

Theories of Intimate Relationship: Part 2.

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🔊 [0:00]

Ah, couple announcements! The first announcement is that I am not Benjamin Karney.

Uh, you probably noticed the difference.

Adding ten years to Ben's age, that is me.

My name is Thomas Bradbury.

I am a professor here in the Psychology Department, as is Ben.

I am a colleague of Ben's.

I study close relationships as Ben does, I am the co-author of your reader so all of the chapters that Ben did not write I wrote.

So, you will have already heard my voice if you read Chapter 1, and I hope you've read Chapter 1 by the way, because we are already in Chapter 3.

So I am very familiar with this material.

I will try not to screw up Ben's class too much.

The reason I am teaching is that his wife is on the verge of giving birth to their second child.

He called me this afternoon, later this morning.

So I pulled together Ben's slides looked at my notes, and here I am ready to talk with you about close relationships and intimate relationships.

And what I'd like to do today is take you through the second part of the theoretical material.

But before that, I wanna give you my understanding of where the class should be at this point, and prior to that I just wanna take you through a few quick reminders.



First is that as in the class when I teach it, I most recently taught in this class in the fall of 2008, there is a writing assignment probably better to start sooner than later especially as we all know what happens during midterm-week.

Keep up with the reading, we have written these chapters over many years and they are getting shorter and shorter.

But they are still not really short so there is some work to do and I hope you will stay up on those.

You probably, hello, you probably all know that the slides are available for downloading and I hope you have a version of those with you.

Also, I think you already know, I hope you know that there are videotapes associated with, I believe, virtually every lecture.

These are videotapes that Ben and I produced with actually former student at UCLA and so I hope you look at those, either right before or right after a given lecture, and I know that the theory videotape is especially good.

I remember it as one of my favorites.

It really involves some of the leading theoreticians in social-learning theory, which you will hear about today, social-exchange theory, ecological theory, and attachment theory which you already heard about, and evolutionary theory as well.

So I hope you will not only be tracking the slides, but also the videos that we have produced.

And let's see what other announcements I wanna make.

Oh, I am a clinical psychologist.

Ben Karney is a social psychologist.

Professor Karney is a social psychologist and these are where certainly both within the discipline of psychology and even closely allied within the discipline of psychology.

 **[3:02]**

As a clinical psychologist, I am really interested in relationship outcomes, I'm really interested in how do you understand couples relationships in such a way that it provides you some leverage for changing them, for giving them the opportunity to have a better relationship.

So Ben and I come in, into the field with slightly different biases and perspectives which you will see both of those represented in the book.



For example, Ben wrote the theory chapter I did not write the theory chapter, I wrote the clinical interventions chapter which you will see right near the end of the class.

So, that's the material that I cover.

I am really interested in, although I am trying to do marital therapy, trying to do couples therapy, I haven't done that for quite, quite some time.

I am really interested in using what we know through research and creating educational intervention, so that if you were anybody like, , you says, you know what is it that I could do to really optimize the quality of my relationship to really make it strong as I possibly could.

Well, if that person were to come to me and have that question, what can I do? I really care about my relationship, I wanna be the person who is able to answer that question, not just for the person who is really struggling in their relationship, but for the individuals who wanna keep a good relationship going strong for a long time.

So, I am a clinical psychologist.

As I said, I come into the field, with a slightly differently perspective than professor Karney.

Okay, so my understanding of where you are now, is that, tell me if I'm wrong, the first lecture would have been about the importance of close relationships.

The intrinsic characteristics of relationships that make them worth studying as well as the extrinsic characteristics that create benefits for us and our relationships.

So I hope you learned about the benefits of our relationships for physical well-being, you know people who are in good relationships are able to stay healthier they're able to throw off colds and illnesses faster than people who aren't in good relationships.

They are, they live longer lives than people who either aren't in relationships, who are in rougher relationships.

In addition to physical health benefits, there are psychological health benefits as best we know, good relationships are one of the best predictors of overall happiness in life.

We know that relationships promote financial well-being.

In fact, you probably know that the best predictor of poverty in this country is not education.

It's not ethnicity, but it's whether or not you're divorced.

When you get divorced, at least for a short period of time, you take a very big financial hit.



So, good relationships allow us to accumulate health and wealth and well-being.

And they also are beneficial for our children, and you will probably learn, in fact, I think I am the person who's going to be teaching you about the effects of relationships on children.

I'm not sure if I said it, but I will be doing not only today's lecture, but the next four lectures as well, the next two weeks.

🔊 [6:03]

So relationships have all kinds of benefits for us, they are intrinsically valuable, they have extrinsic benefits and the question that we pose in this class is how is it, what are the forces that operate on our relationship.

What are the forces that operate inside a relationship, upon a relationship, that allow them to change, and grow and develop, and take on all of this complexity, like that, that's the question that we posed in the first chapter of our book.

And we wanna know why is it some relationships are more fulfilling than other relationships at certain times, and why is it even for a given relationship that sometimes it goes really well, and sometimes it goes poorly.

And in order to understand that you have to understand how people get into relationships, what they do, when they feel stress within their relationship and all sorts of other things that you'll be learning about in this class.

My understanding is that you, Ben had lecture on methods, the methods that we might use in order to understand those characteristics of relationships that determine whether there relatively rewarding or frustrating.

In your last class, I believe Dr.Karney told you about what a theory is, what a good theory of relationships is, and then offered you an introduction, an overview of evolutionary theory and, and attachment theory.

Set? Are we on the same page? Is that good? Okay, any questions about any of stuff that you have covered up to this point in the class? Okay, good.

Well, today I'm gonna talk about three other theories, three other theories and when I think about theories, I don't know what Professor Karney said, but when I think about theories, I think of having on a sort of a distorted pair of goggles, or having a kind of a caricature of some phenomenon, and by that caricature, you know it's like a political cartoon, or if you go down to a Venice beach, and you have somebody draw your picture down on a Venice Beach and they distort your features, and if you've got a big nose, you have a huge nose, in your caricature.

Right? You've got this little tiny body.



It's a distortion of reality, but it's a depiction of reality.

A theory is the depiction of reality that throws away some details and keeps the really important ones.

Okay? It's sort of, theories this is kind of a caricature, it's like you strap on some goggles and you say, Oh, I can see that now.

I can see this.

I can't see other things, but that's okay, that's what this theory is designed to do.

