

BUILDING A LIFE TOGETHER: RECIPROCAL AND NEGOTIATED EXCHANGE IN FRAGILE FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

An ongoing debate in social exchange theory centers on the benefits and drawbacks of reciprocal versus negotiated exchange for dyadic relationships. Lawler's affect theory of social exchange argues that the interdependent nature of negotiated exchange enhances commitment to exchange relations, whereas Molm's reciprocity theory suggests that reciprocal exchange fosters more integrative bonds than the bilateral agreements of negotiation. In this chapter, we use data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with poor and working-class couples to explore the effects of both types of exchange on relationship satisfaction. Consistent with reciprocity theory, we find that couples who engage in reciprocal exchange are happier and more satisfied with their relationship than those who explicitly negotiate the division of labor in their households and that the expressive value of these exchanges play an important role in this outcome. However, reciprocity is not enough. As predicted by the affect theory, the couples with the best outcomes also perceive supporting a family as a highly interdependent task, regardless of their family structure. Our results point to the complementary nature of these two theories in a natural social setting.

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Social exchange is as central to family life as it is to social life in general. Even before Edwards published his seminal work, "Familial behavior as social exchange" (1969), early exchange theorists (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) used examples of kinship and romantic ties to illustrate the ubiquity of exchange in social relationships. The affinity between social exchange and family has generated a rich literature, with both psychologists and sociologists engaging exchange theories in research on the family. Although there have been significant insights gleaned from this connection, including work on relationship satisfaction (e.g., Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; Sprecher, 1998, 2001), commitment (e.g., Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994), and the end of relationships (Edwards & Saunders, 1981; Price-Bonham & Balswick, 1980; Thompson & Spanier, 1983), much of the recent theoretical development in sociological exchange theory has been overlooked by those interested in family (Collett, 2010).

Here, we bridge the gap between these new theoretical insights in exchange theory and the study of family. We use qualitative interviews with couples to explore the effects of two types of exchange – negotiated and reciprocal – on relationship satisfaction. Our results not only further our understanding of exchange patterns in families today but also provide a window into these exchange processes outside the laboratory in a way that might inform future theoretical development on the effects of social exchange processes (Zelditch, 1969). Specifically, we demonstrate the complementary nature of two prominent theories in contemporary social exchange, Molm's *reciprocity theory* (Molm, 2010; Molm, Schaefer, & Collett, 2007) and Lawler's *affect theory of social exchange* (2001), in understanding the benefits and drawbacks of different forms of exchange for relationship outcomes.

Both reciprocal and negotiated exchanges are direct types of exchange, meaning that the benefits flow directly between the two exchange partners. However, the process and the timing of the two types of exchange are different. In *negotiated exchange*, actors engage in a joint decision process, like bargaining, to establish the terms of exchange (Molm, 1997). There are mutual flows of benefit and the agreements are binding. As a result, expectations are explicit and each person's contribution is clear. Most economic exchanges take this form. *Reciprocal exchange*, on the contrary, consists of a series of unilateral acts. There is no direct negotiation; acts of exchange are performed separately. An actor initiates exchange by contributing to the relation without knowing whether, or when, the other will reciprocate. Instead, the exchange process and relationship are built up from individual acts rather than a binding agreement between two people.

Reciprocity theory (Molm, 2010) suggests that reciprocal exchanges – which she argues lessen the salience of the competitive nature of exchange and enhance the expressive value of exchange – increase trust, solidarity, and positive affect between exchange partners. Lawler's (2001) affect theory of social exchange, on the contrary, suggests that negotiated exchanges enhance these types of outcomes. According to the affect theory, the greater jointness of task and perceptions of shared responsibility inherent in the bilateral agreements of negotiated exchange should lead to more solidarity and positive affect between exchange partners than the unilateral transactions in reciprocal exchange. However, recent work on micro-social orders (Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2008) fails to find support for predictions from either the reciprocity theory (Molm, 2010; Molm et al., 2007) or the affect theory. Instead, no significant differences between negotiated and reciprocal exchange on rates of giving, positive emotion, cohesion, or affective attachment emerge. In an effort to explain the lack of support for either theory's predictions, Lawler et al. (2008, p. 539) hypothesize that the differences between the two types of exchange are "contingent on differences in either the salience of conflict or perceptions of shared responsibility." They argue that because neither of those factors – conflict (central to reciprocity theory) and jointness of task (central to affect theory) – varied across the negotiated and reciprocal conditions in their experiments, the empirical results did not differ between the two.

In this chapter, we weigh in on this set of unresolved issues in exchange theory as we explore the effect of exchange processes in households on couples' relationship satisfaction. Using data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with couples, we investigate whether couples who negotiate the division of labor within their households have more positive relational outcomes than those who engage in a more reciprocal exchange strategy. We integrate ideas from both Molm's and Lawler's theories as we consider the roles that structural power, perceptions of interdependence, expressive value, and salience of conflict play in these exchanges and outcomes.

In many ways, our findings provide support for reciprocity theory (Molm, 2010; Molm et al., 2007). Those who engage in reciprocal exchange are happier and more satisfied with their relationship than those who explicitly negotiate the division of labor in their households. Consistent with reciprocity theory, the expressive value of reciprocal exchanges play an important role in these outcomes. However, reciprocal exchange is not enough to produce satisfactory outcomes. As hypothesized by Lawler and his colleagues (2008), the couples with the best outcomes also perceive supporting a family as a highly interdependent task, regardless of their family structure

(e.g., breadwinner–homemaker and dual-career), and trust that they are not being exploited by their partners. Also in line with the affect theory, structural power dynamics prove significantly less important for relational outcomes than perceptions of shared responsibility.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, we briefly outline the presuppositions and empirical predictions of the reciprocity theory and the affect theory of social exchange. Both represent the recent affective turn in social exchange, a shift from concerns about more objective aspects of exchange (e.g., power use, dependence, and the division of resources) to affective exchange outcomes (e.g., trust, solidarity, and emotion).

