

Chapter 36

Prorelationship Motivation

AN INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY ANALYSIS OF SITUATIONS WITH CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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Sometimes involvement in relationships is easy and pleasurable: Communication is effortless, trust is strong, and interaction is suffused with joy and laughter. In such circumstances, partners' preferences are compatible, and neither partner is likely to behave badly. But at other times, relationships are thorny: Conflict emerges, laughter is in short supply, and extra-relationship temptation is fierce. In such circumstances, partners suffer incompatible preferences, and they frequently have to exert themselves to control their less admirable, gut-level impulses (e.g., forgoing the impulse to lash out at the partner or to flirt with a coworker). When gut-level desires conflict with relational well-being, why do people sometimes override their selfish impulses, instead behaving in ways that promote relational interests?

The goal of this chapter is to present an interdependence-based theoretical analysis of self-oriented versus relationship-oriented moti-

vation. The chapter proceeds in four major sections. First, we define *prorelationship motivation* and describe its emergence from interpersonal dynamics. Second, we review the important role of situation structure in understanding this type of motivation. Third, we examine the relevance of temporal processes to understanding prorelationship motivation. And fourth, we consider the potential benefits and dangers of such motivation.

WHAT IS PRORELATIONSHIP MOTIVATION?

Prorelationship motivation describes behavioral preferences that are driven by the desire to benefit one's relationship or partner, despite the fact that enacting such behavior conflicts with one's immediate, gut-level behavioral impulses. For example, if Eleanor wants to watch her alma mater play in the Final Four, but James wants her to accompany him to his cousin's

wedding, her prorelationship motivation would be manifested as willingness to skip the game and attend the wedding. Or if Eleanor says something rude, and James is tempted to be equally nasty in return, his prorelationship motivation would be manifested as the inclination to resist retaliating (which would yield escalating conflict), and instead to react in a neutral or considerate manner.

Forgiveness as an Example of Prorelationship Motivation

Many empirical studies have examined situations in which individuals experience prorelationship motivation despite gut-level impulses to the contrary. As an illustrative example, we review recent findings regarding forgiveness. Forgiveness becomes a relevant interpersonal phenomenon when one partner betrays the other, with *betrayal* defined as "the perceived violation by a partner of an implicit or explicit relationship-relevant norm" (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002, p. 957). Because the victim frequently experiences such norm violations as moral transgressions, betrayals create an interpersonal debt (Exline & Baumeister, 2000). Perhaps for this reason, immediate impulses in response to betrayal are often retaliatory and vengeful (Finkel et al., 2002; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; Rusbult, Davis, Finkel, Hannon, & Olsen, 2006). Although vengeful impulses may well have some functional value (e.g., reinforcing social norms), it is clear that if a relationship is to flourish in the wake of the betrayal, the victim must find a way to get beyond these impulses.

Moving beyond immediate, retaliatory impulses requires *forgiveness*, defined as "the victim's resumption of prebetrayal behavioral tendencies—as the tendency to forego vengeance and other destructive patterns of interaction, instead behaving toward the perpetrator in a positive and constructive manner" (Finkel et al., 2002, p. 958). Forgiveness rests on prorelationship motivation; individuals are especially likely to forgive a betrayal to the degree that they care about the longevity and well-being of their relationship (Finkel et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 1998). In short, experiencing a betrayal by a close partner illustrates central phenomena relevant to prorelationship motivation: The betrayal frequently leads to retaliatory and vengeful impulses (or *desire* to ex-

act revenge), but prorelationship motivational factors can override these impulses in favor of forgiving responses.

Sources of Prorelationship Motivation

What "drives" prorelationship motivation? Interdependence theory does not identify a single, overriding source of prorelationship motivation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Rather, the theory suggests that humans possess multiple goals and needs that are likely to vary across situations, partners, and time. The broader considerations that underlie prorelationship motivation may include any or all of the following: motives centering on desire to protect a relationship upon which one is deeply dependent (e.g., strong commitment); motives centering on desire to maximize one's long-term well-being by promoting congenial interaction (e.g., temporally extended positive reciprocity); motives centering on desire to benefit the outcomes of a partner with whom one's well-being is closely linked (e.g., self-other merger, such that promoting a partner's outcomes is tantamount to promoting one's own); or motives centering on desire to "do the right thing," regardless of the consequences to the self (e.g., altruism).

SITUATION STRUCTURE AND PRORELATIONSHIP MOTIVATION

Our central thesis is that the goals and motives underlying prorelationship motivation can be properly understood only via an analysis of the specific situation in which a given interaction takes place. In this section we examine key structural properties of the situations dyadic partners may confront—emphasizing both the power of situations to influence motivation, and the interplay between personal characteristics and situation structure in predicting prorelationship motivation.

