

do become “thingly.” Their social relations really are those of commodities (and their value). Human characteristics matter little; one’s “properties” as the bearer of commodities, especially labor power, do. This thing-like relation of commodity production dominates the workers actually engaged in production.

Reification links to Marx’s early concern with alienation, where the products and production process under private property are separated from and stand against their human producers. It is a real social process that must be overturned to put social production under the control of its immediate producers.

Lukács (1971) argued that reification created false consciousness, thwarting a spontaneous, workers’ class consciousness, supporting Lenin’s argument for a revolutionary, vanguard party. Other Marxists, like Gramsci and Korsch, argued that workers would, amid the contradictions of commodity production, break through reified, commodity fetishism and force social change.

SEE ALSO: Alienation; Commodities, Commodity Fetishism, and Commodification; Marx, Karl; Phenomenology

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relational cohesion theory

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Relational cohesion theory was designed to explain when and how people involved in exchange relations become committed to their

relationship. This extensive research program was developed by Edward Lawler, Jeongkoo Yoon, and Shane Thye and has become one of the most cumulative research programs in sociological social psychology (Lawler & Yoon 1993, 1996, 1998; Lawler et al. 2000). The theory predicts that dyads embedded in equal power relations within exchange networks are more likely to engage in repeated exchange relations than dyads embedded in more unequal power arrangements. These frequent successful exchange episodes are, in turn, predicted to lead to a higher frequency of experience of positive emotions. When individuals attempt to ascertain the source of positive and negative feelings, relational cohesion theory predicts that these positive feelings are interpreted as a product of the relationship by way of an attribution process. This serves to make the relationship a cognitively salient object (“setting it off” as distinct from other alternative relations) and to imbue it with positive affect. Thus the relationship becomes an independent object of emotional attachment for the individual, which helps create perceptions of their relation as a cohesive unit. This perceived *relational cohesion* is thought to result in a host of behavioral outcomes associated with relational *commitment*, such as staying in the relationship even when alternatives of equal value become available, starting new ventures with the current partner, and expressing positive regard for the partner in the form of unilateral gift-giving.

Relational cohesion theory began (Lawler & Yoon 1993, 1996) as an attempt to establish the conditions under which repeated exchange within dyads would lead to higher (or lower) rates of commitment. The initial insight of the theory at this stage consisted of the connection between the relative power differential within dyads and the probability of successful completion of exchange opportunities, which, in turn, led to more instances of commitment (answering the *when* question). Lawler and Yoon theorized that if agreements are more likely to occur when partners are more open to making concessions and when they are not subject to terms of agreement that they consider unfair, then equal power dyads should be able to complete more exchange opportunities than dyads in which one partner has an overwhelming power differential in relation to the other. Following Emerson

(1981), the theory conceptualizes and operationalizes power in terms of power-dependence theory: A is more powerful than B if A is less dependent on B than B is on A. Dependence is a function of the number of alternative exchange opportunities made available to A and B in the exogenously given network of connections between all of the actors and the distribution of resources throughout the network. Thus, A is more powerful than B if (1) she has a larger number of alternative exchange partners or (2) given an equal number of partners, A's partners are able to offer more valuable resources than B can offer. In this theory, power is conceptualized in structural terms, as a potential *capability* (i.e., the capacity to exclude a given number of potential partners from an exchange in a negatively connected network) inherent in the network, and is distinct from specific instances of *power use* (i.e., the actual act of exclusion). Thus one position may have a lot of power but display very few instances of power use. Equal power is more likely to lead to commitment due to the higher likelihood of completion of successful exchange. Exchanges between equal power dyads are less likely to exhibit concessions and more likely to feature satisfactory terms than unequal power exchanges.

