity for which there is no explicit agreement has symbolic value over and above the instrumental benefits of the act, for it is at the discretion of the reciprocator (Molm, Schaefer et al., 2007). In the same way that one might value flowers more when they are sent “just because” rather than on an anniversary, it means more to an exchange partner when someone does them a favor than when he or she does the same thing as part of keeping up an end of a bargain. Rather than perceiving his wife’s reciprocation as the result of a taken-for-granted agreement, Mr. Pink is likely to see her cleaning up after dinner as a demonstration of her regard for him and an investment in their continued relationship (Kollock & O’Brien, 1992). Although the instrumental contributions in both couples are certainly important, the expressive value further enhances the ongoing relationship between the Pinks.

Another important factor for ongoing relationships relates to how individuals interpret the mixed motives of exchange. Exchange is inherently both competitive and cooperative, and the form an exchange takes can affect the salience this competitive nature (e.g., “I am staying home and caring for these children, while she gets to escape to work every day”) or the cooperative aspects (e.g., “We are working together, complementing the contributions of one another, to raise these children”) for exchange partners. Research suggests that conflict is more salient in negotiated exchanges than in reciprocal exchanges (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2006). When an exchange partner fails to follow through on his or her end of a bargain in a negotiated exchange, this is easily interpreted as an attempt to gain something at the expense of the other. In a reciprocal exchange, however, failure to follow through is an act of omission rather than one of commission, and a transgression is more ambiguous.

To relate this back to the couples above, if one of the Browns fails to uphold his or her end of the bargain, the other might interpret this as breaking a promise and an attempt to shirk responsibility in the relationship and lay a heavier burden on the other party. This would certainly negatively affect the Browns’ relationship. Research has

suggested that a similar lapse would likely have significant less of an impact on the Pinks (Molm, Collett et al., 2006; Molm, Schaefer et al., 2007). A normative transgression has less of the moral undertones of a reneged agreement and is easier to overlook. Mr. Pink, left to do the dishes even after preparing the meal, might be disappointed that he is spending the evening in the kitchen. However, he can more easily explain away his wife’s nonreciprocity, as there was no explicit agreement. Or if the entire relationship is built on series of reciprocal exchanges, he might assume that there is another act of reciprocity, perhaps in another domain, looming around the corner. It would likely take more than one unreciprocated act for Mr. Pink to take notice or feel slighted.

Of course, relationships are built on a series of exchanges, which likely take different forms. It is doubtful that the Pinks would never negotiate or work together in a conjunctive task or that the Browns would never do each other unsolicited favors. In most relationships, there is a mixture of bargaining, reciprocity, and productive exchange. Recent research is beginning to explore these “dynamic histories of exchange” (Molm, 2010) and how they might affect relationships. Preliminary evidence from work by Molm (2010) suggests that “*any* experience with reciprocal exchange, whether it comes early in a relationship or later, fundamentally changes [the relationship’s] affective character.” In other words, any employment of reciprocal exchange is beneficial for the relationship. Small favors can reap large rewards.

This research on exchange form suggests that the structure of reciprocity—holding all else constant (e.g., structural power, outcomes)—affects social solidarity, a measure of trust, affect, commitment, and unity. Reciprocal exchange (e.g., unilateral giving) appears to be better for ongoing relationships than negotiated exchange (e.g., explicit bargaining). This is, in part, because reciprocal exchanges, and those engaged in them, are perceived as fairer (Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2003; Molm, Collett et al., 2006). These ideas are ripe for use in research on relationships. Although Molm’s work (Molm, 2010; Molm, Collett et al., 2006; Molm, Takahashi et al., 2003) extols the merits of reciprocal exchange, and Lawler’s research (Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2000, 2008) the benefits of productive exchange, both are based on laboratory experiments with undergraduates exchanging monetary profits. Future research

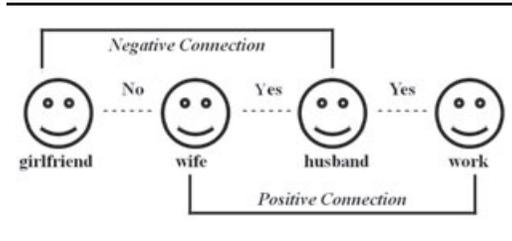
on marital quality can explore the types of exchanges that occur in the daily lives of couples and the effects of those exchange patterns on solidarity, fairness and forgiveness, and other important relational outcomes.