The Affect Theory of Social Exchange

One of the most exciting developments in recent exchange research is Lawler's affect theory of social exchange (2001). The theory is based in large part on his earlier work on relational cohesion (Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2000; Lawler & Yoon, 1993, 1996, 1998), which sought to understand what led people to become committed to exchange relations and to choose to remain in them despite access to attractive alternatives (for a review, see Thye, Yoon, & Lawler, 2002). Focusing on dyads, relational cohesion theory (RCT) argues that frequent exchange produces positive emotions that are attributed to the relation and enhance cohesion. This sense of the relationship as the source of positive emotion encourages actors to not only remain in the relationship but also invest in it. RCT argues that structural power and specifically high total power and equal relative power increase exchange frequency and set this endogenous process in motion (Lawler & Yoon, 1996).

Several scope conditions (Lawler & Yoon, 1996) limit the contexts where the relational cohesion model might be applied. First, the theory focuses on dyads, specifically dyads embedded in the context of a larger network structure that offers them alternative exchange partners but limits them to one. Second, the expected benefits in these relations must be higher than those in the alternative relations. Finally, exchanges must be negotiated. Although the affect theory draws many of its theoretical assumptions from this previous work, it relaxes these scope conditions. The affect theory can be applied to groups of any size, including dyads, as the focus is on the

generation of person-to-group connections (Lawler et al., 2000). In addition, the exchange process can take a variety of forms, as long as there are repeated exchanges and actors make decisions about “whether to exchange, with whom, and with what terms” (Lawler, 2006, p. 250).

In outlining affect theory, Lawler (2001, p. 327) argues that (1) social exchange produces global (e.g., ambiguous and generalized) emotion or feeling, (2) global emotions from exchange are reinforcing (or punishing) stimuli, (3) actors strive to reproduce positive emotions and avoid negative emotions that are experienced as a result of social exchange, (4) the global emotions produced by social exchange trigger cognitive efforts to understand the sources or causes of these feelings; more specific emotions, tied to social objects, result from this attribution process, and (5) in the case of joint tasks, like social exchange, actors interpret their feelings partly with reference to social relations. The last assumption, on the jointness of task, is where affect theory moves beyond RCT.

Whereas RCT focuses on structural power's influence on the frequency of exchange, the affect theory of social exchange takes interdependence as the most important factor in actors' propensity to both engage in exchanges and attribute positive emotions to the exchange relation. Its two core propositions are as follows:

Proposition 1. – *The greater the nonseparability of individuals' impact on task success or failure, the greater 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 (i.e., relations, networks, or groups) (Lawler, 2001, p. 327).*

Combining these propositions with the process outlined in RCT, Lawler argues that the more interdependent an exchange process is, the more likely that positive emotion generated in exchange will be attributed to the relationship and the greater individuals' commitment to that relation will be.

According to the theory, interdependence varies across exchange processes. For example, productive exchange, “coordinating efforts or combining resources to create a joint good” (Lawler, 2001, p. 334), fosters the highest levels of interdependence. However, Lawler asserts that perceptions of interdependence also vary across direct exchange processes. He sees the joint decision process in negotiated exchange as a group effort that should make salient the jointness of task and evoke a sense of shared responsibility in exchange partners that is not present among those engaged in reciprocal

exchange (Lawler et al., 2008). Because of these perceptions of interdependence, negotiated exchange should generate positive relational outcomes between exchange partners. Reciprocal exchange, on the contrary, with its unilateral acts, should not be as effective at promoting positive emotion or enhancing relational outcomes as negotiated exchange.

A Theory of Reciprocity

Reciprocity theory argues that “the way that transactions are structured and organized over time” (Molm, 1994, p. 163) has important implications for cognitive and affective outcomes of exchange. For example, central to reciprocity theory is variation in the way reciprocity – “the giving of benefits for benefits received” (Molm, 2010, p. 119) – is structured in exchange processes. Affecting reciprocity are the flow (unilateral versus bilateral) and source (indirect versus direct) of benefits.

Although both negotiated and reciprocal exchanges are direct exchange processes, they differ on the flow of benefits. According to Molm, when benefits flow unilaterally – as they do in reciprocal exchange – exchange is risky and uncertain (Molm, Schaefer, & Collett, 2009). This is because this form of exchange offers the opportunity for an individual to either exploit his or her partner or to demonstrate trustworthiness by reciprocating the other’s contribution in some way. The experience of reciprocation in the face of risk promotes trust, fostering integrative bonds between exchange partners. Reciprocal exchange is also beneficial for affective outcomes because an act of reciprocity for which there is no explicit agreement has symbolic value over and above the instrumental benefits of the act, because it is at the discretion of the reciprocator (Molm et al., 2007). Negotiated agreements, whether binding or not, lack the expressive value of reciprocal exchange. Finally, reciprocal exchange lessens the salience of conflict between exchange partners. Exchange is inherently both competitive and cooperative and the form an exchange takes can affect the salience of this competitive nature or the cooperative aspects 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 relationship built on reciprocal exchange, on the contrary, failure to follow through is an act of omission rather than one of commission and a transgression is more ambiguous.

In sum, reciprocity theory and the empirical research testing its predictions suggest the reverse of Lawler’s affect theory. Reciprocity theory predicts that reciprocal exchange (e.g., unilateral giving) is better for producing positive affective outcomes than negotiated exchange (e.g., explicit bargaining), whereas the affect theory predicts that the explicit bargaining of negotiated exchange will be better for integrative outcomes because it enhances exchange partners’ senses of interdependence. In the analyses that follow, we consider both mechanisms (affect theory’s interdependence and emotion and reciprocity theory’s risk, expressive value, and conflict) and their effects in ongoing, intimate relationships outside the laboratory. We describe our data and methods next.