And a theory is designed to explain some regularity in nature.

It's a proposed explanation for regularity in nature, and different theories look at slightly different aspects of the phenomena that we care about in this class.

Okay? So, that's why when you read Chapter 3, you saw not just one theory that explains everything, but different theories that explain different components of how relationships operate, how they unfold, how they change.

 **[9:02]**

Okay, so our job and your last class and today's class is to give you a good representation, a good understanding of what it's like to strap those goggles on.

What it's like to be that person who says, I see the world through a attachment theory.

That's how I see the world.

I see the world from an evolutionary point of view.

And today we're gonna see the world through three points of view, the first one is going to be social exchange theory.

Social exchange theory goes like this.

According to social exchange theory, we are rationalists, and economists, we weigh things and make decisions based on those weights, and what we are weighing is whether we are being rewarded or punished for our actions.

This is a very primitive idea that pervades many aspects of social sciences going back to a guy by the name of George Holmmans, back in the 50's.

And the idea is in social exchange theory, specifically, that as we apply that idea to relationships is that partners evaluate the reward and costs associated with being in a relationship, along with barriers to leaving the relationship and the available alternatives.

Okay, so we as relationship partners, this is the goggles that I'm asking you to put on right now we as relationship partners are always sort of evaluating things.

We are always judging the relative rewards that we get as a compare to the cost that we are dealing with our relationship.

And as we make some decisions about our relationship, we are also thinking about what our alternatives are, what my expectations are for relationship in general, what some of the barriers are that keep me in this relationship.

Okay, and one of the important things that you wanna take away, in addition to that, that sort of characterization of social exchange theory is the idea that satisfaction within a relationship, or how happy you might think you feel, in a relationship is not the same thing as whether or not you wanna stay in a relationship.

That becomes one of the real interesting and important contributions of social exchange theory.

This is the picture of Herod Kelly, a very famous social psychologist here at UCLA, who passed away maybe five years ago now.

And he was one of the four most figures in social exchange theory along with his colleague John Tiboe.

So this is the general portrait of social exchange theory that I want you to have in your head as we move forward.

I should also say that I have annotated Dr.Karney's slides just a little bit.

But I haven't deleted anything.

So, if you see things on this slides that are not in the versions that you have printed out, they are just a few notes that I added in, because I like to add notes in to things and it helps me to keep them in mind as I'm talking to you.

But there's nothing, nothing fantastically new, it's all really from the readings that I hope you have done or will do soon.

And here's the idea.

People evaluate and make decisions about their relationship the same way that they make economic decisions.

🔊 **[12:04]**

Right? And we call this combination this weighing of rewards that we get in a relationship against the cost in relationship.

We define that as the outcome, okay? And that's kind of important concept, it turns



out to be an important building block for a couple of ideas that you will see in a moment.

So our outcome, how we're evaluating the relationships is really that difference between the rewards that we are getting subtracting off the cost that we are also having to deal with and the those are some of the notes that I added, so what are the rewards that we get out of relationships.

Well, you know the rewards we get out of relationships, we get material gains.

It's good to be in a relationship, because now it's not just you feeding yourself, now there's another person, and you're feeding one another, right? There's an economy of scale of relationships, that is wonderfully powerful and that's from strictly true, economic point of view why economic relationships are so valuable.

By the way, this is why our federal government cares about intimate relationships.

Our federal government doesn't care about intimate relationships because they want everybody to be happy.

That's sort of a nice by-product.

People, our federal government, invest a lot of money in various ways, and more recently than in the past.

In intimate relationships, in order to keep people together, because when people separate, when their intimate relationships end, there is a lot of fallout, and the person who is the entity that's paying, that's footing the bill after a divorce is usually our federal government.

Our federal government is very interested in keeping relationships together, because they are very expensive when they fall apart.

So, this is a representation of that exact fact is that we when we're in relationships, gain materially, there are financial advantages, there are gains in status to being in relationships, generally perhaps, and maybe within your family, there are emotional gains that we get in relationships.

There are many, many kinds of rewards that we accrue for being in relationships, you can think of many on your own.

One important consideration is that the rewards that one person experiences in a relationship, obviously are kinda different from the rewards that somebody else is experiencing in a relationship.

So it's not as though there's a fixed list, a fixed set of rewards, but there is great heterogeneity that exists within the population amongst all of you.

There's heterogeneity even between the two partners within a relationship, so that



part of what you have to do in a relationship is figure out what it is that the two, how is it that the two can reward one another for being in a great relationship.

And also, even for a given person, there are different rewards over time, so that early on in your relationship, you might find one thing rewarding, and then later on in your relationship that may not be so rewarding at all.

[14:58]

Of course, you can think of pain from being hurt in a relationship, the risk of being betrayed in a relationship, you later in this course, you will learn a lot about physical abuse in relationships, the suffering that comes from not as having, not being fulfilled as you hoped to be.

Of course you can also think of pain from being hurt in a relationship, the risk of being betrayed in a relationship, you later in this course you'll learn a lot about physical abuse in relationships, the suffering that comes from not having your not being as fulfilled as you would hoped to be and so these are some of the cause of relationships, again these are gonna vary systematically within a population They are also lost opportunities, for most of us when we tend to get into relationships we tend to get into monogamous relationships that's not always the case.

But when you have a relationship like that that does that mean you are not in a relationship with somebody else and that can be perceived as a cost.

So this is the building block this idea that there are outcomes that we evaluate the rewards that we're getting in relation to the cost that we're having to confront and it's important to recognize in the book points out quite clearly that the outcomes that you are sort of tabulating in your head, is different from the level of satisfaction that you're experiencing in your relationship.

Satisfaction is not the same as an outcome.

Outcomes are building blocks for satisfaction.

And that goes like this.

So here you see the third line down.

That satisfaction how happy you are in a relationship is not just the balance of getting a lot of rewards and not having many costs.

That's important you want that.

But you're also judging that again something called the CL, the comparison level.

The comparison level that's your expectations what's it take for you to have a good relationship.

What's it take for you to feel satisfied in a relationship?

Because there could be one person who has a certain reward cost structure right? And another person who has the exact same reward cost structure but the first person says, wow a lot of relationships could make me happy, my expectations for what can make me happy in a relationship are pretty low.

So that reward cost structure for this person will increase their satisfaction.

You see how that works?

Another person will say you know I'm sort of hard to please.