The Power of the Situation

Although social psychologists frequently pay homage to "the power of the situation" in predicting human behavior, systematic analysis of the meaning of "situation" is rare. More than 70 years ago, Lewin (1936) argued that behavior (*B*) is a function not only of characteristics of the person (*P*), but also of that person's pres-

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ent social environment (E). These ideas are summarized in his famous dictum, $B = f(P, E)$. It is readily apparent why we must analyze characteristics of the person (P) if we are to apprehend the character of motivation: How could a comprehensive model of human motivation ignore such person-level factors as the drives to survive, to reproduce, to feel safe, to experience close involvement with others, and the like? But examining the person is only part of the story; understanding human motivation also requires a systematic analysis of social situations (see Kelley et al., 2003; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). We adopt a strong form of this argument: Except in extreme cases (e.g., starvation, imminent physical threat), understanding relationship-relevant influences on motivation virtually *requires* an understanding of the social situation in which human behavior transpires.

Recent work in the interdependence tradition proposes an important extension of Lewin's famous dictum. Kelley and Holmes (2006; see also Holmes, 2002) adopt a truly interpersonal analysis of human behavior, suggesting that understanding a given social interaction (I) not only requires knowledge of a given actor (A), but also knowledge of the interaction partner (B) and the specific situation in which their interaction transpires (S). These ideas are summarized in an inherently interpersonal dictum regarding behavior, $I = f(S, A, B)$ (also described as the "SABI" model).

The SABI model has important implications for understanding prorelationship motivation. Whereas many perspectives on social motivation focus exclusively on characteristics of the individual who experiences a given motive, interdependence theorists emphasize three classes of variables: the individual (A), the partner (B), and the situation (S). For example, imagine that we want to predict whether Eleanor (A) will forgive James (B) for talking about their sex life during a dinner party with her family (S). If Eleanor feels insecure in her relationship with James (A), she may perceive his inconsiderate comments as globally rejecting and therefore virtually unforgivable. If James is relatively indifferent to their relationship (B), he may argue that the incident was meaningless and conclude that Eleanor is overreacting. Under circumstances such as these, Eleanor is unlikely to forgive James.

The power of an interdependence theory analysis of social motivation is illustrated by

observing that Eleanor's motivation and her interaction with James are likely to differ markedly as a function of changes in any one of the three elements in the SABI model. For example, imagine that James's revelations about their sex life take place during a raucous night on the town with their buddies, rather than at a dinner party with her family (S). Or imagine that Eleanor feels completely secure in her relationship with James (A). Or imagine that James is strongly committed to maintaining his relationship (B), and offers a heartfelt apology and profuse amends. In interactions involving one or more of these modified circumstances, Eleanor may well find her way to complete forgiveness.

Why Study Situation Structure?

There are two reasons why an analysis of prorelationship motivation requires an understanding of situation structure. First, situations sometimes exert strong effects on individual behavior—effects that are largely independent of the interactants' personal characteristics and motives. For example, most people will forgive another person who bumps into them during a crowded subway ride. This does not mean that most people are dispositionally forgiving; it merely means that forgiveness is a near-universal response to this situation.

A second reason for analyzing situation structure is that particular situations afford specific dyadic problems and opportunities. That is, specific situations (1) render some motives relevant and others irrelevant (e.g., the issue of trust is irrelevant when partners' preferences are in perfect harmony); and (2) allow individuals the opportunity to express or suppress relevant motives (e.g., James cannot demonstrate that he is trustworthy when his outcomes are in perfect harmony with Eleanor's). The term *affordances* describes the possible behaviors, motives, and goals that a particular situation makes possible or may activate in the interactants (Holmes, 2002). For example, if your former friend Bill makes it his sworn mission in life to make you miserable, offering to buy him a beer at the local pub might not be a viable option for resolving the conflict. In contrast, if Bill is angry with you but seems receptive to working things out, offering to buy him a beer might be an effective means of working through problems.

How Interactants Influence One Another's Outcomes

Thus far, we have characterized situations in a rather informal manner. However, interdependence theory offers a formal, systematic means of analyzing situation structure. In particular, interdependence theorists employ *outcome matrices* to depict both the behavioral options available to each interactant, and the outcomes that will accrue to each individual as a function of both individuals' behavior. For example, Figure 36.1 depicts a variant of the well-known prisoner's dilemma situation (Rusbult & Arriaga, 2000). The house that Eleanor and James share has not been cleaned in several weeks, and both are becoming dissatisfied with its griminess. If they continue to avoid cleaning, both partners will experience poor outcomes (0), as depicted in the lower right cell of Figure 36.1. Given that neither enjoys cleaning, both would prefer that the other clean the house alone (+8); however, each would be irritated by cleaning the house without the other's help (-4). If they clean the house together, both Eleanor and James would enjoy the clean house, and each would experience the cleaning chore as less aversive (+4).

