Social Exchange Theory (*Thibaut and Kelley 1959*)

- Social exchange theory is an economic theory, meaning that it takes the view that social relationships are run in a similar way to a business – people are negotiating in order to get the best deal.
- It is based on the principals of operant conditioning since we form and maintain a relationship since they’re rewarding.
- We are deemed to be selfish since we want lots of rewards for ourselves and not many costs.
- Satisfaction occurs when the rewards (social status, companionship, sex, feel of want/value, emotional and financial support) outweigh the costs (loss of friendships, money, time, effort, disagreements) incurred.
- A relationship may end if the costs start to outweigh the rewards.

Levels of satisfaction depend on:

Comparison level (CL): Concerned with the past and the present; that is the comparison between the rewards and costs of the current relationships and what we have been used to in the past. If reference is compared favourably, we are motivated to stay in the relationship.

Comparison level for alternatives (CLalt): Concerned with the possible alternative relationships. Here, we compare the reference relationship with others which we could have been in. If we feel we could do better (whether that be imagined or real), we will be motivated to finish in a current relationship.

Stages of a LT Relationship:

Sampling – The couple explore the rewards and costs in a variety of relationships.

Bargaining – The couple ‘cost out’ the relationship and identify sources of profit and loss.

Commitment – The couple settle into the relationship – the exchange of rewards becomes relatively predictable.

Institutionalisation – The interactions are established and the couple have ‘settled down’.

Floyd (1994):

- Found that commitment develops when couples are satisfied with and feel rewarded in a relationship and when they perceive that equally or more attractive alternative relationships and not available to them.

Cate and Lloyd (1988):

- Found that level of rewards from a relationship is a determinant of satisfaction, the more reward we feel, the more satisfied we are.

Rusbult (1983):

- College students completed questionnaires over 7 months – kept notes on how satisfactory their relationships were, how it was compared to possible alternatives, how much they had invested in it, and how committed they felt into the relationship and whether it had ended.
- ‘Commitment’ was defined as ‘anything a person puts into a relationship that will be lost if they leave.'
Triver’s Theory

- This theory developed Bateman’s principle (TRIVERS IS THE BETTER THEORY), so that the entire investment made by parents, such as gestation, protection, care and feeding is taken into consideration, not just their gametes.
- Suggests that when the amount of energy that each sex must devote to reproduction and parental care is different, the sex with the greater burden will be choosier (women).
- Applies to animal and human behaviour. E.g. with animals, female fur seals are choosy, and with humans, females are choosy since the cost of an egg doesn’t stop with reproduction (invest heavily in supporting child, with a long gestation and dependency period).

Evidence to support:

**Hoffman et al (2007)**

- Found that female fur seals are particularly choosy when selecting a mate since males make no contributing beyond mating.
- Not only do they carefully discriminate between males according to size, behaviour and smell. But they are willing to travel up to 35 miles between colonies, to find the right male.
- Females select very carefully from available mates since they want the best biological contribution.

Females tend to take on the role of caregiver – only 1% of men take on significant parental responsibilities and stay at home to look after children.

Females ability to reproduce declines rapidly after about 30 years, some average females could expect to have a maximum of 12 pregnancies, whereas men produce sperm from 13-death. So whilst female fertility is limited by egg production and age, male fertility is only limited by the no. of females available to inseminate. Mistakes in mate choice for women could be costly, so they are very selective since they only have so long.

**Clark and Hatfield (1989)**

Attractive males and female students approached student of the opposite sex, and asked them if he/she would ‘Sleep with them tonight’.

- This offer was received much more eagerly by male students than by female students.
- 0% of females accepted, 75% of males accepted.
- This supports the view that males are easily persuaded to have sex, whereas women are choosier.
- Links to the idea that men wants to spread their genes, yet women only have a small window to have children, therefore, she will want to maximise her reproductive success by choosing the right male.

Evaluation

Obvious evidence that not all mating is long-term – men and women have short term relationships, one night stands and affairs. Lots of women that aren’t choosy and will sleep with anyone – could be explained by looking for better quality genes.

Many examples in the animal kingdom where sexes invest equally (bi-parental care). Pair of crested auklets for instance breed once a year, nesting on sea cuffs and sharing equally in incubation and feeding of young.
Cultural Differences in Relationships

Culture refers to things that make a society what it is, e.g. rules, laws, beliefs and norms.

2 types: individualistic, collectivist.

So far, research has concentrated on individualistic cultures, but there are differences.

Differences in Love

- Individualistic = strong tendency to regard love as more important than marriage.
- Collectivist = (romantic) love is not needed for marriage.
- **Levine**: positive correlation between perceived necessity of love and individualism.

Correlational – only 0.56 so not that strong. Can’t see cause and effect.

Voluntary/Involuntary

- Individualistic = have a choice in marriage
- Collectivist = have arranged marriages (most popular worldwide). India = 90% arranged marriages.
- Harris; Only 6/26 societies with evidence of romantic love gave individuals complete freedom of choice of marriage.

However, other research found that in individualistic cultures, parents still intervene and strive to influence choice. No difference in most respects. Can still say no with arranged marriages

Duration of Relationships

- Individualistic = divorce is much more common, have more short term relationships from a younger age (learning things before marriage)
- Collectivist = less divorce – much less tolerated. But divorce rate is rising.
- Goodwin: In china, divorce rate is less than 4% - regarded as shameful.
- Broadbar: Jews had greater marital stability

Jewish families in NY – collectivist subcultures, still westernised.

Large sample (4000).

Interviews – interviewer effect and demand characteristics.

Friendships

- Individualistic = work friends, family friends – different friends for different occasions.
- Collectivist = more strong family based friends.
- **Goodwin**: people in collectivist cultures tend to have fewer, but closer friendships than people in individualistic cultures.

Physical Attributes

- Anderson: Heavy bodies preferred in cultures with unreliable food supplies – better equip.