I'm kind of hard to please, my standards are pretty high.

And so that same amount that same outcome weighed against that individuals comparison level leaves them less happy ok? So the key idea here is that comparison levels matter right? Comparison levels matter.

Compared to what? Are you happy compared to what Right? How good is your relationship well there is a lot of good things happening in my relationships and not many bad things but I expect even more.

I expect even more.

And that's gonna decrease satisfaction.

So the key idea's we now have to add in this idea of compared to what? Compared to what do you want right? And lot's of times we don't know that.

We have to sort of figure that out you get into a relationship and you say ,wow this feels pretty good but not quite good enough right? Not quite good enough.

🔊 **[18:04]**

And so you figure that out often as you go through different relationships.

Now the point I made earlier is that satisfaction how happy you feel in your relationships which as I've just said we define as the discrepancy between the outcomes that you're getting in your comparison level.

That level of satisfaction how happy you feel in your relationship is different from whether or not you want to stay in that relationship.

Now all else being equal, people who are in happy relationships tend to stay in happy relationship, people who are at non happy relationships tend to leave unhappy relationships, but we all know that's not uniformly the case.

When professor Kearney was a graduate student at UCLA he wrote a very important paper one of several important papers.



That looked at the association between relationships satisfaction and whether that relationship ended in divorce, these were all marriages.

And that correlation as he points out in this chapter, the book is not that high it's not a perfect correspondence right? We know that there are people who are unhappy or moderately happy or kinda happy but not really ecstatic about their relationships tend to stay in their relationships.

And we know that there are there are people who are really happy in the relationship that get out of their relationship okay? Satisfaction and dissolution are different things.

It stands to reason it shouldn't come as a shock to you but we do have to pull apart we have to tease apart these two experiences that we have in a relationship which is how's it going for me right now right? Do I feel satisfied? And is this an enterprise that I want to remain associated with right? And now we have to talk about another kind of comparison level.

And this one is called the CL alt.

The comparison level of alternatives and so now we're not just talking about your expectation levels like what is it that you expect or desire or believe you deserve within a relationship

But now we're talking about what other actual relationships or situations or experiences might you have available to you right? So now we're talking about intentions to stay or leave.

The freedom that you feel in being able to leave your relationship or stick around.

It's gonna be related to outcomes right? I said all else being equal you going to stay in rewarding relationships and leave unrewarding ones but it's not a perfect correspondent and the factor that makes that an imperfect correspondence is the CL alt .

The comparison level of alternatives what other relationships might you jump into right? What other things might you do right? So I can be again we take the hypothetical case of someone with a certain kind of reward cost structure that is to say an outcome structure.

 **[21:00]**

And another person who is exactly the same and the first person has very few options maybe they live in a very small town maybe they are kind of shy and that's just hard for them to do the other person doesn't have those constraints on them.

The first person is going to be more depending on that relationship.

So we have to understand satisfaction and what I like to think of as dissolution



propensity the likelihood that something rant, we need to think of them differently but in each case we think about them in a compared to what kind of sense and when we think about dependency we're talking about compared to what other relationships you might have.

Ok you see that? You know one thing scientists have to do is try to be precise in their language and so some of this seems obvious to you and what your or what we are trying to help you do with this chapter is map on some of the intuitions that you already likely have with the lingo that social exchange theorists already are using.

So these are ideas that probably aren't foreign to you but part of it is getting the ideas your ideas linked up to these terms and then getting them in this foreign equation format.

So how does the theory guide research? Well lot's of different ways.

First if there is this disparity this disconnect between satisfaction and dissolution, that there are people who are happy who leave relationships, unhappy who stay in relationships.

Well we know when people far for the divorce that some people change their minds.

Once you get closer to the brink of either a divorce I mean it's not essential that it's divorce it's more a committed partnership that you think about leaving right? So as you move closer and closer to thinking about ending a relationship and you get closer to that decision a lot's of times we back off from that.

People back off from that.

And why might that be? Social exchange theory helps us understand this by saying that people encounter barriers and people encounter on people then recognize the investments that they have.

So as you get closer and closer to ending a relationship with somebody say well, what are the costs associated with me doing that? What do I lose in doing that and what do I gain by jumping into another relationship.

So we have to think about the costs in the barriers associated with leaving as well as the investments that you have made.

And the number of alternatives that you have available to you.

So people don't leave satisfied relationships research shows because they've been invested a lot they don't have many alternatives and there's some significant barriers.

Maybe you have a bank account with your partner maybe you only have one car and if you were to end your relationship you would be stuck taken the bus to school everyday.

🔊 [24:05]

Until you find either a car or a better partner right? So there are costs and barriers that we start to really have to confront when we think about ending a relationship.

When the relationship is going along well we weigh these things but they don't feel quite so consequential but as we get to the brink of making the decision we really have to confront the realities.

And we have to say okay what do I really lose? What are the barriers keeping me in.

Would it be really hard to explain my divorce to my mother like how hard would that be right? Or I have children and my parents, this is not true, me, my parents divorced if that were the case I would say I don't want to inflict that on my own children.

I know what that pain was like for me.

You stay and there's a sort of an invisible wall around your relationship.

So theory guides research lots of different ways these are two examples the second example is dependent people.

People who have a relatively, a certain kind of reward structure.

And then a Comparison level of alternatives that leads them to stay in a relationship that is to say low comparison level of alternatives.

People in that sort of circumstance lots of times they derogate their alternatives.

They say you know I can't imagine my relationship might not be so great but the alternatives that look better out there they're not good so either right? So we sort of use our current experience, one of the ways that we maintain our relationship I should say and stay within a relationship and stay in a sense not in a pathological sense but in a social exchange theory sense dependent on that relationship is we say you know my comparison level for alternatives is really high like I would have to really have some great options to leave this relationship and frankly the options that I see just aren't that good.

We put down those alternatives they just psychologically in our head we sort of play this cognitive game that just doesn't look as good as they otherwise might.

So this research shows this is the case.

So what do we like and dislike about social exchange theory.

Well Social exchange theory as we've said allows us to understand why some distress related people in distress relationship stay together it's not a perfect theories, in fact none of the models that we're talking about and last class in this class are perfect.



And in this case the perspective doesn't really tell us so much about how those rewards and cost change over time.

There is as you read in the social exchange literature is not a lot of understanding about how characteristics of our relationship that often are highly rewarding early on become less rewarding with the passing of time.