A systematic analysis of prototypical outcome structures allows researchers to explore the implications of a diverse array of interdependence situations (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Given that an outcome matrix (such as Figure 36.1) represents a 2×2 table of the outcomes

that will accrue to each person as a result of both partners' behavioral choices, it is possible to conceptualize the numbers in the matrix by using analysis-of-variance logic. From Eleanor's perspective, a main effect of columns represents her *actor control*, or her ability to exert over control her own outcomes; Eleanor can improve her outcomes by 4 units by not cleaning the house rather than cleaning it, regardless of James's behavior (see Figure 36.1). A main effect of rows represents *partner control* over Eleanor's outcomes, or James's ability to exert control over Eleanor's outcomes; James can improve Eleanor's outcomes by 8 units by cleaning the house rather than not cleaning it, regardless of Eleanor's behavior.

An interaction effect represents *joint control*, or the degree to which Eleanor's outcomes are influenced by the combined behavioral choices of James and herself. In Figure 36.1, James and Eleanor exert no joint control over one another's outcomes. In contrast, Figure 36.2 depicts a new situation in which James and Eleanor experience joint control over one another, but have no actor control or partner control. In this new example, Eleanor and James are deciding at which restaurant they would like to dine on Saturday night. Neither partner has any absolute preference about where they dine (there is no actor control), and neither has any absolute preference about how the partner should behave (there is no partner control). Both have a strong preference, however, to dine together (there is strong joint control). In this

		Eleanor	
		Clean the House	Don't Clean the House
James	Clean the House	4	8
	Don't Clean the House	-4	0

FIGURE 36.1. Prisoner's dilemma situation: Cleaning the house.

		Eleanor	
		Bangkok Balcony	Road to Karakash
James	Bangkok Balcony	8	0
	Road to Karakash	0	8

FIGURE 36.2. Coordination situation: Where to eat Saturday night?

example, James has joint control over Eleanor, because switching from one restaurant to the other makes it highly desirable for her to change her selection as well. (The interdependence patterns in Figures 36.1 and 36.2 are *symmetrical*, so the analysis would be identical if we were to describe James's outcomes rather than Eleanor's.)

Four Properties of Situation Structure

In addition to parsing the ways in which interactants can exert control over their own and one another's outcomes, interdependence theorists also define four properties of situation structure (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The first property, *level of dependence*, describes the degree to which an individual's outcomes are influenced by the partner's actions. When Eleanor's outcomes in a given interaction are determined primarily by actor control, she experiences low levels of dependence on James; she can directly control her own outcomes without being influenced by James's behavior. In contrast, when her outcomes are determined primarily by partner control or joint control, she experiences high dependence on James.

The concepts of dependence and power are inextricably linked: Eleanor's level of dependence on James is equivalent to James's power over Eleanor (Huston, 1983). At the same time, power is not always usable. James possesses *usable power* over Eleanor to the extent that

(1) when he exercises partner control or joint control over Eleanor's outcomes, his own outcomes are not harmed; and (2) Eleanor cannot obtain better outcomes in an alternative relationship. For example, although James may have the wherewithal to exert power by yelling at Eleanor in a restaurant, he is unlikely to exercise this power because (1) he himself would suffer poor outcomes if he were to engage in such an unseemly public act; and/or (2) if James were to provide her with such terribly poor outcomes, Eleanor might well dump him and opt for an alternative relationship. It is appropriate, therefore, to construe level of dependence in terms of the range of outcomes through which James can *realistically* move Eleanor, with the upper end being defined by the very best outcomes he can cause her to experience, and the lower end being defined by the poorest outcomes he can cause her to experience (without harming himself substantially or causing her to opt out of the relationship).

How does level of dependence influence motivation? Increasing dependence tends to activate increased situation- and person-relevant attention and cognition, in that when Eleanor's outcomes are governed by James's actions, she will dedicate considerable mental resources to discerning what the situation is "about" and to developing expectancies regarding James's future behavior (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Fiske, 1993). Given that dependence constitutes reliance on a partner for fulfilling important needs, increasing dependence tends to promote

commitment to relationships (Bui, Peplau, & Hill, 1996; Rusbult, 1983). Also, and as noted earlier, individuals who are highly dependent on a given relationship for good outcomes are likely to experience greater preresolution motivation than are those who are less dependent. For example, highly dependent individuals are more willing to accommodate when their partners behave badly, and are often willing to make personal sacrifices to benefit their relationships (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Van Lange et al., 1997). Moreover, because dependence sometimes entails vulnerability, it may inspire motivated forms of cognition such as positive illusions and downward social comparison. For example, Eleanor may quell feelings of insecurity by translating James's faults into virtues, or by identifying flaws in other relationships that are not evident in her own (Murray & Holmes, 1993; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000). In short, situations involving high levels of dependence afford cognition, motivation, communication, and interaction centering on issues of comfort (vs. discomfort) with interdependence and independence.