Future research might also want to hone in on particular outcomes—like trust, which has been of great interest to those working in social exchange—rather than a more general sense of solidarity. A potential avenue to explore would be covenant marriage (Spaht, 1998, 2004), which attempts to strengthen marriage by placing a legal obligation on the covenant spouses to take a number of additional steps to avoid divorce (e.g., premarital and couples' counseling, extended waiting periods for divorce). Such obligations decrease an individual's risk of desertion. With recent exchange research having suggested that it is in situations of high risk that exchange partners not only experience increased trust but also demonstrate heightened trustworthiness (Cook, Yamagishi et al., 2005), it is worth exploring whether levels of trust in covenant marriages are different from standard marriages and the effect this might have on marital quality. Laboratory research suggests that, even in negotiated exchanges, agreements that are binding produce less trust than those that are negotiated without explicit promises (Molm, Takashi, et al., 2003; Molm, Schaefer, et al., 2009). Perhaps research outside the laboratory can determine whether efforts to strengthen marriage may, in some ways, unintentionally undermine relationship quality.

Network Connections and Resource Characteristics

Thus far, my examples have predominantly been of what exchange theorists refer to as negatively connected exchanges. In such connections, exchange in one relation precludes exchange in another relation (Emerson, 1972b). For example, when a stay-at-home mother pours her time and energy into child care and housework, she is unable to spend those resources in her relationship with a girlfriend. She simply might not have time or energy to spare. Similarly, cooking dinner or doing the dishes comes at the expense of doing something else. In a positively connected network, however, exchange in one relation actually increases the likelihood of exchange in another relation (Emerson, 1972b). The husband who exchanges financial support

FIGURE 2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXCHANGE RELATIONS.



for the time his wife spends on child care and housework is able to give his boss his full attention and spend his time and energy on work. In other words, the wife's exchange relationship with her husband precludes her from engaging in other exchanges (e.g., a negative connection), whereas the husband's exchange relationship with his wife actually facilitates other exchanges (e.g., a positive connection). Figure 2 illustrates this example.

Recent research (Schaefer, 2007, 2009; Schaefer & Kornienko, 2009) has explored the role of resource characteristics in influencing whether a connection is positive or negative, specifically whether resources are duplicable and/or transferable. Duplicable resources allow the provider of the resource to retain control of the resource and use it in another exchange. An attractive woman will take her attractiveness with her and can use it to gain a husband, a lover, status, and other resources. A prize-winning cook has a recipe that she will continue to enjoy even if she shares it with others. These resources (e.g., attractiveness and recipes) can be used across a number of relations. Resources are transferable if the recipient gains control of the resource and is able to use it in another exchange. A man who marries an attractive wife cannot use her attractiveness in a subsequent exchange, as it is nontransferable.⁵ However, if his wife gives him money, advice, or a fantastic recipe, he can use that transferable resource to gain a benefit in a subsequent exchange.

Exchange resources vary across these two dimensions and fall into four categories, shown in Figure 3. They can be (a) nontransferable

⁵This is not to say that he could not use his wife's attractiveness to gain another benefit (e.g., status, prestige), only that he cannot gain control over her attractiveness.

FIGURE 3. RESOURCE VARIATION.

	<i>Nonduplicable</i>	<i>Duplicable</i>
<i>Nontransferable</i>	Votes, favors, virginity	Assistance, support, attractiveness, prestige
<i>Transferable</i>	Money, toys, material goods	Information, gossip

Source: Schaefer (2007, 2009).

and nonduplicable (e.g., one’s virginity), (b) nontransferable and duplicable (e.g., attractiveness), (c) transferable and nonduplicable (e.g., money, toys), or (d) transferable and duplicable (e.g., information) (Schaefer, 2007, 2009). The attributes of the resources exchanged can actually alter the connection type, as transferability and duplicability alter the capacity for a resource to be used in multiple transactions. It is precisely because the wife in the previous example gives her time and energy, arguably nonduplicable and nontransferable resources, to her husband in the form of child-rearing duties that she is unable to find the time or energy to exchange with her girlfriend. However, if her exchanges were centered on a duplicable resource (e.g., moral support), she would be able to offer it to both her friend and her husband, indicating a positive connection. Along similar lines, if her husband’s financial support came in the form of money—a transferable resource—the woman could use it to contract someone else to provide his or her time and energy to the children (e.g., a nanny or sitter), and she would be free to give her time and energy to a friend. In other words, the transferability of the resource she obtains from her husband would open up the potential for exchanges in other relations—in fact, in two relations, if it facilitates exchange with both her nanny and her girlfriend.