🔊 [27:07]

How does that happen or how do we take on more costs and how do we integrate those within the outcome organization, that decisions that we make in our head right? So we don't know, it doesn't help us understand change.

And if you remember from chapter one that's one of the big things that we are in the business of doing.

We want to understand in part how it is that our relationship is better at one time than another time right? So this model doesn't exactly get us to that point question.

Student asking a question.

I think the question is the do CL: alt change the alternative change.

And I think the answer is yes.

any of the comparisons can change you know as the model as people do more research they become more and more aware and this is where the design issues that you learned about in the last class get connected up with the theoretical issue.

So as you think about relationships not just as something that you couldn't measure at one point in time but it's interesting dynamic process is that unfold long spans of time then you star to measure comparison levels and alternatives and you actually demonstrate that they do change so in that way the empirical evidence starts to suggest new refinements of the theory question? Student asking a question.

well that work is this model is from the 50's so these are concepts that really emerged from fairly basic ways of thinking about economics and don't really incorporate these new ideas but that would lead us to think that it would lead us to, I think really draw an underline under this point that our rewards are going to change.

What you see initially in a relationship maybe quite different from and what attracted to relationship maybe quite different from what keeps you in a relationship and if you go into a relationship with certain sorts of hopes and goals within that relationship and then you are not really able following den Gilbert's work to project from them into how your parent how your partner is going to evolve or develop and how your relationship is going to change then you have to engage in an adaptive process you have to somehow make sense of this in these new information that's come into the system., That's is largely outside this theoretical perspective.

In fact the next theoretical perspective that I want to talk about social exchange theory



🔊 [30:02]

In fact, the next theoretical perspective that I want to talk about, social exchange theory, really gets after these interpersonal processes a bit more directly.

And social exchange theory, social learning theory takes us a little more deeply into the actual processes.

So for me one of the most interesting things, I study newly-weds, and so in my lab over in France Hall, I bring newly-wed couples into my lab and I videotape them and I interview them and talk with them and then over five or ten years, I follow them and I see which ones divorce and which ones end up miserable and which ones stay happy, and what you realize is that relationships do change.

The level of positivity in relationships on average drops off over the first, I mean it's evident over the first two years that there's drop offs in the level of positivity and then the question is, which most people wouldn't say what they'd expect.

They'd say, "Wow, I love Betty, this is the greatest relationship.

Betty's always gonna be there for me.

We're gonna have sex this much every month for the rest of our lives.

Wow, this is great, I can't wait!" and then lo and behold, that doesn't happen, right? And I think that's one of the tricks that nature plays on us.

It is that nature wants us to be in relationships, right? We're in relationships, as you learn in chapter one, in part to procreate, right? Nature has given us that capacity and we sort of lose track of the idea, what has to happen is we have to sort of adjust to the realities that then come on line.

Good relationships are ones that you say, some couples and I had couples say this when I've done consulting work with them, you say, you know, it's just not the way it used to be.

And I say, well, someone promised you that? Like, I don't remember some, did someone guarantee that you're relationship wasn't gonna change? The question isn't does it change or not change.

The question is how do you adapt to this new reality.

What sort of characteristics can you create within your relationships? What is sort of the new interactional processes that you can put on line to say, "wow, we don't do this so much anymore, but this new part has opened up in our relationship." And that's the tasks in relationships, right? That's the adaptive challenge in our relationships.



Social learning theory which I want to talk about next gets us a little closer to that.

Social learning theory says that, in the same way social exchange theory talks about rewards and costs.

But usually, what are the two theories of learning? Anybody? Operant conditioning, did you say? Operant conditioning is one and classical conditioning, right? We are now talking about operant conditioning, also known as Skinnerian conditioning, right? So now we're talking about not associationistic learning, which is the Pavlovian conditioning that you probably learned and forgot about.

🔊 **[33:04]**

This is Skinnerian conditioning where if you reward something, it happens more, and if you punish something it happens less, right? So now we're talking about using that idea and building it into our relationships.

And now we're saying, okay, I evaluate my relationship based on how good it feels.

I base my relationship on the amount of rewards I've got coming my way.

In fact the way my partner treats me.

And on the punishments that I'm receiving as well, okay? Now we have to switch goggles.

Now we're switching goggles.

We're not the rational economists that the social exchange theorists want us to be.

Now we're looking through rewards and punishments specifically in our conversations, okay? Social learning theory takes us inside the conversation.

Social exchange theory is much more inside my head.

Social learning theory, inside our conversations.

Now we're talking about transactional processes.

It's not as though those weren't present in social exchange theory, they are.

But a social exchange theory says, "wow it's really interpretational.

All the inferences I'm drawing to generate outcomes and think about my comparison levels and all that" Right? Now social learning theory started by bunch of clinical psychologists.

And they said, well, I'm a clinical psychologist.



And in the 60's when the divorce rate was really, really high, you all know that the divorce rate has been going down now, since 1980.

It was very high in 1960s.

And the stigma associated with seeking therapy had reduced.

So couples were more inclined to seek therapy and they went to some people like these people up on the board, Bob Weiss, Gala Margalain, now USC also appears on the video tape, and the late Neil Jacobson from the University of Washington, went to people like this and they said, "we need to understand these intense conversations that these unhappy people are having.

We need to understand how it is that they're arguing with one another, right?" So this view takes us right inside the conversations because that's what they saw.

I'm a practitioner, I see you guys pummeling each other psychologically.

You're just saying mean things to each other and you don't have much capacity for generating positive emotions within one another.

You see how that's different from social exchange theory? Now we're right in the middle of the conversation and my job as a social learning theorist is to improve your conversations.

To make it more rewarding and less punishing.

Okay, so they really focused first on unhappy engaged, negative people, and they are trying to find ways to figure out ways to make those conversation less unpleasant and maybe even if they were lucky, more pleasant, okay?

🔊 **[36:03]**

So these people are all clinical psychologists.

And the idea is that our behavior is molded and shaped within relationships, you've heard about that, the attachment theory, rewarding and punishing interactions affect how we behave with one another.

So if I'm in a bad relationship and you say something nasty to me, well I'm gonna say something nasty back to you, right? That's sort of a basic characteristic of human behavior, especially in unhappy relationships.

And as a result of these conversations that we're having, I'm gonna make a judgment on whether or not this is a good relationship, okay? So it's not totally distinct from social exchange theory.