The second property of situation structure, *mutuality of dependence*, describes the degree to which partners experience equal levels of dependence upon one another. When Eleanor is dependent on the relationship for good outcomes but James is not, the relationship is characterized by unilateral dependence; when the partners are similarly dependent, the relationship is characterized by mutual dependence. Again, note that Eleanor's dependence on James is equivalent to James's power over her; if she is unilaterally dependent, then he has power over her, but she has none over him.

How does mutuality of dependence influence preresolution motivation? When one partner is highly dependent but the other is not, the more dependent partner generally experiences greater preresolution motivation than the less dependent partner. For example, the less dependent partner tends to exert greater control over decision making and the allocation of resources, whereas the more dependent partner tends to carry the greater burden of interaction costs (forgiveness, accommodation, sacrifice) and is more vulnerable to abandonment (Attridge, Berscheid, & Simpson, 1995; Rusbult, 1983; Witcher, 1999). Therefore, nonmutual dependence tends to magnify the

dependent partner's situation- and person-relevant attention and cognition, along with other adaptations geared toward reducing vulnerability. For example, when Eleanor is unilaterally dependent, she is likely to be very attentive to the ways in which her outcomes may be affected by James's actions, to predicting his probable behavior, and to engaging in motivated cognition that may reduce her feelings of vulnerability and anxiety. In contrast, interactions characterized by mutual dependence tend to be more stable and congenial, yielding benefits that accrue from balance of power: more tranquil and positive emotional experience (less anxiety and guilt), reduced use of threat or coercion, and more reciprocal and harmonious interaction (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Fiske, 1993). In short, situations with nonmutual dependence afford the expression of comfort (or discomfort) with vulnerability on the part of the dependent partner, along with comfort (or discomfort) with responsibility on the part of the powerful partner.

A prototypical example of the consequences of unilateral dependence (and of a circumstance where the situation may well overpower personality differences) is the *demand-withdraw pattern* of interaction, involving repeated demands for change by wives and repeated withdrawal behaviors from husbands (Christensen & Heavey, 1993; see Holmes & Murray, 1996). Traditional explanations of this phenomenon might suggest that this pattern of behaviors emerges from fundamental sex differences that cause women to nag and men to withdraw. But a more compelling explanation of the demand-withdraw pattern is that situation structure largely dictates interaction behavior. Because husbands traditionally hold more usable power in many domains, wives are dependent upon their husbands' fairness (e.g., in performing household chores). If a wife perceives that the situation is unfair, her primary recourse is to try to convince her husband to change, which may cause her to complain that the status quo is unfair. In contrast, he may not want to change a status quo that benefits him, so he may try to avoid discussing the topic. In this analysis of the demand-withdraw pattern (Christensen & Heavey, 1993), the situation structure dictates both that the husband has domain-specific power over the wife and that he is more satisfied with his outcomes in this domain (e.g., household

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chores) than she is with hers. Given this situation structure, the partners' behavior would be easy to predict even without knowing any information about their personality characteristics or motives. The structure of the situation exerts a powerful influence on them; most people facing the same situation, regardless of their gender, may well experience similar motives and exhibit similar behaviors.

The third property of situation structure, *basis of dependence*, describes the way in which partners influence one another's outcomes—whether an individual's dependence emerges from partner control (James's behavior directly controls Eleanor's outcomes, regardless of what she does) or joint control (by changing his behavior, James can make Eleanor want to change hers). Whether dependence on a given relationship is characterized by partner control or joint control leads to important social consequences. For example, when partners face situations characterized by mutual partner control (which renders prorelationship motivation highly relevant), it is frequently adaptive to engage in temporally extended patterns of exchange behaviors ("You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours"), in which James helps Eleanor achieve good outcomes in the present interaction under the assumption that she will help him achieve good outcomes in a future interaction (Axelrod, 1984; Clark & Mills, 1993). In contrast, when partners face situations characterized by mutual joint control, they are less dependent on temporally extended behavioral patterns; rather, they focus their efforts on coordinating their behaviors in such a manner as to maximize efficiency ("You drive, I'll read the map"; see Finkel et al., 2006). In short, basis of dependence affords the expression of motivations relevant to morality and fairness (partner control) versus coordination and assertiveness (joint control).