DATA AND METHODS

The Study

Spearheaded by Paula England and Kathryn Edin (2008), the Time, Love, and Cash in Couples with Children (TLC3) study conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a subsample of 75 couples originally interviewed for the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (McClanahan, Paxson, & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Multiple waves of both individual and couple interviews began two to three months after the focal child was born and continued over the next four years. To qualify for the study, couples were romantically involved at wave one, with family incomes below \$60,000. If couples broke up, the research team did their best to interview both biological parents and social fathers if there was a new partner in the mother and child’s life.¹ The interviews cover a wide range of topics from relationship history to the division of labor in the household to the role models respondents drew on as parents and partners. Interviews most often occurred in the couple’s home and, when possible, with the same interviewers over time to help establish rapport. Interviews, which usually lasted between two to three hours, were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Sample

We randomly selected cases from the 75 TLC3 families to include in our analysis. We stopped coding transcripts after 36 cases because of data saturation. After approximately 25 sets² of interviews, subsequent cases were not illustrating novel patterns of exchange or the effects of those

exchanges. These later cases began to fit easily into the framework we had developed from earlier cases, without prompting new questions to explore, indicating that we had reached the point of diminishing returns. We agreed to cease coding after the 36th family.

When we examined the 36 cases we coded, we found that our random sampling strategy had worked; our selection of cases closely resembled patterns found in the full set of interviews. For example, 14 of our couples were from Chicago, 12 from Milwaukee, and 10 from New York. Twenty-five TLC3 families (one-third of the total) were drawn from each of those cities. Additionally, at the first wave of interviews, 23 of our couples were unmarried, 12 were legally married, and 1 claimed to be "spiritually married." This breakdown – one-third married, two-thirds unmarried – is representative of the families initially chosen for the TLC3 study.³

We exclude three of these unmarried couples in the analysis below, resulting in a slightly higher rate of marriage among our sample. One of our excluded cases is a couple from Chicago who was not cohabiting and had no plans to in the future. In fact, rather than ask the mother questions about exchanges with the focal child's father – as they do in the other interviews we read – interviewers ask the respondent about her relationship with her mother (the focal child's grandmother), who is responsible for almost all the childcare in the household. The two other couples we omit have particularly pronounced on-again and off-again relationships that make it difficult to discern an exchange pattern or gauge relationship satisfaction.

To protect the anonymity of our couples, we opt not to include a detailed description of each family here and instead provide a more general picture of our sample. The mothers' ages at the birth of the focal child (the child whose birth precipitated involvement in the Fragile Families study) range from 19 to 40, with a median age of 26. For 11 of our mothers, the focal child is their first biological child. For another 11, the focal child is their second biological child in the household, for six he or she is the third, and for five, the fourth. One of our families has six children at home and two others have five. In the first wave, 29 of our couples are living together and 4 are not (although all move in together at some point during the interviews). In their initial interviews, all 33 mothers stated that they want the fathers involved in the raising of their child(ren) and the fathers indicate that they would provide (financial) support for the baby.

In our sample, 4 of the mothers classify themselves as white, 11 self-identify as Latina, and 18 as black/African-American. There are three interracial couples; one is a white woman and a Latino man and the other two are Latina women with African-American men. The other 30 of our

couples are in same-race relationships. Three of the mothers in the sample were not born in the United States (two Latinas and one white woman). Nine mothers have dropped out of high school. Twelve have finished high school, nine have some college or technical degrees, and three mothers have attended college or graduate school. Their partners' education levels are similar.⁴ Nine fathers do not have a high school diploma, twelve have a high school diploma or GED, and eight have some college or a technical degree. Two fathers graduated from college and another went on to complete a law degree. The average family income (including from public assistance, unemployment, etc.) is \$27,334, with the highest being \$62,500. Eight families are living under the poverty line when the interviews begin; two of those families live in a public housing project at the time of the initial interview. Eighteen families live in nonpublic housing rentals and thirteen live in houses or apartments that they or their families own. Seven of the mothers identify as Catholic, one as Muslim, three as "not religious," and three either consider themselves of another religion or their religious preference is not available. The other 19 mothers consider themselves some kind of Christian. Twelve of the mothers attend church regularly (at least several times a month). The most frequent attendees are those who classify themselves as just "Christian," Baptist, or Muslim.

Coding

For this chapter, we read each transcript, created a coversheet with information we saw as pertinent (e.g., other children, marital status, living situation, and occupation), and flagged sections related to exchange, power, interdependence, conflict, and emotion. The two authors met regularly to discuss cases and their reading of the transcripts to ensure that they interpreted each couple's situation similarly and to select relevant examples and quotes, generating a summary page. By reading and rereading these summaries in various groupings (e.g., exchange type, family structure, and perceptions of interdependence), important patterns began to emerge. We present these next.

RESULTS

We initially set out to illuminate how reciprocal and negotiated exchange processes, so often studied in the laboratory, are realized in intimate relationships outside the laboratory. We begin there, with descriptions of

both reciprocal and negotiated exchange in our families. The examples are not exhaustive, but instead chosen to be representative of the dynamics described in the interviews. We follow types of exchange with other topics – specifically, interdependence and structural power – that emerged as we read the transcripts.

Reciprocal Exchange

Carla and Ben have been together for 12 years. They had two children, 9 and 4, when a third joined the family. Although they were once both employed outside the home, neither are working now. Ben needed an organ transplant, and Carla decided to stay home to care for him, and therefore, they survive off disability and other forms of public assistance. Ben has primary responsibility for housework and childcare. Ben believes that it is a man's responsibility to support his wife and children. As he cannot work outside of the home because of his medical condition, he pulls his weight around the house to offer this support (Linnenberg, 2007). Plus, he says, Carla carried their children and gave birth to them, something he could not do himself, and therefore, it is time to help out in the best way that he can. We see Ben's consideration of Carla's contributions in relation to his own as indicative of a reciprocal exchange relationship.

Ben discusses finances to illustrate how reciprocity works between them. Although they have separate bank accounts, they work in tandem to support the household:

When we were both working, we would always just pay the bills together. There would be some days, though, that she would just go and pay a bill, and I didn't even know about it, and the bill would come in and be already paid. Well, I would do the same thing.

He uses this example of how they paid their bills to emphasize that they do not engage in explicit bargaining in their relationship. Although they sometimes have open dialogue about what needs to be done, he finds that they usually just step up and do what they need to without discussing it directly. The laundry is another example. Whoever notices that it needs to be done takes charge of it.