In fact, none of the five models are totally distinct from one another, but it's different.



It's different and it focuses on rewards and costs, the rewards and punishment is really the better way, the Skinnerian way of thinking about it, that really make us happy or unhappy in relationships with one another.

And it really focuses on communication, really focuses on communication intently.

Okay, so that's sort of the basic idea when you put on these goggles.

The idea is that behavior matters, right? Like there's a reality to our relationships that is the starting point for the psychological judgments that we might make but that behavior's sort of a core element in every relationship.

The way we talk to our partner, it's really, really hard to have a relationship with your partner if you don't have back and forth exchange.

In fact, in chapter one there was the defining criterion for relationships.

That interdependence.

The fact that when I behave it affects you and when you behave it affects me.

That there's that connection we have with one another.

So behavior is the final common pathway that gives us some insight into how our relationship is going to evolve and change.

Appraisals of our interactions accumulate.

So I can have a conversation and let's say it's even as slightly heated conversation and two people, in fact I've seen this in my laboratory, two people get done with a conversation, and we've asked them to talk about something, and try to resolve the disagreement between them, we do this all the time in my lab, and one person said, "wow we sort of had to yell at each other a little bit, but we really cleared the air. You know, I feel a lot better because we cleared the air."

The other person says, "Wow! That was really painful.

We just yelled at each other.

We didn't clear the air.

Now I feel even worse than when we started, right?" The exact same conversation can leave different people to have what I call, appraisals.

Conclusions that they make not in general about the relationships, but about the conversation we just had, right? So that's we call it an appraisal.

I've just appraised the conversation.

I've sort of thought about the negatives and the positives and now I'm making a judgment about that.

🔊 [39:04]

So we have these conversations.

We make some appraisals, we make judgments about the conversations, and sure enough, when I then start another conversation, I'm gonna have that appraisal in my head, as a way that I'm approaching the next conversation.

And our relationships become biased in a good direction or biased in a bad direction depending on the nature of those appraisals.

Escape conditioning is an important and specific kind of interactional exchange between two partners in an intimate relationship whereby a negative thing happens.

My partner nags me to do something.

And she escalates in her nagging to get me to do something.

And finally when she's gone to the point where I really can't tolerate that anymore, I finally give in.

I say, fine I'll do the taxes, fine I'll take out the garbage, fine I'll wash the dog, okay? So the negative has been met with a positive.

Finally, you're contributing to the household.

I have been rewarded for nagging you, okay? So if that is the case and if we believe what B.

F. Skinner said, that the offset of a negative is a positive, right? Minus a minus is a plus.

We have just engaged in a coercion or escape conditioning, right? So in the short term, that works really well.

My wife got me to wash our dog.

Good deal, right? But over time the theory goes, there is an accumulation of these experiences so that she has been rewarded and therefore the next time the dog is dirty, she will not go through the lower level of nagging.

She'll just walk in the room and say, "why hasn't the dog been washed! My God!" Because that was what she was rewarded to do, right? She was rewarded to just come in at the highest possible level.

I didn't reward her at the lowest possible level which was, "honey, do you smell



something funny?" Like when the dog walks by, "do you smell funny? It smells kind of funny in here." That's sort of the hint that men don't get, right? Honey I'm telling you to wash the dog.

I'm giving you the option of saying, "hey, the dog smells a little funny.

I'll take her down to, place I go is, the dog gramat on Venice Boulevard.

I'll take her to the dog gramat.

Why don't I just do that? Honey you stay home I'll take care of it, right?" I didn't pick up the clue at that level, right?

I didn't pick up the clue until the highest level.

[41:58]

So that's where interpersonal insensitivity leads the other person to keep trying and keep trying and escalating to get the other person's attention.

And eventually they do get their attention, they get their reward and it has a short term benefit.

But it has a long term cost, okay? So you can see now we're in the heart of the conversation.

We're in the punitive things that partners say to one another, and then sometimes the inadvertent rewards that we get for that negative behaviors.

You see how that works? Now there's a whole another way of thinking about it and that is, that a lot of our positive behavior should be spontaneous, right? We shouldn't have to be constrained by...

we can offer in an unsolicited way, a lot of positive kinds of behaviors and that's why most of us want to be in relationships.

We come home and our partner says, "So, well, how was your day?" and we say, "wow it was okay."

And your partner says, "just okay? Well tell me about it." Well that feels good, right? That feels good.

So we are positioned not only to be prisoners of the behaviors that our partners show us, but we can also generate positive behaviors.

And in fact a lot of research which you'll read about in the conflict chapter shows that, our ability to spontaneously generate positive emotion like humor, interest and affection, when our partner is talking to us, are profoundly beneficial in our relationships so much so that if you're not so good at communicating, but you're



pretty good at generating positive emotion, that your relationship can stay pretty healthy.

Now as people got into this research, and this is early 1980s, people said, "well, here's something funny.

There are some relationships where people take things the wrong way.

Like, you know, you offer some feedback to your partner about the way they dress, and they take that as criticism, right?

So two people hearing the exact same thing can walk the, can hear that in different ways, right? You've probably all had this experience.

You're home and your partner comes home at the end of the day, and you hear the front door slam.

Right? The front door slams and you could say, "why is that bastard slamming the door? That is just not right.

I deserve to be treated better." Or you say, "wow it must be windy out there." The exact same thing in our relationships takes on all kinds of different meanings.

Here's an example.

I don't know if I have any time left at all, by the way.

Uh 3:47.

I do have time.

I was doing some couple therapy, back when I was doing couples therapy at the University of Illinois that's where I got my degree.

A young couple was, uh, they have been living together for a while, and they were wondering about whether they should get married.

And, so, they came to me, a 26 years old graduate student, who knew nothing about this, but, you know, you pretend.

🔊 **[45:05]**

When you're learning, you pretend.

And eventually, you kind of get good at it.

So they were talking, the wife said, "You know, honey.

I am not so sure about this relationship.” And this was in the hot summer in central Illinois.

Have any of you ever been to Champaign, Illinois? Oh, you have.

Why? What’s that? Your boyfriend goes there.

Wow.

Champaign, Illinois, is the flattest place in the world.

Am I right about this? It’s the flattest place in the world.

When your dog runs away in Champaign, Illinois, You can see it like four days! It’s really true.

It’s very flat, like you can see all the way to Chicago almost.