Although attention to resource characteristics is rather recent in exchange research, this line of inquiry has the potential to generate important insights for the study of families. The aforementioned resource characteristics (i.e., transferability and duplicability) not only determine the connection type (e.g., positive or negative); such connections influence relative power (Schaefer, 2007), emotion (Schaefer & Kornienko, 2009), and cohesion (Schaefer, 2009). I address each of these findings in turn.

Exchange theorists have argued for some time that power develops in the context of relations

(Emerson, 1972b). Structurally advantaged actors (i.e., those who have more alternatives and can therefore exploit others without alternatives) gain power through exclusion and ordering. The type of connection determines whether a power advantage is produced and which power mechanism emerges. Ordering occurs in positively connected networks; the person who X must exchange with to gain access to Y gains power over X. For example, when a couple wants to have dinner at a nice restaurant with friends, they must find a sitter for their children. Because they cannot have dinner without the sitter, if sitters are difficult to find, the sitter is in a position of power and can perhaps bargain for her preferred night or conditions. Negatively connected networks, in which engaging in one exchange precludes another exchange, often produce power through exclusion. If more than one sitter were available for a particular evening, the power would shift to the couple. Choosing to hire one sitter prevents them from hiring another for the same night, which means that the couple gains power by being able to exclude one of the sitters from exchange. Understanding this, the sitters might compete for the opportunity—offering to do chores around the house or to take the children someplace special (Schaefer, 2007).

Research suggests that power use by structurally advantaged actors (e.g., those who have more alternatives and can therefore exploit them without such alternatives) disappears when duplicable, nontransferable resources are exchanged, because the resources can be used in multiple transactions (Schaefer, 2007). Providing emotional support to a friend does not preclude the supporter from providing similar support to another friend, so neither friend will be excluded. Furthermore, with positive connections, structural power imbalances do not lessen exchange frequency. In other words, the findings by Lawler and Yoon (1993, 1996) that suggest imbalances of power negatively affect exchange frequency hold only in negatively connected networks. In positively connected relations, such power imbalance is not an impediment to exchange (Schaefer & Kornienko, 2009). Even as structural imbalance increases (e.g., over time, powerful actors demand a larger proportion of the available resources) and successful exchanges require greater sacrifices from disadvantaged actors, these low-power actors continue to exchange with their advantaged

partners because the positive network structure provides an incentive to do so (Schaefer & Kornienko, 2009). In other words, despite the concessions that a couple might need to make for the only available sitter, they will likely bow to the sitter's demands as securing the sitter for an evening enables them to see their friends.

Although duplicability is important for power dynamics, it is transferability that seems to affect cohesion (feelings of attachment and solidarity). Nontransferable resources produce greater cohesion than transferable ones (Schaefer, 2009). This is intuitive if we draw on our earlier example of the husband's financial support. If he gives his wife a sum of money, which she then transfers to a child care contractor so she can spend time with her friend, the initial exchange relation, between husband and wife, is diluted. This may be one reason children are unlikely to give money as gifts to their parents (Caplow, 1984); they might feel particular pressure to indicate the importance of the relationship in their choice of a nontransferable gift. Nontransferable resources (e.g., expressions of love or support rather than money) are particularly potent for increasing cohesion.

Related to cohesion, emotion is affected by structural power in interesting ways. Research finds that advantaged actors feel more positive emotion than disadvantaged actors and are more attached to their relationships than disadvantaged actors (Schaefer & Kornienko, 2009). In other words, the increased exchange frequency in positively connected, power imbalanced networks increases the positive emotion and cohesion of actors who are high on structural power. The babysitter who is frequently able to bargain for the ideal night and sitting conditions is happy and feels a connection to the family. The same positive affective responses are not likely from the couple, however. Disadvantaged actors in the laboratory did not experience the same emotional high or elevated attachment with frequent exchange.⁶ This incongruity could be problematic for relationship stability. Without positive emotion emanating from or attachment to the relationship, the disadvantaged actor might leave if he or she finds a suitable alternative. The advantaged actor, content and involved, might

not realize his or her partner's discontent until it is too late.