When asked in his interviews if this back-and-forth situation seems fair, Ben told the interviewer that this lack of explicit agreement works because each knows that the other would help them out when they needed it. Although one might argue that Ben is just a trusting soul or not one to complain, other evidence from the interviews suggests that his satisfaction with reciprocal exchange is a product of his relationship with Carla and not

simply his personality. In later interviews, after the family has moved in with Carla's sister and her nieces, Ben begins to feel exploited and believes that he is treated unfairly by being expected to care for not only his and Carla's children but also Carla's nieces and nephews. He grows dissatisfied with the situation and his relationship with Carla. Informal reciprocity worked for Carla and Ben when they were the only adults in the household. The addition of another adult (and her children) into the household complicated the understood reciprocal exchange relationship they had established in their nuclear family.

The importance of trust in maintaining a positive reciprocal relationship is also evident with Dana and Antoine, an unmarried couple that is very committed to one another. They met at work two years ago and both currently work outside the home. They describe the importance of trust in their "turn-taking." In describing the care of their young son, Antoine Jr., they say:

Antoine: Yeah, it's not like a problem. And it's not like most people. "Oh, come ON! I don't want to do it! YOU get up this time!" "No, I ain't getting up." No, it's whoever. "Fine, I'll get up." No argument, no disagreement. I'll take on that responsibility. Changing him, bathing [him].

Interviewer: And do you ever talk about wanting one of you to do something more for the baby or around the house?

Dana: No. We take turns. We don't say, "You do this today, and I do this tomorrow." We take turns. He feeds him. I feed him. I bathe him. He'll bathe him.

Like Carla and Ben, this couple is clear in their interviews that they avoid explicit bargaining. There is no agreement and therefore no disagreement. Also like the previous couple, they seem to understand that reciprocal exchange works for them because they do not exploit one another.

One of the most common examples the couples use to illustrate reciprocal exchange patterns in their relationships is meals. For example, Carla does the cooking, Ben cleans up the dishes and kitchen. Although they will sometimes switch roles, Larissa and Robert are similar. Larissa explains, "Like if I cook, he'll clean. And if he cooks, I clean."

In describing her and her partner's "50-50" arrangement, Larissa, a stay-at-home mom, tells the interviewer:

I don't [say] ... you have the kitchen and I have the bathroom. I'm home all day; I have [our son]. I clean the house. I do the laundry. If [Robert]'s home, HE'LL clean the house,

he'll do the laundry, he'll cook. It's the same thing. It's not like, "The bathroom's not clean," "Well, it was your time . . ." It's not that way. Or "Why don't you clean the bathroom? That's your responsibility." That's not the way we are. That's not us.

Although Robert works outside the home while Larissa cares for their son, Gregory, they each see their contributions as important to helping the family run. The division of labor works well for them. They had been together for a couple years before Gregory's arrival and married around his first birthday. Larissa continued to stay home with Gregory as Robert transitioned through jobs to support the family financially. In a later interview, they reveal they are still quite happy and expecting a second child.

Our results suggest that reciprocal exchange in "traditional" (i.e., breadwinner-homemaker) couples is most successful when each person understands how hard their partner works. For example, Larissa understands that Robert's work is busy and stressful and Robert knows that Larissa works hard at home all day, caring for their child and their house. They are willing to cut each other slack, offer support to one another, and step in when necessary to sustain their family. Katrina and Peter have a similar understanding. When Peter decides to shift from working at a locksmithing company to become an independent locksmith, Katrina knows that the hours will be longer and the commitment more, leaving her with almost all the work at home to do alone. Rather than becoming annoyed, she learns to do some locksmithing, making it a family endeavor and doing what she can to help Peter realize his dream.

The couples who feel like these reciprocal patterns just emerge interpret it as a positive development, a sign that the relationship is meant to be and the partners belong together. Peter, who describes his marriage to his wife Katrina as happy, explains that in an ideal world, there would not be negotiations or orders: "Everyone should be well-versed [in what needs to be done], so you do what needs doing." An interview with Caren and Garrett, a couple where she works outside the home while he stays at home with their daughter, illustrates the positive emotion that the spontaneous reciprocity spurs:

Interviewer 1: So how did that come to be? 'Cause a lot of times, you know, one partner ends up doing a lot more than the other person, even if . . . just because. How did you guys get it to be so FAIR?

Caren: I don't KNOW. It just HAPPENED. I don't know really. 'Cause we didn't just, like, sit down and talk about it. It kinda, like, happened.

Interviewer 2: Does it seem like that's a good thing?

Caren: Yeah.

[Garrett laughs]

Interviewer 2: What do you think? We already saw her smiling. We know this is a good . . . Is it working out for you?

Garrett: Yeah, it's working out.

Interviewer 2: Yeah? You feel good about that?

Garrett: Yeah.

Although Garrett's response might not appear overly enthusiastic, we find that our couples who engage in reciprocal exchange patterns, on average, experience more positive emotion and are more satisfied in their relationships than those who engage in negotiated exchange. Furthermore, the couples high in reciprocity, and the interviewers who talked to them, are also more optimistic that they will still be together in later waves.

Negotiated Exchange

Couples who engage in a more negotiated exchange strategy often are not as close, or have not been together as long, as those who exhibit a reciprocal exchange pattern. Marta and David have lived together, on and off, for five years and have four children. Marta is the main earner in her household, working full-time in a food-processing factory. Her boyfriend David has seasonal jobs, but mostly contributes financially to the family with his unemployment benefits. They share childcare, with Marta caring for the infant and David taking charge of the older children. There has been trouble in their relationship, and therefore, they have broken up a few times, and David had a brief stint in prison for a crime he states he did not commit. In their interviews, they describe how they physically sit down and discuss issues large and small and try to come to an agreement. When asked what happens when she and David disagree on something, Marta explained that "Both of us sometimes get our way. We compromise." When the interviewer interpreted this as a competition and says, "sometimes you'll win and sometimes he'll win," Marta agreed. Unfortunately, naming a winner and a loser, like the interviewer does, is problematic. Both partners end up making concessions in these discussions, heightening the salience of conflict between them. Perhaps as a result, both Marta and David are very aware of whether or not their partner is upholding their end of the bargain. They explain to the interviewers that when one of them thinks the agreement has been

breached, the couple needs to sit down and negotiate again to restore balance and fairness to their arrangement.