So anyway, hot summer, central Illinois.

And this, the woman says, “Honey, I’m not so sure about this relationship.

Like, the level of our physical intimacy in our relationship has dropped off really quickly in the last, you know, month or so.” And the husband, I’ll never forget his face, or the husband to be, I should say, the man, said “I thought we weren’t having sex because the air-conditioner was broken.” The exact same event, the exact same event, and he’s oblivious like “Yeah, it will cool off eventually.” And she’s going, “Our relationship is going down the pot.” you know? So, eventually, people then added the original version of the model was really over-behavior, it was really, the observable characteristics of behavior.

Then as the model evolved, it took on more of this cognitive component.

Not in the same way that social exchange theory had, but in an interpretational sense, in the sense that within a relationship, the exact same event can take on different meanings.

Okay? So, when you’re in a relationship, you have to understand that the way you see things is different from the way your partner sees things, or that, two people in different relationships will see the exact same thing in different ways as well.

OK.

So, that’s a little bit about social learning theory.

What do we do a social learning theory? While we spent a lot of time looking at people talking to one another, we developed really good dictionaries for understanding communication when people engage in communication on either solving problems, or talking to one another about daily events in their lives.



Most of this, because most of this emerged from clinical psychology in the 70s and 80s, most of this has been conflict-oriented, the idea was that conflict and mismanagement of conflict was really, the true cause of distress in couples' relationships.

So, people said, well, if I were to look at the rewards and punishment, that people are delivering toward one another, I need to look at that,.

I need to see them talking to one another and look at that.

🔊 **[48:03]**

And we've now developed really good technologies, it's expensive and time-consuming.

Now we have really good technologies for looking at couples' conversations and then quantifying communication.

And so, as Ben has outlined, here there's a kind of study called "the talk table studies", which was one of the first studies that got people to start thinking about cognitive processes with a talk table, one individual in a relationship, it's sort of artificial, one individual sitting down across from their partner, and they've got two buttons in front of them, and one button says, "intent", and one button says, "impact".

Another person has the exact same set-up, right? They were in a laboratory.

And one person says, "You know, honey, I would like you, I would like just spend time with my family over the holidays, instead of your family over the holidays." And then this person is asked to say, "What was the intent of what you've just said?" "That was just a neutral statement of what I want."

So, that's neutral, right? My partner then says, "Here's this." And says, well, that's pretty negative, "I don't want to spend time with my family." That is, a negative, right? And then, partner then says, "Well, when are we gonna spend time with my family?" And, she then says, "That was my intent. That was neutral statement."

And the other, the guy, in the other side says, "That wasn't neutral. That was critical. When are we gonna spend time with my family? You're always whining. Why are you whining?"

That's a negative statement, right? So, you can pull apart in a relationship, the intent behind what you're trying to say, and I think we all have this experience.

We were trying to say something nice, and your partner distorts it, right?

Almost always in a negative direction.

And we can look at their relationship between intent and the impact, right? And,



happy and unhappy couples don't differ in their intent.

Everybody tries to be nice, but the impact turns out to be negative.

Might be impact unhappy couples, tends to be way more negative than the impact in happy couples.

So, you can pull apart the conversational sequence and this was one way that disentangles some of those elements that social exchange theory tells us what we should be doing.

Observational coding, I've sort of already alluded to, we videotaped people and put them in a laboratory with their permission, we said we'd like you to talk to one another and work toward the resolution of some problem, go ahead and identify a problem, then you leave the room and you let them talk for a while.

And you see how well they handled that sort of task.

Now, you can create all the kinds of tasks.

And then trained coders look at those videotapes and quantify the rewards, and the punishments, and especially the emotional quality of those behaviors.

A negative reciprocity is a, it's another sort of interactional exchange; it's really, something that we've learned about as a result of observational coding.

🔊 [51:02]

And this is the idea that unhappy couples have a lot of structure in their conversations.

There have a high-degree of predictability, that if one person says something negative, the other person will say something negative as well.

There's, uh, when you are in an unhappy relationship, if you've ever been in unhappy relationship, you've probably know this phenomenon.

You feel like you don't, it's hard to extract yourself from arguments.

Like, you get stuck in a swamp, kind of.

And, you can't really see the bigger issue that your partner is raising, but you do see the negative emotion that they are delivering toward you.

Happy couples are able to break that negative reciprocity.

And they are able to say, "uh, Joe's a little bit unhappy now.

It's not gonna do me any good to start screaming back at him, I might even want to



try to understand him.

So, instead of saying, “oh, yeah”, I will say, “Tell me more about it.” right? Unhappy couples get locked in high-degree of structure, high-degree of predictability.

And it’s hard for them to extract themselves from that negative emotionality.

And this is what we’ve learned from, one of the many things we’ve learned from social learning theory.

Is that, negative reciprocity is kind of a hallmark, kind of a signature of an unhappy couple.

And their arguments are, they get more locked in, and they get more entrenched, and it’s that, there’s more behaviors, there’s more exchange behaviors in a disagreement sequence among unhappy couples than this case with the happy couples.

Happy couples argue, it’s not the case that they don’t argue.

Yeah, happy couples argue.

But they are able to extricate themselves from the negativity much more quickly.

Now, this idea that our behaviors are in part of product of the rewards and punishments that we’re delivering toward one another, and that there are interesting kinds of experiences like that coercion sequence that I mentioned to you a minute ago.

This idea implies a very powerful idea of its own.

And that is that, if you only communicate better, you will have better relationships.

In theory we should all be trainable, we should all be educatable, in how to have a better relationship, if we only deliver fewer punishments and more rewards, right? So, this kind of technologically simple idea that if you do this in your relationship, you should experience better appraisals after each conversation, and then higher levels of satisfaction.

And that’s a complicated idea, it turns out, and you’ll talk a lot about that in the intervention segment of the course.

But it is an idea that is gotten a lot of play in the public policy circles and right now, there’s something called “helping marriage initiatives”, funding a lot of projects to try to understand whether if it’s not the case, whether that is the way to make relationship stronger.

So, this has all kinds of interesting implications.



🔊 [54:01]

And probably, best to wait, so you hear the full story on those.

You can imagine that, if these clinical psychologists were in a room, and they heard all of these exchanges of punishment, and punishment, punishment, and not much positivity, not much reward within these conversations, that they would develop interventions exactly around that idea.