Although the research program on resource variation is much less developed than the others discussed here, there are valuable insights to consider in future research. Not all resources are equal, and they can qualitatively shape the relationship. Similarly to considering the effect of various types of investment (e.g., direct and indirect) (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) on relationship quality and stability, research should attend to the types of resources exchanged in relationships and how that resource variation affects relational outcomes like power use, cohesion, and emotion. Although RCT and the affect theory of social exchange suggest that, for enduring relationship quality, couples should have equal power and high levels of total power (i.e., dependence on each other and attractive alternatives), Schaefer's research suggests that power can come in many forms beyond access to alternatives.

Perceptions of Fairness in Exchange

Fairness has long been an interest of people working in exchange more generally (Homans, 1961) and among those applying exchange to family. Early work on exchange focused largely on distribution rules—outcomes based on equity, equality, or need (Deutsch, 1975). Family research followed suit and, as discussed earlier, spent a great deal of time exploring the importance of perceptions of distributive justice on relationship satisfaction (e.g., Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999; Huppé & Cyr, 1997; Michaels, Edwards, & Acock, 1984; Sprecher, 2001; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Recently, however, attention to procedural justice—the fairness of procedures—has eclipsed this interest in distributive justice. In instrumental terms, procedural justice is the amount of perceived control a procedure affords an individual or the efficacy one feels in shaping the process and determining the outcome (Thibaut & Walker, 1975, 1978). The more control an individual has, the more just is the procedure. And, recent research has found, the more fair an individual perceives a procedure to be, the fairer he or she perceives the outcome to be (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997).

Other important components of procedural justice emerged following Thibaut and Walker's (1975, 1978) innovative research. Leventhal,

⁶Similarly, Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2006) found low levels of cohesion in exchange relationships that individuals felt induced into.

Karuz, and Fry (1980) outlined criteria for fair procedures, including suppression of bias, consistency, representation of all parties' interests, accuracy of information, ethicality, and correctability. Greenberg and Folger (1983) highlighted the importance of voice for perceptions of procedural justice, demonstrating that people want to have a say even if it does not influence the outcome. Finally, Lind and Tyler (1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992) suggested both the group value model, which argues that procedures are fair if they promote within-group relationships and provide participants with information about their own place in the group, and the relational model, which highlights standing, neutrality, and trust as important antecedents for perceptions of procedural justice. In addition to exploring procedural justice in exchange relations, recent research in social exchange (e.g., Molm, Collett et al., 2006) also explores the role of fair treatment, increasingly referred to as interactional justice (Bies, 2002; Bies & Moag, 1986), in relationships. Work in interactional justice separates specific interactions from the general process.

With growing interest in the affective and cognitive outcomes of exchange, rather than the distribution of resources, those studying exchange have incorporated both procedural and interactional justice in recent work (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999; Molm, Collett et al., 2006; Molm, Takahashi et al., 2003). Findings have suggested that, holding outcomes constant, reciprocal exchange is considered more procedurally fair than negotiated exchange (Molm, Takahashi et al., 2003; Molm, Collett et al., 2006) and that exchange partners in reciprocal exchange are seen as more just as well—a measure of interactional fairness (Molm, Collett et al., 2006). Both dimensions of fairness are largely influenced by the salience of conflict in the exchange relationship (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999). Conflict increases attention to inequities (Deutsch, 2000), and research has suggested that the salience of conflict is higher in negotiated exchange (Molm, Collett et al., 2006). The idea of a conflictual negotiated exchange might be counterintuitive to those who focus on the cooperative nature of bargaining (e.g., Lawler, 2001; Lawler et al., 2008). However, when outcomes are easily compared and one partner's gain is perceived as another partner's loss, conflict is certainly present (Molm, Collett et al., 2006).

Understanding that fairness extends beyond distributive justice (Homans, 1961), recent research has explored how ostensibly unfair distributions might be perceived as fair through the lens of other dimensions of justice (for an example from the family literature, see Wilkie, Ferree, & Ratcliff, 1998). Those interested in relationship quality should devote more attention to the work in procedural justice, particularly the more nuanced approaches (e.g., Greenberg & Folger, 1983; Leventhal et al., 1980; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992), and interactional justice (Bies, 2002; Bies & Moag, 1986) to explore the power of process and fair treatment in reactions to exchange and inequity. Marital quality may be less influenced by the division of labor in the household and more by the process through which such duties are divided.