The first three properties of situation structure (level of dependence, mutuality of dependence, and basis of dependence) pertain to partners' dependence on one another. The fourth property, *covariation of interests*, describes the degree to which *outcomes* from specific behavioral patterns are mutually beneficial rather than unilaterally beneficial. If behavioral patterns that result in good outcomes for Eleanor also generate good outcomes for James, then they experience positive covariation. In contrast, if behavioral patterns that result in good outcomes for her generate poor outcomes for

him, they experience negative covariation. If Eleanor's positivity of outcomes is unrelated to James's, they experience zero covariation. Examining the within-cell associations between the two persons' outcomes reveals the degree to which they experience compatible versus incompatible preferences. For example, compare the situations depicted in Figures 36.1 and 36.2. Whereas Figure 36.1 depicts a situation in which Eleanor and James experience moderately negative covariation of interests, Figure 36.2 depicts a situation in which they experience positive covariation of interests. The situation depicted in Figure 36.1 affords the expression of either self-centered goals or relationship-oriented goals, and as a result inspires predictable patterns of cognition (e.g., close monitoring of the partner's behavior) and affect (e.g., fear, greed, gratitude) (Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994). The situation depicted in Figure 36.2 affords none of these processes; in the bizarre circumstance where the partners fail to coordinate their behaviors to their mutual benefit (i.e., they end up at different restaurants), predictable patterns of cognition (e.g., puzzling over where coordination broke down) and affect (e.g., frustration) differ markedly from those experienced in the former situation.

The association of covariation of outcomes with prorelationship motivation is complex. If partners experience perfectly positive covariation, then the question of prorelationship motivation is irrelevant: What is good for the self is likewise good for the partner, so people do not think about whether they wish to behave well toward one another, and one partner does not worry about whether the other will behave well. At the other extreme, if partners experience perfectly negative covariation, prorelationship motivation becomes irrelevant, because the costs of forgoing self-interest are so high—at least within the context of a particular interaction.¹ In fact, voluntary relationships are likely to dissolve when they are characterized by negative covariation across many situations. Thus, situations with moderate covariation of interests afford the expression of prorelationship versus self-interested motives (e.g., Figure 36.1). In such circumstances, partners' gut-level impulses conflict, but there is plenty of opportunity for them to override these impulses to benefit one another.

Indeed, although situations with moderately negative covariation may be difficult to navigate, they hold an important place in relation-

ship development, because they represent the arena in which partners develop (or fail to develop) trust in one another (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Eleanor comes to trust James when she observes him engaging in behaviors that are beneficial to her, despite the fact that doing so flies in the face of his immediate preferences (e.g., skipping a Super Bowl party with friends to spend time with her family). Witnessing James make such a sacrifice allows Eleanor to conclude that he cares about her. In short, a partner's prorelationship behavior in situations of moderately negative covariation cause the individual to develop greater trust, thereby enhancing the quality of the relationship (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999).

TEMPORAL PROCESSES AND PRORELATIONSHIP MOTIVATION

Thus far we have emphasized interactions that take place at a single moment in time (e.g., the examples represented by the outcome matrices in Figures 36.1 and 36.2). We now turn our attention to temporally extended processes relevant to understanding prorelationship motivation.

Making the Transition from One Situation to the Next

A shortcoming of outcome matrices as theoretical devices is that they only represent snapshots in time, thereby failing to incorporate any of the richness associated with examining relational processes as they develop over time. When researchers are studying prorelationship motivation in close relationships, this is a serious limitation. Interdependence should be conceptualized not only in terms of the immediate outcomes produced by patterns of behavior in a particular situation, but also in terms of the future situations (interdependence structures) that are made available or eliminated as a consequence of present behaviors (Kelley, 1984). For example, in the course of an extended conflict, later behavioral options and outcomes are powerfully influenced by whether, earlier in the conflict, Eleanor has apologized for being inconsiderate rather than insulting James by claiming that he is overly sensitive. In the former case, James may find that hugging Eleanor is a highly available, desirable behavioral option; in the latter, hugging may not be an option for James (or at least not a desirable one).

In understanding prorelationship motivation, there are at least two important implications of the fact that behaviors enacted in the present influence the future situations partners face. First, individuals can enact behaviors in the present that are designed to benefit the relationship or the partner in the future. Second, taking a long-term view of one's relationship allows partners to engage in reciprocity over time. Illustrating the former point, Eleanor may work 80 hours this week to ensure that next week she will not have to bring work with her on a shared vacation. Illustrating the latter, Eleanor and James may decide that they will alternate who gets to select the film for their regular Saturday night date; both Eleanor and James recognize that their relationship is enhanced when both partners' needs are met, and that alternating film choices is an effective means of assuring mutual need fulfillment.

The Transformation Process

Of course, the temporal processes relevant to understanding prorelationship motivation are not limited to the subsequent situations people create (vs. eliminate) as a consequence of their earlier behavioral choices. Additional temporal processes transpire inside people's heads as they analyze and reinterpret their behavioral options in terms of the broader considerations and values to which they are committed (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). That is, temporal processes are relevant to understanding interactions even in the sort of snapshot situations represented by outcome matrices; in both temporally extended interactions and one-shot matrix-like interactions, individuals may subjectively reevaluate situation structure prior to enacting behaviors.