Like, how can we create, how can we break these cycles? And, there were many, many studies to test that idea, and it turns out, for just foreshadow that later the lectures going to go, it turns out that, here's what happened.

People would end therapy successfully, and they would say, "Wow, we are really good at solving our problems.

We don't punish each other when differences of opinion come up.

On the other hand, I really don't like my partner.

I don't like him now, we communicate really well, right?

But I just not like him, right? So, you can get really good at not being punitive, and get good at solving your problems in a conflict-free way, but it doesn't mean your relationship is great.

It doesn't mean it's the relationship you wanna be in.

So, anyway, you will hear tons more about that, in the second to last chapter in the book.

Okay.

So, what does social learning theory helps us to explain it? It helps us to explain how satisfied relationships change.

Negativity accumulates, we get used to the positives in our relationship, and they take on less and less significant, but negativity can accumulate.

And if you don't take care of that, it'll accumulate and you'll pay a price for that.

And if you take this coercion idea really seriously, it means that some of it even might happen outside your conscious awareness, like, we don't quite realize what's going on sometimes.

And you don't realize that effect of communication, especially if you've been in a relationship for a while, not like a year, but five, ten years, 20 years like me, you have to sort of put some effort into it.



And if you don't really, sort of take stock and think about what you're doing, you get stuck in a rut and you don't, sort of leave yourself options for being rewarding in your exchanges.

That's really important element in a social learning theory.

What to leave out, where, why is it that some people are more negative than others in their communication? Where does that come from? Social learning theory does not care.

We don't care.

We just care that this is what you will have to change.

If you want a better relationship, this is what you will have to change.

This will turn out to be a very significant flaw.

You will see, in the lecture, why that is.

And can people who are distressed ever get happy on their own? Like, how is it, that if you have certain degree of skill, like we have certain capacity in rewarding or punishing, and that over time accumulates to be detrimental to your relationship.

🔊 **[57:09]**

How do you, if this is your skill set, how do you get out of that, right? If your relationship is gradually dwindling and the quality of the relationship is gradually dwindling, how do you without therapy, without a therapist coming in and say, "You guys are really being very rewarding toward one another.

It's really a punitive of experience.

You realize that you are not saying very nice, sweet, sensitive things to one another, and in the absence of that sort of intervention, it's not really clear how a couple would sort of extricate themselves from their relationship difficulties, and yet, we know that happens.

Okay? So, that's social learning theory.

And now we're gonna turn to the third, and final theoretical perspective that you will read about in chapter three, and you will hear about in this class.

And these are social-ecological models.

Social-ecological models are relatively, oddly enough, talk about them as having started back in the 40s, they have taken on a new significance.

They've sort of been bubbling on a back pot for a while.



And now, for interesting reasons, people are starting to integrate them with other perspectives.

And by a social-ecological model, social ecology refers to the context in which a relationship in which relationship unfolds.

Right in the idea is that, if your relationship is, we don't usually realize it, but our relationship is connected up of, with lots of other factors, that are going to impinge on relationship.

So, for example, you can imagine two people who were in a typical, normal healthy relationship, and if it so happens that one of them lost their job, but the other one didn't, just by chance, and the relationships are otherwise identical.

Then those relationships would unfold in different ways.

Not that couple has a challenge; they have something that they need to deal with, right? Or now, imagine that, I tried to just study like this, now imagine that one of those couples has a very low birth-weight child, right? Or have something horrendous happened to their child.

Or those two relationships now are different, right? In the interior, what's going on in the inside of those relationships? Whether you think about that from social exchange theory, or from social learning theory, those relationships are different now, right? So, the social ecological model encourages us to realize that the stresses supports and constraints in the environment of a couple, affect the way partners think, the way they feel, and act in their relationships, and when we think about social ecological models, we can think about this man, Rubin Hill, a family sociologist, and Uri Brofin Branner, a psychologist and a human developmentalist at Cornell University.

 **[1:00:08]**

Family sociologist and Uri Brownfield Brenner a psychologist and a human developmentalist at a Cornell university, who passed away 3 or 4 years ago.

So that's the social ecological perspective, and there is some lingo here, just like there is got to be lingo with all of these theoretical perspectives.

But if you look in the chapter you will see this, series of concentric circles with the couple in the center of the model and around them are increasingly distant sets of influences on the couple.

So immediately around your relationship, you might think well there is the other people who you know, there is the roommates that you have, there is your parents' point of view on your relationship with another person, there is what your siblings think, there is what your friends think, there is an immediate social and even environmental context so that if you have a relationship

And you live in an expensive mansion, oh that is going to be really different than if you share the basement of your parent's home, Right? Those are different relationships; different circumstances are going to affect what your relationship is like.

That's the micro system.

The Meso- system is one step removed from that and now we are talking about things like cultural influences, things like the neighborhood that you live in, right? Things like attitude toward your kind of relationship.

So for example a gay couple who is in West Hollywood is pretty different from a gay couple that is in Wyoming.

A gay couple that's in California and who is unable to get married, well they know that their government and the majority of people, voting people, in their state view their relationship different than somebody who is in Iowa or Massachusetts or maybe in Washington DC right?

So the relationships that we have are affected not only by our immediate friendship circles or the day to day stuff that you've got going on in your life, but one step removed from that there is a Meso system.

Meso means middle.

There is a middle set of influences which has to do with cultural influences and the role of religion in people's lives and things like that.

Further from that we have the Macro system, the biggest possible influence or the source of influence that affects many people simultaneously so now we are talking for example about the global economy right? Their characteristics of the global economy, their characteristics of people's religious beliefs that then affect, might affect your Meso system.

If you happened to be the person who was in New York City on 9/11, well you might have well been influenced by a Macro system that had a certain view about an American world view right?

🔊 **[63:01]**

Or a way that our economy was working, that rubbed other people the wrong way.

Ok that can come home to roost directly in your relationship ok? So there are issues of a jet travel.

Like you can, we can all get on a plane and be in New Zealand in 15 hours right? Hundred years ago that wasn't possible.

We can now get on a phone right now and call somebody in New Zealand and find them in their office, right? I mean, that's amazing that the world has changed.



And if that's your partner now you can keep in touch, now you can keep in touch really regularly even though they are almost anywhere on the globe, ok? So those are big Macro level influences they don't, they might not influence each and every interaction that you have with your partner but they influence many different people in small ways.