ARE ALL RELATIONSHIPS EQUAL?

It is important to say a few words about types of relationships. Although this special issue's topic is theorizing marital quality, much of the article has focused on relationships more generally, without delineating married, cohabiting, engaged, or dating couples. With the research presented here focusing on the context and quality of exchanges, it is clear that such distinctions likely matter. I believe that exchange theory likely holds great promise for discovering specific interactional differences between these groups and the effects of such differences on various relational outcomes. However, currently there is not enough research to speak to those distinctions. These are the types of questions that require moving out of the laboratory and into the lives of couples.

In the future, those interested more specifically in marital quality might draw on Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model to explore how direct and indirect investments (e.g., wedding, vows, joint gifts, name change) affect commitment to marriage and relationship maintenance strategies (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994) or the importance of roles for comparison standards (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) to determine whether a woman's CL would be different as a wife than as a cohabiter. From the research presented here, one might consider how exchange frequency, perceived jointness of task, and emotional attributions (Lawler, 2001) vary between married or unmarried people. Exchange form

(Molm, 2010) and exchange resources (Schaefer, 2007) might vary between groups, too. Knowing that both form and resources affect outcomes like power use, cohesion, and emotion, it is important to parse out differences in these among those who are married and those who are not. Finally, preferred types of justice (procedural, interactional, and distributive) or justice rules might vary across relationship configurations.

CONCLUSION

It would be too strong to say that we need to build a bridge between social exchange and family research—such a structure clearly exists. However, the bridge is currently in dire need of repair. As in many areas of social psychology, social exchange experienced parallel development in psychology and sociology after the seminal works of the 1960s and 1970s. There have been great theoretical advances in both disciplines since then, but it appears that contemporary family research draws more heavily on the psychological work than on the sociological contributions. It is my hope that exposure to more recent exchange developments in sociology might benefit not only those interested in family but also the psychologists interested in exchange, thus leading to more mutual social psychological inquiry in the future (Thoits, 1995). The research presented here is just a small slice of what sociological social exchange theories have to offer. There is much left to mine.

However, to test and refine those sociological theories, new questions must be asked in family research—particularly on emotion, cohesion, commitment, and fairness. It is important to know how couples feel and who they attribute those emotions to (e.g., “Is my current state of happiness or well-being attributable to my relationship or my success at work?”). Rather than focusing exclusively on ratings of a partner, researchers must pay attention to ratings of the relationship. One might have great respect, love, and admiration for an ex-husband but not be likely to use those same words to describe the relationship. The relation itself must be a unit of analysis (for an example, see Stanley & Markman, 1992). Relatedly, research must work on getting feedback from both parties, to look at the connection (or lack thereof) between their perceptions. Commitment takes many forms (e.g., gift giving, investment in the relation,

and joint ventures) and these nuances should be considered in future research. Fairness, too, has multiple dimensions. Future work should not only look at the division of labor in a household, but how it is decided. Are the procedures perceived of as fair, even if the outcome is not? Is this breakdown the result of explicit agreements, or just how it happened?

I have devoted much of this article to the recent developments in sociological social exchange that I see as most relevant for those who study marital quality, specifically, but also those interested in family, more generally. I sought to demonstrate how theoretical insights gained from laboratory experiments on cohesion, exchange form, resource variation, and procedural justice might relate to intimate relationships. Although the examples I used to elucidate the concepts and theories might seem superficial or simplistic to some, I hope they piqued the interest of readers and inspired them to forge connections between these lines of exchange theory and empirical issues related to families. The benefits of the laboratory for theory building are significant, but such theory is most useful when it is explored in everyday life. In this way, my motive for writing this article was likely self-interested. As a sociological social psychologist, much of my own work is experimental, with theory development in mind. Those theories and their insight are supported and enriched when they are connected to the world outside the laboratory. When work on family employs some of the sociological exchange ideas, I believe it will not only enhance research in family but also open new doors and develop new questions for social exchange. I hope that those working in social exchange will realize such connections as well. Better integration warrants attention from both sides. I consider the relationship symbiotic and know that both social exchange and family will benefit from attention to the relationship.

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