How does this process work? Interdependence theorists distinguish between the given situation and the effective situation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The *given situation* describes the impact on the interactants' outcomes if both were to behave in accord with their own immediate, gut-level behavioral preferences. These outcomes are "given" in that they are not influenced by regard for the partner's preferences, long-term relational concerns, and the like. Individuals sometimes behave in accord with their gut-level, given preferences. Such behavior is especially likely when there are no complex exogenous issues to consider (e.g., "How will this behavior affect my relationship in the long run?"), when an individual lacks the

ability to control gut-level behavioral urges (Finkel & Campbell, 2001), or when effortful cognitive processes cause the individual to conclude that gut-level preferences are an exact match with deeply processed preferences.

Behavioral impulses are often altered, however, by broader considerations—by concerns extending beyond the gut-level preferences people experience on the basis of the given situation. Acting on the basis of broader considerations results from a *transformation process*, whereby individuals reconceptualize the given situation so they can be responsive to issues such as strategic concerns, long-term goals, or the desire to influence a partner's outcomes (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Outcome values resulting from the transformation process constitute the partners' *effective situation*; their effective preferences guide nonimpulsive behavior.

For example, if Eleanor and James decide that they will enact whatever behaviors yield the best combined outcomes for the two of them (a transformation termed *MaxJoint*), they can reconceptualize the situation depicted in Figure 36.1. This transformation process is depicted in Figure 36.3. The left side of Figure 36.3 reproduces the given situation Eleanor and James confront (from Figure 36.1); the right side portrays their transformed preferences (*MaxJoint* preferences, wherein each person's effective preferences take into account the sum of both partners' outcomes). After transforming the given situation, both partners experience a clear preference for cleaning the house together, because this option maximizes collective outcomes.

Individuals vary in the degree to which they exhibit different types of transformations, as well as in the likelihood of engaging in any transformation at all. Some people (termed *individualists*) are likely to pursue their simple self-interest, acting on the basis of their given situation preferences. Of course, the theoretical universe of possible transformations is infinite. But realistically, a limited set of relevant transformations is readily available to the interactants for a particular interdependence pattern. Given that the topic at hand is prorelationship motivation, we consider the transformation options available to partners facing situations with conflicting interests, such as the situation illustrated in Figure 36.1. Although some theorists recognize a large number of possible transformation options (e.g., Bornstein et al., 1983), we follow Van Lange's (2000) lead in emphasizing four of them: (1) *MaxJoint*, which maximizes partners' joint outcomes; (2) *MinDiff*, which minimizes differences between partners' outcomes, regardless of the absolute level of these outcomes; (3) *MaxOther*, which maximizes outcomes for the other partner; and (4) *MaxRel*, which maximizes the superiority of the individual's outcomes relative to the other partner's. The first three options are prorelationship transformations; they psychologically alter the given situation to ensure that collective interests are served (*MaxJoint*), that outcomes are fair (*MinDiff*), or that the partner is benefited (*MaxOther*). The fourth option can be construed as a selfish, or antirelationship, transformation; it psychologically alters the given situation to ensure that the indi-

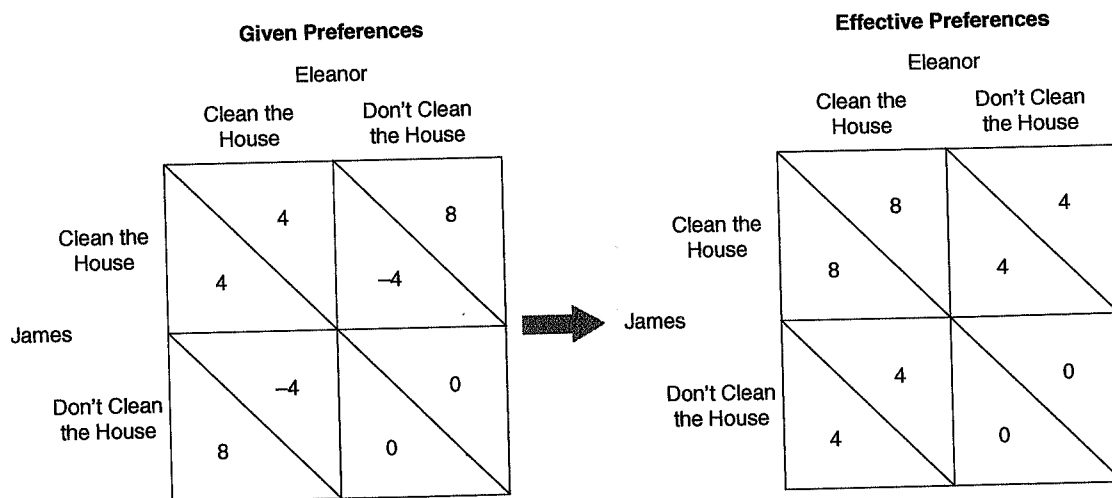


FIGURE 36.3. Prorelationship transformation: *MaxJoint* transformation of motivation.

vidual is advantaged relative to the partner (MaxRel).