STRUCTURAL COHESION

While initially (1993) using a simple equal power/unequal power distinction to predict frequency of exchange and relational commitment, Lawler and Yoon (1996, 1998; Lawler et al. 2000) later generalized this classification by introducing the concept of *structural cohesion*. In contrast to relational cohesion, structural cohesion is defined as the structural potential for instrumental cooperation in an exchange relation. Instrumental cooperation exists in an exchange relation when each actor is more likely to benefit from achieving agreement in that relation than by resorting to one of her alternatives. Lawler and Yoon further differentiate between the total power inherent in a dyad (the *sum* of the power of actor A and actor B) and the relative power of the dyad (the *ratio* of the power of actor A over that of actor B). In Lawler and Yoon's formulation, structural cohesion is a positive (curvilinear) function of the total power

of the dyad and a negative function of the relative power of one actor over the other. Thus, maximum structural cohesion should exist on equal power dyads with high total power. Lawler and Yoon (1996) reason that agreement is easier to reach when power inequality is low (one actor is prevented from taking advantage of the other, which results in refusals to reach agreement) and total power is high (which results in greater expected benefits for both parties). Further repeated mutual agreement increases actors' mutual dependence.

Commitment in relational cohesion theory is defined as the attachment that the individual feels to a collective entity, such as a relationship, a group, or an organization. Attachment in this sense can involve a wide variety of interests, from purely instrumental interests (when the actor is interested in an inflow of valued material resources that the relationship makes possible) to emotional and normatively mediated attachment. When the actor is committed to the collective due to the perceived costs of leaving the relationship, she is said to be instrumentally committed. When the actor remains in the relationship largely due to an emotional attachment, she is said to be affectively committed to it. Finally, when the actor remains in the relationship because such membership is normatively sanctioned and perceived by the actor as an obligation that she must fulfill, she is said to be normatively committed to the collective. Relational cohesion theory highlights the role of emotional commitment as an explanatory mechanism that sheds light on why actors are likely to stay in certain frequently activated exchange relations. The theory highlights a process whereby a relationship initially based on purely instrumental motives and commitments comes to acquire expressive value and is transformed into one founded, at least partially, on emotional and cathectic sources of commitment. A common behavioral indicator of commitment is based on Kanter's concept of "stay behavior" or forgoing forming new partnerships even when these become available. More recent empirical tests of the theory have come to highlight other more expressive indicators of commitment (i.e., gift-giving).

In order to tackle the *how* question, relational cohesion theory posits an affective mechanism: the completion of a joint task (such as an

exchange agreement) is seen as a mutual accomplishment which makes the participants feel good, by giving them an "emotional buzz." Frequent successful interactions result in a consistently generated stream of mild and shortlived positive emotions. These positive emotions unleash an attribution process, which culminates in the relationship being considered the source of the positive emotions. Lawler and Yoon (1993, 1996, 1998) draw on a psychological model of emotions known as the circumplex model. The circumplex model distinguishes between two principal dimensions of emotional experience: pleasure and arousal. Arousal can be positive or negative, while pleasure can be present or absent. Lawler and Yoon treat interest/excitement as a positive form of arousal that is distinct from pleasure. Interest/excitement is a motivational state of curiosity and fascination; it is equivalent to feeling energized, while pleasure is closer to feeling satisfied. Interest/excitement is based on expectation of future rewards, while pleasure/satisfaction is a product of rewards received. Experimental evidence has shown that pleasure/satisfaction is a more consistent product of exchange frequency and predictor of relational cohesion than interest/excitement. Lawler and Yoon see these two emotions as representative of different attitudes to social exchange, one backwards looking and focused on rewards already obtained (pleasure) and the other forward looking and focused on anticipated accomplishments (interest). They theorize (1996) that it is a possibility that pleasure is more strongly connected to routine, less complex joint tasks, while interest is a more consistent product of complex, non-routine exchange contexts.