Robin and Allen – who have six children between them – have been together for four years. Three of the children are Robin's from a previous relationship and the last three are both of theirs biologically. Neither of them has stable employment and their housing situation changes fairly often. They keep track of who is doing what and the fairness of each other's contributions. They often talk to each other, and the interviewers, about what can be done to make things more even. In the end, despite these joint decisions and compromises, neither Robin and Allen nor Marta and David were very close to each other, satisfied with their relationship, or had any sense of interdependence.

Another couple, Rosaria and Roberto, do not live together early in their interviews, but they aspire to a negotiated relationship. Before living together, they already bargained about some things – who would take care of their daughter Tiana, who would pay for various items – and planned to bring up lingering issues with each other once they move in together. In later interviews, they seem to have adopted a largely negotiated relationship where she stays home and cares for the baby and house and Roberto works outside the home. Rosaria keeps her frustrations about Roberto's lack of involvement to herself. Knowing that he will not change diapers or feed Tiana if Rosaria is around, Rosaria will find excuses to leave Roberto alone to care for their daughter as her way of getting him to contribute to the caring for the baby. They have no problems dividing other obligations, as everything (e.g., phone bills and car payment) is split in half. In his last individual interview, Roberto tells the interviewer that Rosaria is expecting their second child – a child that they sat down and planned to have, negotiating the timing. They have also “agreed” that this would be the last one.

Even among the couples who primarily engage in negotiated exchange, one area of family life where there appear to be norms against explicit negotiation is matters concerning children, particularly regarding financial obligations. Roberto just gives Rosaria money for clothes or Christmas presents, without worrying about her contributions, or lack thereof, and stops to pick up a toy in the toy store if he sees something that he likes. Similarly, Dana and Antoine⁵ split their bills and their grocery shopping “50–50,” but when it comes to diapers, they both say it does not matter who buys them:

Dana: It doesn't matter. Me or him, it doesn't matter.

Antoine: [I don't] say all right, you know, and this month you got to buy Pampers, and next month [I'll] buy. It don't work that way.

Jackie and Vince, who have two children born just a year apart, have traditional gender roles (i.e., he works and she takes care of the home) where there is very little overlap and Jackie is ultimately disappointed that Vince refuses to do more to help out around the house. However, the place where he is most willing to pitch in and contribute without a fight, or without feeling as though he has sacrificed something, is spending time with their kids. These examples suggest that regardless of a couple's dominant exchange strategy, explicit negotiation of providing for children is somehow considered inappropriate.

Combining Exchange Processes

Certainly all of our couples used a combination of reciprocal and negotiated exchanges. However, it was easy to fit most of them into one of the two groups because one type of exchange came to dominate their relationship. Three of our couples described a concerted effort to shift from one type of exchange to another – specifically, from reciprocal to negotiated exchange. One was Olivia and Mason. Parents of two young children, Olivia and Mason both work. She is a teacher and he is a counselor. At the beginning of their relationship, they tried to just fill in the gaps and to establish a sense of turn-taking or reciprocity in household tasks. Olivia soon realized, though, that she was doing the majority of the household labor. She tried talking to Mason about it. She asked for help and made suggestions, but nothing seems to work. She finally decided to keep her frustration to herself, which caused major strife in the relationship because she was constantly angry and Mason had no idea what needed to be done. Realizing that the quality of their marriage was suffering, Olivia reached out to her married friends. She said that they told her, “it's a husband thing ... you have to just talk about and talk about and talk about [it] until you get it right.” She ended up doing just that. Olivia and Mason sat down and decided that they needed to draft a plan and explicitly agree on who should do what, when, and how. Unfortunately, it seemed to make matters worse. When Mason failed to pitch in as much as he had agreed to in the plan, Olivia was even angrier than she was initially because it was not only that she was still doing more, but also that he was not upholding his end of the bargain. As predicted by reciprocity theory, conflict was more salient in the negotiated exchange setting than the reciprocal one and Olivia viewed Mason's actions, or lack thereof, as intentional. At the time of the last interview, in an even more explicit negotiation process, they sat down and put the expectations

for chores on paper. Olivia likens the document to “closing procedures” in a workplace – everything that needs to be done before one can leave having completed their work – but they are unsure if this new method will work any better than previous attempts.

Jodi and Michael also make a concerted effort to move from reciprocal to negotiated exchange. Once again prompted by her own dissatisfaction, Jodi tried to get Michael to move beyond their traditional gender roles and to agree to do specific things around the house. He refused. Although this impasse was unsettling for Jodi, when Michael does pitch in and voluntarily help out around the house – however sporadically – she is surprised and happy, a response that demonstrates the expressive value of unilateral exchanges.

Interdependence

As is clear from the above examples, a reciprocal exchange strategy is not necessarily the key to a healthy, satisfying relationship. Our results suggest that perceived jointness of task is important as well, whether the “task” is perceived as supporting a family, running a household, or nurturing a marriage. If couples do not see themselves as mutually responsible for an overarching goal, the exchange strategy is of little importance.

One couple with a great deal of reciprocity but very little interdependence is Stephanie and Darren. They work together to lighten each other’s load and are able to switch things up quite naturally when it comes to their different needs and abilities. Darren not only does more around the house when he is out of work and Stephanie is enrolled in school, but they both often look to cues for how they can help each other out. Darren gives an example:

So sometimes on a weekend, I’ll be like, “Go to your mama’s house, or go to your girlfriend or whoever.” So she can get a break, and I’ll just keep the baby. She might do the same. She might say, “I know you have some things you have to do today, so go ahead and do what you have to do, and I’ll see you when you get home.” So we never sit back and try to figure who’s gonna have the baby from day to day. We never have that problem.

However, they also both know that they can survive alone and therefore do not feel that they need each other, meaning there is not a sense of interdependence in their relationship. When there were problems with Darren’s son from a previous marriage, Stephanie decided to leave him.