So that's the how that's especially what is called a Brownfield Brenner perspective that's Uri Brownfield Brenner's model of relationships.

He didn't mean for that to involve couples so much, he was thinking more about children but it has been adopted by people like me in the relationships field because it really helps to contextualize people's relationships and we know, for example that people who live in rougher neighborhoods, engage in a marital interactions that have more conflict and more tension and less warmth in them the actual communication between partners in a relationship is indeed affected by the contexts in which they find themselves.

There is the ABCX model which Heil proposed back in 1949 and here the idea is that when we you are trying to understand adaption to some sort of event that disrupts your equilibrium like the loss of a job or sick child or whatever that might be, that we have to understand that in relation to three things.

The nature of the stressor itself there is a great variability in stressors.

The resources that an individual or a couple has to deal with that stress and then the interpretation that they make of it.

And then the double ABCX model is basically the same thing Ben outlines.

Doctor Karney outlines this quite well in his chapter but the double ABCX version now says we have to add a temporal dimension to that, that's a fairly static point of view as the things don't change much but we know stress accumulates and we know it's harder to deal with stress.

When you've got a lot of stress as opposed to just one acute thing that you are dealing with, resources fluctuate sometimes people help you, sometimes you have more money than at other times, sometimes you can turn to other people for help an interpretations change as well so what seemed like a chronic stress, what seemed at first like an acute stress that you are going to be able to deal with, well now it feels like a chronic stress.

We just can't shake it.

🔊 **[65:59]**

You know, we thought it would just going to be a temporary thing, when Joe lost his job but wow now it's a chronic stress we have to adjust to that.



Let me just finish up here.

Measuring reactions to stress, so the key idea of the social ecological perspective is that we cannot understand relationships without understanding all of the other things that happen.

If you pick up virtually any self help book on the shelf, it is always going to tell you about communicating better, the way to have better relationship is to communicate better but a big part of what we do in our daily lives in establish relationships is manage stress right? And couples who can manage stress actually position themselves to strengthen their relationship and couples who fall apart in the face of stress really will struggle in their relationship.

So stress can be social ecological perspective is really key for drawing attention to this very basic and central element.

In fact, Two days ago, the New York Times had a special little section about the role of stress on couple's relationships and whether this was seen as something that couples in general would be able to ride through or whether this really foreshadowed some very difficult times ahead for couples and families.

So you might want to look at that it's quite interesting.

Military families you read about this in the chapter, this, the effects of war for example, on couples relationships we know a lot about this now.

Transition to parenthood is usually in normative stress that couples have to deal with, usually is a kind of throws people for a little bit of a loop when they have their first child.

Relationship satisfaction typically goes down after the arrival of the first child.

There is an air traffic controlling study done by Reno Repete here at UCLA showing that if you do a diary study which I think you have already learned about it.

If you do a diary study with air traffic controllers you can see fluctuations in the quality of the weather and the number of planes that an air traffic controller has to land in any given point in time and the quality of their marital interaction at home at the end of the day.

So you see these most of them were male.

These air traffic controllers disengaging from their family on the high stress days relative to the low stress days and then the adaptive response on the part of their partners, was not to say, "Hey you got to get involved in the family you know you've got to pull your own weight in this family."

You have got kids, you have got homework need to get done.



“The adaptive response is to recognize that this might be going on with your partner, a cognitive kind of process obviously and then support them rather than criticize them.

So we can see fluctuations in environments circumstances.

Weather, a number of planes that someone is trying to land, and the equality of the interactions within their relationship, that’s the power of the social ecological model.

 **[69:00]**

And so this perspective really forces us to take culture and SES seriously because we do know for example, I was just reading a paper this week that individual that European American and Asian American people seek social support in different ways, for example.

That is that it can be easier for European Americans to seek help for a problem whereas at least within a research that “Sally Taylor” and her colleagues published suggest that individuals with who are Asian American, I don’t want to burden another person so they are much less likely to sort of ventilate their feelings.

So we know culture is yet another one of these factors in the set of concentric circles that impinge on people’s relationships, so crisis theory , social ecological models are very good at telling us about why vulnerable relationship are going to break up, vulnerable relationships are going to break up now when things are going well.

Now when things are going well but when stress really hits and one of my colleagues Phil Karen , formerly at UC Berkeley , he says you know if everybody is riding on the bike and everybody is sort of on a flat terrain, well you can’t really tell who the good bike riders are and who the bad bike riders are.

But if you send them up a hill, now you figure it out.

Now you find out who can really adapt to the new stresses and strains and stresses like that in couples relationships Stress is like, now you are going to go up hill and some people are gonna just keep on the same path and they are just gonna keep cranking away ‘cause they know how to do that, they are on faced by it.

Other people are really going to struggle and they are going to fall back, and they are going to be way back in the pack.

So that’s what crisis theory helps us understand is that vulnerable relationships are going to break up when they start going up the hill when that first child arrives or when that child arrives in their sick or when Joe loses his job or something catastrophic happens.

What does it leave out? We don’t know around from this perspective about where resources come from.



Why is it that they sort of just are posited as an entity that exist and we need to learn more about where those resources come from and how people generate those resources right? People in good relationships invest a lot in their resources knowing that they may not need them for a while.

So you know you help other family members with struggles and strains that come up so that you know when you are in that position you sort of nurture the social network around your relationship and if you have been loaning somebody money because they needed it when they are in the tough period.

Well now chances are good that you can call back that debt and when you get into a rough place you will be able to get the support that you need, so social ecology theories still coming to figure that out.

The, uh, three last points.

We need to admit these things together, we need to pull these theoretical perspectives together and you are going to see taste of them, you are going to see little hints of these models as we go through like when we talk about physical aggression, we are going to talk about attachment, we are going to talk about social exchange theory, we are going to talk about social learning theory.

So you have to, you will hear different hints of these different models, but they are not yet in a comprehensive version.

We have a lot of different tools that allow us to learn new things about relationships and that's going to force us to develop better theoretical perspectives, but right now, what you've heard about our some of the big picture ways of thinking about relationships and you will hear a lot about them and we will develop them in lots of interesting different ways.

We will learn about specific models of social support, specific models of disclosure for example, specific models about how gender works in relationships and in fact that's what I will talk about on Wednesday.

I will talk about sexuality, sexual orientation and gender.

Thanks for your attention, I will see you Wednesday.