Relational cohesion theory is built on an impressive empirical record, which has repeatedly confirmed its basic premises. Laboratory studies have shown that structural cohesion leads to higher frequency of exchange, and that the effect of exchange frequency on relational commitment is primarily mediated by positive emotions and the effect of the latter on the perceived cohesiveness of the relationship by the participants. Empirical tests of the theory have also uncovered new findings, such as a possible alternative pathway toward commitment by way of the reduction of uncertainty (the traditional explanation of commitment in

exchange theory), and a small residual direct effect of frequency of exchange on commitment that does not operate through the affective pathway (interpreted as an operant conditioning effect). A recent refinement and empirical assessment of the theory (Lawler 2001) showed that indeed two alternative pathways toward commitment do appear to exist, but the uncertainty reduction path toward commitment *does not* operate by inducing greater relational cohesion, and does not affect the more expressive forms of commitment behavior. Further, positive emotions lead to higher levels of cohesion which result in more commitment even after the effect of predictability (as a measure of uncertainty reduction) has been held constant. However, predictability of the relationship does have a direct effect on the most risky indices of commitment (such as engaging in a new joint venture with a high probability of defection on the parts of other participants), indicating that predictability might have a basis in trust. Thus, there appears to exist a *dual process* which leads to different forms of commitment: a trust-based cognitive process that goes from frequency to predictability to willingness to engage in risky new ventures, and an emotion/cohesion-based process that produces stay behaviors and expressive forms of commitment behavior.

Relational cohesion theory goes beyond the standard view in exchange theory that commitment is a direct effect of uncertainty reduction processes (Emerson 1981). In the traditional view, actors are motivated to search for stability and predictability in exchange relations, since exchange contexts are characterized by the basic trust dilemma where actors cannot be sure of the motives of their exchange partners, and thus leave themselves open for potential malfeasance on the part of their partners at every exchange opportunity. To this largely cognitive non-emotional account of the process of commitment, relational cohesion theory adds an emotional component (Lawler & Thye 1999): the completion of successful exchanges, beyond serving to reduce uncertainty, is an independent source of positive emotions which come to be attributed to the exchange relation itself. Thus, from the actor's point of view, the exchange relation comes to be an independent source of emotional gratification, and thus becomes a valued object in itself.

The theory has its classical roots in the work of George Homans, and in the power–dependence exchange theory of Richard Emerson (1981). From Homans, relational cohesion theory draws its key insight connecting rates of interaction and positive sentiments. From Emerson, the theory takes its specific form as an *affect theory of social exchange* (Lawler 2001), which conceives of the network of exchange opportunities (the initial setup determining who can exchange with whom) as the primary exogenous factor which brings certain pairs of actors to interact more frequently than others. The theory draws on another wing of the classical tradition, the social constructionist work of Berger and Luckmann on the conditions that produce “incipient institutionalization.” In relational cohesion theory, the process that results in the relationship acquiring an objective standing from the individual’s viewpoint is analogous to the process of institutionalization from repetitive behavioral patterns outlined in Berger and Luckmann. Finally, the connection between affect and the process through which social relationships come to acquire an objective, constraining force on the individual harks back to Durkheim’s pioneering connection between joint ritual activity, emotional arousal (“collective effervescence”), and the emergence of the group as an overarching, independent social reality. This connection between affect, arousal, and emotional energy is also present in Collins’s neo-Durkheimian theory of interaction rituals, which see these repeated sets of affect-producing interactions as the microfoundation of larger social orders.

The theory has a host of implications and explanatory utility in terms of accounting for real-world phenomena. The most obvious application of the theory is to the explanation of the stickiness of transactions in real-world markets, which, in contrast to the neoclassical image of disconnected actors that come together for one-shot transactions and which have equal probabilities of interaction with any exchange partner, show instead that exchange transactions tend to increase the probability of future transactions, and that actors become involved in exchange relations and come to regard them in terms that go beyond the purely instrumental benefits that they bring in. Further, the theory can also be used to explain when and how people

become attached (and disengaged) from real groups, organizations, and networks (Lawler 2001), thus forming the basis for a general theory of group commitment and affective attachment to collectivities.

SEE ALSO: Emerson, Richard M.; Homans, George; Power-Dependence Theory; Social Exchange Theory; Social Psychology

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reliability

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Reliability refers, at a general level, to *consistency* of measurement. Consistency can be conceptualized somewhat differently for different forms of reliability estimation, but in all cases reliability is focused on whether a measurement yields consistent results.

Such consistency is critical to research practice, where variables must be operationalized