One unexplored issue regarding the transformation process concerns the degree to which it can become fully automated over time. For example, is it possible that as a consequence of interacting with James for 30 years, Eleanor undergoes virtually automatic prorelationship transformation if James forgets her birthday? Rather than experiencing an immediate retaliatory impulse, Eleanor may come to experience immediate forgiveness, automatically assuming that James's forgetfulness is attributable to extraneous causes or extenuating circumstances (e.g., James is suffering a bad spell at work).

How might such a process transpire? When they initially confront a new interdependence situation, individuals experience it as a specific opportunity or problem to be addressed. They can either act impulsively (on the basis of their automatic, given situation preferences) or deliberately consider their various options. Repeatedly engaging in cognitively laborious transformations (i.e., consciously and diligently considering their response options, and the implications thereof) is costly and effortful. Early in a relationship, using cognitive resources in this way may well make sense; among other benefits, it allows the individual to determine whether the partner is reliable and cares about the self. However, once a relationship is well established, such laborious mental exertions may be unnecessary. As the partners experience similar given situations over time, they are likely to repeat transformations that previously resulted in good outcomes, and are likely to eschew transformations that previously resulted in poor outcomes. The forgiveness process may well become automated over time to the extent that forgiving each other's minor transgressions has generally been the best course of action.

Predictors of Prorelationship Transformation of Motivation

In situations involving conflicting interests, three broad categories of variables influence the degree to which individuals are likely to enact prorelationship transformations (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). The first category is *dispositions*, including both personal dispositions (e.g., self-control) and interpersonal dispositions (e.g., social value orientation). Personal dispositions are stable characteristics of indi-

viduals that are relevant to a broad range of personal and interpersonal tasks. Interpersonal dispositions are actor-specific tendencies to respond to particular interpersonal situations in a specific manner across numerous partners (Kelley, 1983).

An example of a *personal disposition* that reliably facilitates prorelationship transformation is self-control. Individuals with strong self-control are more accommodating and forgiving in response to potentially destructive partner behaviors than are those with weak self-control (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). In particular, people with strong self-control are skilled at inhibiting retaliatory impulses in favor of prorelationship behaviors. An example of an *interpersonal disposition* that is relevant to understanding prorelationship motivation is social value orientation (Van Lange, 2000). Individuals generally fall into one of three social value orientations: *individualists*, *cooperators*, or *competitors*. Individualists are likely to act on the basis of their self-interested, given preferences; cooperators are likely to enact prorelationship transformations; and competitors are likely to enact hostile, antirelationship transformations.

A second category, *relationship-specific motives*, describes tendencies to respond in a consistent manner to particular situations with a specific partner (Holmes, 1981). These motives are especially relevant to situations with conflicting interests. One such motive, relationship commitment, promotes prorelationship motivation across a broad spectrum of situations (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001), including those in which the individual (1) has been betrayed by the partner (Finkel et al., 2002), (2) must decide whether to make sacrifices to benefit the partner (Van Lange et al., 1997), and (3) is exposed to tempting alternative partners (Miller, 1997). In one study (Finkel et al., 2002, Study 1), participants who were involved in dating relationships were exposed to an experimental manipulation of relationship commitment (i.e., priming of low vs. high commitment) before confronting a series of hypothetical betrayal incidents (e.g., "Your partner becomes sexually intimate with another person"). Participants primed to experience high commitment were more forgiving in response to betrayal incidents than were those primed to experience low commitment. In another study (Van Lange et al., 1997, Study 4), participants with stronger commitment exerted

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greater physical effort to benefit the partner (stepping up and down a stair to earn money for the partner).

Complementing the effects of commitment, trust is a relationship-specific motive reflecting an individual's confidence that the partner experiences prorelationship motives toward the self (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). As noted earlier, Eleanor develops trust when she perceives that James has behaved in a prorelationship manner in *diagnostic situations* (i.e., situations in which his interests conflict with hers). Such behavior reveals James's willingness to sacrifice for Eleanor, and communicates that her needs are important to him. When Eleanor perceives such behavior, she becomes more willing to commit to their relationship, which in turn increases the likelihood that she will reciprocate James's prorelationship acts (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Thus prorelationship behaviors such as forgiveness and sacrifice produce a pattern of mutual cyclical growth, whereby James's prorelationship motives and behaviors promote Eleanor's confidence in his trustworthiness, which increases her willingness to become dependent, which in turn promotes her own commitment and willingness to exhibit prorelationship motives and behaviors, ultimately yielding patterns of mutual prorelationship motivation and reciprocal prorelationship behavior.