Darren attributes their separation to her not seeing marriage – and, in many ways, parenthood – as a joint venture:

No, she doesn’t understand, you know ... You know, now you got a child, and you feel, well ... I got my child and I’m happy that I got my child there ... and she always says, “Don’t nobody understand what’s going on between us, and how you just put him up on me,” and I say, “I ain’t put him up on you. You’re my wife, how is that putting you up? When we get married, everything I got comes your way, just like everything you got comes mine. I mean kids and all whatever, and every situation I gotta go through you gotta go through too.”

The reciprocity and Darren’s kindness might have fostered positive emotion, but the lack of interdependence in their relationship might have inhibited Stephanie from developing a sense of commitment to Darren in the face of adversity.

Nyah and Sam suffer from similar problems concerning not only her children from a previous marriage but also the foster children living in their home. Although she and Sam are married, Nyah says that the kids feel like hers alone. This was part of a larger trend in their marriage where everything felt separate, a state that Nyah described as not “living like they’re married.” She says, “we [pretty much] could have stayed apart, ‘cause that’s how everything is. Everything is ‘you do this, and I do that.’ So, everything that I do, as far as my kids and all that stuff, that comes from me.” Sam has the same sense of separateness. He gives Nyah money, which she spends on rent and utilities. He described their living arrangement as her living there and him moving into her life, not the two of them creating a life together. Their relationship is not built on any mutuality or interdependence. She thinks she could do things on her own and does not need him. He feels like he is expendable or replaceable. Their relationship is unstable and it is not uncommon for them to separate for a few days on a regular basis.

Malcolm is similar in describing his relationship with Magda. Although they have a four-year-old son and young daughter together, he does not see himself as tied to her at all. He often throws the fact that he pays for everything in her face, telling her that there is no reason for him to cheat on her, because he would just leave the relationship if he was unhappy. Magda describes him as self-centered and is frustrated that will not take the family into consideration when he makes decisions. Needless to say, there is little happiness in either Nyah and Sam’s or Malcolm and Magda’s relationships.

Situations where one partner takes control of everything and does not allow the other to make any contributions also fail to foster a sense of shared responsibility. For example, Scott does all the housework and childcare in his marriage to Laura. While Laura works and he stays home,

suggesting that such a division might be interpreted as a type of trade-off, he admits that doing so much around the house is related to his insistence on taking care of everything. He believes that because Laura came from a broken home, she acts like a child and does not know how to do anything. Although Laura views this division of labor as fair and appreciates everything that Scott does to help the household run, the interviews suggest that the arrangement, and his attitude about it, is not healthy for her mental state or their children.

One of the largest threats to interdependence among our couples was living with extended family, particularly parents. Katia and Daniel, a young couple with a daughter, live with his parents who interfere with how they parent their daughter. Rosaria and Roberto live off and on with relatives and the interviewers see this arrangement as hindering them growing together as a couple. Robin and Allen are constantly moving from one relative's house to another, never putting down roots. When the couples live in situations like these, there is often help with childcare or housekeeping (and certainly less responsibility with regard to the latter, as the couples are often only responsible for cleaning a bedroom and perhaps a bathroom) that buffers the relationships from most serious conflict. However, the couples are also sheltered from responsibilities that might require working together. As a result, they do not learn to rely on one another. They never have to determine how they would work together to manage a household or their children, meaning there is never an opportunity for interdependence to be established. This is particularly problematic when these couples move out on their own or face situations they have not yet learned to cope with before the stresses of additional children, job losses, and so forth.

Katrina and Peter, parents of a young boy and a girl, experienced the reverse, as they are estranged from their families. They see themselves as interdependent in large part because they do not have a support system outside of each other. When asked about the quality of their marriage, Katrina explains,

I actually think we have a strong relationship. Of course, we actually are on our own, basically. We actually have to rely on each other for everything, really ... if my parents force me to make a choice, I'm going to make that choice. I made commitments to my marriage and to my family, and that's the way it is ... I'm confident in that commitment. And that said, I'm very happy in [that].

Katrina and Peter fit the traditional breadwinner-homemaker model. Given exchange theory's interest in structural power, and the power

differentials assumed in such a relationship, we expected these to be some of the least interdependent relationships. However, they proved to be perceived as some of the most interdependent.

For example, in Michael and Jodi's relationship, he makes the money, but she is in charge of distributing it. Jodi is particularly grateful that Michael realizes what she does around the house and helps out with the older kids. She gives an example of his attentiveness, "Some mornings, he WILL do the dishes for me, 'cause he realizes [how hard I work]. And now he will – like if he makes a big breakfast for himself – he'll apologize if he doesn't have time to do the dishes." Her comments, and others from those in similar relationships, illustrate the expressive value of exchange. It is not just that Michael does the dishes, but that doing so is an indication of appreciation for how hard Jodi works.

Couples who were religious were more likely to perceive their relationship as a joint task and to view both men and women's contributions as valuable in maintaining a family than those who were not religious. For example, Lydia and Matteo are a very religious couple who attend church regularly with their two children. Lydia is aware of how hard Matteo works to support the family financially. Although he offers to help out more, she shields him from much of the household and childcare labor. She gives an example of the night waking as a case where she does the majority of the work:

Yeah. [I do] more. You know why? Cause I [feel] bad, because when [our daughter] goes to sleep, I can go [back to sleep]. He has to get up in the morning, you know, and it's so many hours. So even though he tells me, "Oh, wake me up," I would [let him sleep].

She went on to say that if it is something more complicated than food or a diaper change or wanting to play – something that she cannot handle – she will wake her husband up. She knows he does not mind. Matteo has made it his personal goal to understand their daughters and to learn how to help. He is constantly asking Lydia to show him how to do things so that he can lighten her load. Lydia feels grateful to have a husband as attentive as he is.

Religion also plays a role in Richard and RYanne's relationship. In a one-on-one interview, Richard describes his 15-year marriage to RYanne as "correct, which means that RYanne is submissive, but I'm not a tyrant." They describe their family as a team and actively incorporate their older children into running the household, resulting in a form of productive exchange. Richard explains, "They have their chores, I have my chores, and my wife has her chores ... [it is evenly distributed] all across." The one thing

that the family will work on together is yard work. Yet even this is coordinated in a teamwork style system:

We take turns. One person won't cut all the grass. They'll take a couple of people to cut the grass. You cut till you get tired and then we have something else to do out there. Like we just planted flowers. So one person cutting grass, one person planted flowers, one dug dirt up, and we just rotated until the yard is done.