A third category of variables that shapes prorelationship transformation is *social norms*, defined as rule-based, socially transmitted inclinations to respond to specific interdependence situations in a particular manner (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Many norms emerge around the goal of promoting prorelationship behavior when immediate impulses might favor selfish motivations. For example, the "golden rule" prescribes that we should treat other people as we ourselves would like to be treated (e.g., with consideration).

A topic worth exploring empirically is the degree to which cultural differences in norms influence relationship motivation. For example, it is easy to imagine that people from individualistic cultures such as the United States might experience prorelationship motivation at lower rates (or in fewer circumstances) than those from collectivistic cultures such as Japan (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Almost by definition, people who adhere to individualistic norms believe that personal satisfaction is relatively more important—and that relational

well-being is relatively less important—than those who adhere to collectivistic norms. Such normative differences are likely to have important and predictable implications for prorelationship motivation.

BENEFITS AND DANGERS OF PRORELATIONSHIP MOTIVATION

It is difficult—costly and effortful—to sustain a long-term, well-adjusted relationship. A growing literature has examined various relationship maintenance mechanisms (forgiveness, sacrifice, accommodation, etc.), determining that such behaviors are more likely among individuals with greater prorelationship motivation. The question we address in this section is whether and when engaging in relationship maintenance mechanisms is beneficial versus destructive for the self.

The Benefits of Prorelationship Motivation

Abundant evidence suggests that on average, engaging in prorelationship behavior is associated with positive outcomes for relationships and for individuals. (Less empirical attention has been directed to the obvious prediction that an individual's prorelationship acts are beneficial for the partner.) For example, empirical evidence suggests that prorelationship motivation and behavior are associated with greater couple adjustment and longevity (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Van Lange et al., 1997), enhanced mental health (e.g., Coyle & Enright, 1997), and superior physiological functioning (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). One study demonstrates that prorelationship behavior (accommodation, forgiveness, and conciliatory behavior) is associated with personal well-being (life satisfaction, physical health symptoms, psychological adjustment), and that this effect is driven by the effects of prorelationship behavior on couple well-being (Kumashiro, Finkel, & Rusbult, 2002).

The Dangers of Prorelationship Motivation

However, the association of prorelationship behavior with positive personal and relational outcomes is not universal. Prorelationship motivation can sometimes result in self-destructive behaviors. For example, extreme levels of com-

mitment may cause individuals to make unhealthy sacrifices for their relationships. One illustration of this point comes from an archival analysis of data from a shelter for battered women: Severely abused women were more likely to return to their abusive partners to the extent that they were highly committed to (and dependent upon) their relationships (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). A plausible interpretation of these results is that because many of these women had exceedingly poor alternatives to their present relationships (e.g., no driver's license, poor work skills, fear of injury or death if they were to leave the partner), they were powerfully motivated to behave in ways that benefited the relationship, even if it meant that they would experience severe physical and psychological abuse as a result.

Less extreme examples corroborate the notion that prorelationship motivation can sometimes be harmful for individuals or relationships. For example, in normal populations, high *unmitigated communion* (i.e., an emphasis on others to the exclusion of the self) is associated with psychological distress (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). Other research demonstrates that individuals who overprioritize their relationship and thereby neglect their personal needs exhibit poorer subjective well-being, greater psychological distress, and greater physical symptomatology (Kumashiro, Rusbult, & Finkel, 2006). Moreover, an imbalance between partners' commitment levels predicts poorer couple well-being (Drigotas et al., 1999). The conclusion from the corpus of relevant data is that strong prorelationship motivation is beneficial to relationships and to individuals, but that excessive relational motivation—motivation that takes place to the neglect of the self's needs—is self-destructive.

CONCLUSIONS

Most theories of human motivation look inside the individual, arguing that motivation stems from genetic makeup, biological drives, person-level dispositions, and the like. Although we do not question the importance of these sources of human motivation, they provide an incomplete picture of its character. To understand almost any interpersonal motivation, researchers must take account of the interdependence situations individuals confront. The present analysis of prorelationship motiva-

tion recognizes that individuals differ in the strength of their general motivation to benefit the relationship and the partner, but it emphasizes that these differences will be more salient in some situations (e.g., divvying up a limited resource) than in others (e.g., coordinating who will paint which wall of the kitchen). Understanding situation structure provides insight into both (1) the social situations that reliably promote (or inhibit) prorelationship motivation versus the social situations to which prorelationship motivation is irrelevant; and (2) the dispositional, relational, and normative factors that increase the likelihood of prorelationship behavior, even when the situational pull against such behavior is strong.

NOTE

1. Even in situations with perfectly negative covariation, if partners are forced to interact with one another over an extended period of time, they may sometimes achieve patterns of reciprocal prorelationship behavior. For example, political enemies in the U.S. Senate may find that it is in their long-term interests to support one another's bills, in that such a pattern of reciprocal cooperation enhances the odds that each person will achieve a high rate of successful legislation.

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