These two couples' religious views not only enhance their idea of interdependence but also offer an outside source of appropriate roles in the workplace or the household. To be able to attribute these ideas to religious views – rather than a father who was trying to get away with doing less around the house or a wife who refused to work – helps protect the relationship from antagonism (Collett, 2008).

Even parents who have split up are able to maintain a positive relationship with one another when they see “raising children” as a joint task that they are engaged in together. For example, Aldo continued to do housework at Sabrina's house even after they separate because he felt that he should “play a very strong role in [his] children's upbringing.” He sees involvement in her household as part of that. The two of them view parenthood as something that they will do together, whether they are in a relationship or not. Aldo describes this approach it to an interviewer:

Yeah, if I go out there, and I see the trash and stuff in the yard, and [we] will get out there and clean it up, yeah. Mop the floor or whatever needs to be done ... Regardless of, of what beef you have with people, you know, it's, it's not only me doing that for her, it's for me doing those ... Doing that for those children, too. You know what I'm saying? So I'm like, she needs me to clean her bathroom, I'm going to clean [it]. If I think it needs to be done, I'm going to do it.

Aldo and Sabrina's experience demonstrates the importance of interdependence in satisfaction with a relationship. Even as their romantic connection dissipates, the reciprocity in their relationship is evident and they are able to generate positive emotions from working together as parents.

Structural Power

Our results also support affect theory's turn away from RCT's focus on structural power and toward interdependence as generating frequent exchanges. Although there are few in our sample, couples with high total power and equal power – for example, when both partners work outside the home – did not appear to have better outcomes than those who are

differentiated on power (e.g., breadwinner–homemaker couples). Marcia and Dante, who are both lawyers, have never been very happy with their relationship. They do not view themselves as interdependent and have very little trust in each other. They split soon after having their daughter Cristina and, although they get back together for a brief time and have a second child, they are no longer involved romantically. As RCT suggests, high total power and equal power are only beneficial insofar as they encourage exchange among actors. This is not the case for Marcia and Dante. Similarly, other couples who had equal power (i.e., they both work or rely equally on government benefits and programs) were only happy when they saw their relationships as reciprocal and interdependent.

Like the subjective nature of interdependence, *perceptions* of power seem as important – if not more so – than actual power for relational outcomes. Certainly, the women or men who have jobs outside the home and partners who do not work are structurally advantaged and less dependent on their partners. However, this seldom comes up in interviews. Instead, these powerful partners often saw their contributions as financial and their partners as socio-emotional (or in keeping up the household, raising the children, etc.). Some of our happiest couples – Larissa and Robert, Katrina and Peter, Lela and Manny, and Jodi and Michael – are in traditional relationships. However, so are Tess and Terrence, with a very different outcome. Terrence works while Tess stays home with their baby. Unlike many of our other couples, they do not see this as an equal power relationship. In fact, Tess is desperate to go back to work as soon as possible because she sees herself as too dependent on Terrence and thinks that he uses this against her:

Interviewer: So do you think you both have an equal say in the relationship, though?

Tess: I don't know. At first we did, but now he probably feel like ... He pays all the bills, so now I think he feels like he got more say-so 'cause he, you know, he pays all the bills. But when I bring it to him, he be like, “No that's not it.” But I feel like he does.

Interviewer: So this something you've talked about then?

Tess: Yeah, I have. You know say little things like that. So, yeah, I think that's how he feels. Like, I'm totally relying on him so, you know, I think that's how he feels.

Interviewer: So what have you said to him?

Tess: Well, I say, "You think you can just say anything or do anything, 'cause you pay all the bills?" or "You think I totally need you?" or something that I say to him? He be like, "No." Or he be like, you know how, like he think he has the upper hand or something, I guess 'cause he brings in the finances. And, you know, everything's on him, so it's like, he probably feel like, "Well she don't have any choice, 'cause she has to depend on me." Stuff like, I kinda think he does that.

Although Tess says that Terrence denies feeling advantaged over her in any way in the relationship, this attitude shows up later in one of his one-on-one interviews with a male interviewer: "Basically we agree you know, with each other, you know we talk things out, but, I guess when it comes down to it, I probably have the, you know, I probably have the ... [last say or something]." While it is in the context of describing the mutuality of their decision-making, Terrence's perception of power in the relationship is clear. In her own one-on-one interview, Tess recounts a time when she asked Terrence to help clean up the house. Apparently Terrence replied, "Oh, I gotta wear a skirt around here?" Although she wished he would help more after she went back to work, she continued to take care of all the household labor even when she returned to working full-time because she was concerned about threatening Terrence's masculinity. In sum, our results suggest that while power dynamics are important components of couples' relationships, couples' structural power is not related to frequency of exchange, type of exchange, perceptions of interdependence, or relationship satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

Although there is a long history of exchange theory in studies of intimate relationships, contemporary work on the affective outcomes of exchange has been largely ignored (Collett, 2010). In this chapter, we apply two recent developments in sociological work on social exchange – the affect theory of social exchange and the theory of reciprocity – to life outside the laboratory, exploring the processes in couples with young children. Although we originally set out to find examples of reciprocal and negotiated exchange in families to demonstrate the usefulness of an integration of contemporary social exchange and family research, our analyses reveal quite a bit more.

Specifically, the qualitative interviews highlight the effects of the two types of exchange.

Initial results show support for Molm's theory of reciprocity (Molm, 2010; Molm et al., 2007). It appears that couples who engage in reciprocal exchange are happier and more satisfied with their relationship than those who explicitly negotiate the division of labor in their households. Newer couples or those who have yet to really put down roots appear more likely to engage in negotiation. Such couples also seem less sure of their relationship and less happy. However, it is impossible to tell with this data what came first. There is strong support for reciprocity theory's assertion that the expressive value of these exchanges – the sense that couples understood each other or "clicked" or that their partner's contributions indicate caring – plays an important role in the positive outcomes associated with reciprocal exchange, but it could be that happier couples are more likely to engage in reciprocal exchanges.

However, we find that reciprocity is not enough. As hypothesized by Lawler and his colleagues (2008), the couples with the best outcomes also perceive supporting a family as a highly interdependent task, regardless of their family structure (e.g., breadwinner-homemaker and dual-career). Couples who see themselves as a team and believe that they share responsibility for important outcomes in their relationship are much more satisfied with and committed to their relationships. Although we notice negotiated or reciprocal exchange strategies in these couples, it could be that they see their relationship or their family as an instance of productive exchange.

Couples who successfully engage in the reciprocal exchanges are those who trust that their partners will not exploit them and who believe that the division of labor is fair. Although not analyzed here, we have data on the breakdown of responsibility in chores, in terms of percentages given by the couples. Preliminary analyses suggest that even in couples with similar percentages (e.g., a 90/10 split on child care and 60/40 on household chores), couples who engage in reciprocal exchange view how they split up tasks as more fair than couples who rely on negotiation in their relationships. In other words, it does not appear that the division of labor varies significantly across exchange types, but the interpretation of that division does. Couples involved in reciprocal relationships appear more satisfied not because their partners do *more*, but because they believe that their partners do *enough* (England & Shafer, 2007).

In our research, structural power dynamics prove significantly less important for relational outcomes than perceptions of shared responsibility.

Table 1. Couples' Prominent Exchange Strategies & Levels of Interdependence.

	Reciprocal	Negotiated
High interdependence	Andrea and Ronald	Caitlin and Jacob
	Bernadine and Allen	Jackie and Vince
	Brittany and Ron	Jodi and Michael ^a
	Caren and Garrett	Ryanne and Richard
	Carla and Ben	Olivia and Mason ^a
	Dana and Antione	
	Katrina and Peter	
	Larissa and Robert	
	Lydia and Matteo	
	Pamela and Nate	
	Sabrina and Aldo	
	Tonisha and Gary	
Low interdependence	Caroline and Joshua	Genevieve and Trent ^a
	Laura and Scott	Lisa and Matthew
	Marcia and Dante	Marta and David
	Magda and Malcolm	Nyah and Sam
	Penny and Tariq	Rosario and Roberto
	Stephanie and Darren	Robin and Allen
	Yana and Pablo	Sondra and Morris
		Katia and Daniel
	Celia and Nathan	

^aCouples made a conscious and notable switch from reciprocal exchange strategies to negotiation.

Whether the partners have access to alternatives or equal power, their perceptions of interdependence are more important than exchange frequency for producing positive emotions and integrative outcomes that stem from exchanges. Our results do suggest, however, that there should be increased attention to *perceptions* of structural power differences. Previous research on exchange treats power as objective, but future research should consider exploring subjective interpretations of power relationships as well.

Although we hesitate to make too strong of assertions with the data at hand, we believe that this research has additional implications for future work. We hope that our findings demonstrate the mutuality of Lawler and Molm's ideas on interdependence and reciprocity. Our results suggest that perceptions of interdependence, likely fostered by reciprocity or a sense of shared responsibility in making their families work, may be more important

than the objective interdependence inherent in negotiation. Future work in the laboratory should explicitly test the distinction and attempt to integrate mechanisms from both theories to build a more unified theory of relational outcomes and exchange forms.

There are two limitations to mention. First, our analyses are based on interview data that vary not only in quality between couples but also between interview waves. Although the interviews cover a variety of topics and we found them conducive to an exchange analysis, such an analysis was not originally envisioned by the Principal Investigators (PIs) and we may be missing important information on couples' exchange strategies and experiences. Second, the data collected are from a nonrepresentative sample of families. Although these families certainly face obstacles unique to their demographic, we find their accounts of family life typical of families across social spectrums (Table 1).

In conclusion, we believe that there are three important things to take away from this research. First, in family contexts, reciprocal exchange does seem to be better for integrative outcomes, supporting reciprocity theory. However, interdependence is a key piece of the puzzle and should be more pointedly considered in future research on the structure of reciprocity. Second, while the laboratory has provided rich theoretical development and mechanisms for both the affect theory of social exchange and the theory of reciprocity, other research methods may help illuminate the theory and mechanisms and work to stimulate ideas about new directions to explore. Finally, social exchange has a great deal to offer those investigating life outside the laboratory. It is our hope that this work stimulates others' interest in the application of recent work in social exchange not only to family but also work and occupations (e.g., Taylor & Pillemer, 2009) and other relevant domains.

NOTES

1. Whereas social fathers were included in interviews if the mother became romantically involved with someone who acted in a paternal capacity to the focal child, the same did not happen if the father of the focal child became romantically involved with another woman after the relationship ends with the focal child's mother. It is not clear why this is the case, but it is possibly because the mother is typically the parent who acts as the primary caregiver for children after biological parents break up or divorce.

2. Each set includes up to four waves of individual and couple interviews for a total of 12 interviews as well as interviewer notes on the interviews and couples.

3. Nine of our originally unmarried couples were legally wed before the final wave of interviews.
4. The level of education is not available for one of the fathers in our sample.
5. Dana and Antoine are a couple whose exchange patterns we classified as primarily reciprocal, but this 50-50 language was common throughout our interviews, regardless of the typical exchange processes involved.

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THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LEGITIMACY OF GROUPS AND THE MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES

Morris Zelditch

ABSTRACT

Constructing a theory of the legitimacy of groups, especially groups that mobilize the resources of their own members and provide pure or impure public goods such as collective action, raises some questions not encountered by theories of the legitimacy of acts, persons, or positions. Among these are: First, groups are typically nested in other groups. Groups nested in other groups may differ from each other both in their situations of action and in the larger social framework of norms, values, beliefs, practices, and procedures that guide action in them; or, in other words, in the two chief sources of their legitimacy. Does this pose a problem for the legitimacy of groups? If it does, with what consequences and under what conditions? Second, groups that mobilize the resources of their members for the purpose of providing them with pure or impure public goods have problems of both agency and collective action. Problems of agency and collective action make compliance with the claims made by the group on the resources of its members problematic. Even those willing to comply with them may be deterred by fear of the opportunism of others. Under what conditions do those who would be willing to comply were it not for fear of