

# Prerequisites for Satisfactory Relationships

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Alan Page Fiske  
Nick Haslam

Everyone wants to be connected to others, but everyone has problems in relationships too. More than anything else, people seeking psychotherapy complain about problems in interpersonal relations (Horowitz & Vitkus, 1986). To help people form rewarding social relationships, we need to understand what social relationships are and how they are formed. Common sense is not enough; we need an empirically supported theory of how people relate to each other. The theory has to inform us about what makes relationships satisfying and what can prevent relationships from being rewarding. This chapter is an introduction to such a theory.

## A THEORY OF SATISFACTORY RELATIONSHIPS

Relational theory posits that there are four elementary models that people use to construct, interpret, coordinate, and evaluate most social relationships (Fiske, 1991a, 1992). The four models are communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. Communal sharing (CS) relationships are based on the perception that people within some bounded group are, in some relevant respects, equivalent and undifferentiated. In this kind of relationship, the members of a dyad or group treat each other as “all the same,” focusing on commonalities and disregarding distinct individual identities. What matters in a CS relationship is whether the other person is in the same group or of the same kind. People in a CS relationship often think of themselves as sharing some common substance (e.g., “blood”) and thus think that it is “natural” to be relatively warm and altruistic to people of their own kind. Close kinship ties usually involve a major CS component, as does intense love; ethnic and national identities and even minimal groups are more attenuated forms of CS.

Authority ranking (AR) relationships involve asymmetry among people who are linearly ordered along some hierarchical social dimension. The salient social fact in an AR relationship is whether a person is above or below each other person. People higher in rank have prerogatives and privileges that their subordinates lack and often control some aspects of their subordinates’ actions. People lower in rank are often entitled to protection and pastoral care. Relation-

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ships between people of different ranks in the military are predominantly governed, by this model, as are relations across generations in many traditional societies. (Note that AR relations experienced as legitimate contrast with mere force or coercion.)

Equality matching (EM) relationships are based on a model of even balance and meaningful differences. EM tends to be based on one-for-one correspondence, as in turn taking, egalitarian distributive justice, in-kind reciprocity, tit-for-tat retaliation, or compensation as equal replacement. People are primarily concerned about whether an EM relationship is balanced; they keep track of how far out of balance it is and what would be required to balance it. The idea is that each person is entitled to “the same thing” as each other person in the relationship. Common examples are people in a car pool, a babysitting cooperative, or the rules for competitive sports; acquaintances, peers, and colleagues who are not especially intimate often interact on this basis.

Market pricing (MP) relationships are based on a model of proportionality. People in an MP relationship organize their interactions with reference to ratios and rates, such as prices, wages, cost/benefit calculations, and judgments of efficiency, so that what matters is how a person stands in proportion to others or relative to some social standard. For example, in relationships between buyers and sellers, both people attend to the ratio of what is paid to the value of the commodity and only complete a sale if they can agree on a mutually acceptable proportion: the price. Money is the typical medium of MP relationships, but many MP relationships do not involve money, and many monetary transactions are not based on MP.

There is extensive evidence in support of relational theory. The theory is a synthesis of the major relational concepts developed by Marx, Tönnies, Weber, Durkheim, Piaget, Ricoeur, economic anthropologists, social justice researchers, and social psychologists. Relational theory was developed through its application as a framework for an ethnography of the Moose (pronounced MOH-say) of Burkina Faso and in broad cross-cultural comparisons (Fiske, 1991a).

More than a score of studies have confirmed that the four models are pervasive in everyday social cognition (summarized in Fiske & Haslam, 1996). The models predict who is confused with whom in naturally occurring “social errors,” for example, when people call someone by the wrong name, misremember with whom they did something, or misdirect an action. The patterns of substitutions in these errors indicate that people mentally organize their social behavior in terms of the four models. This effect has been obtained among Americans (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske, 1991) and in four other cultures (Fiske, 1993). The effect also holds for American intentional social substitutions, in which an originally intended interaction partner is deliberately replaced by another (Fiske & Haslam, *in press*). In addition, when people try to recall all of their acquaintances, they tend to recall clusters of people with whom they interact according to each of the models (Fiske, 1995), and people’s subjective groupings of their own relationships also correspond well to the models (Haslam & Fiske, 1992). People seem to judge hypothetical (Haslam, 1994b) and real (Haslam, 1994a) relationships in terms of a small set of distinct categories like the models, rather than in terms of dimensions or the multitude of social roles.

People are motivated to seek, create, sustain, and repair their relationships primarily for intrinsic reasons, rather than as a means to accomplish asocial ends (Fiske, 1991a, 1991b). Under appropriate conditions—some of them psychological and some of them situational—people experience each of the four types of relationships as meaningful and inherently rewarding. This chapter focuses on the psychological prerequisites for satisfactory relationships: appropriate social cognitive capacities, motivations, implicit understanding of cultural rules for realizing the models, and appreciation of the mutual implications of relationships for one another.

First, people must have the social cognitive capacity to use the models competently. That is, people must be able to construct relationships in accord with each model. They must also accurately recognize the use of the models in complementary actions by social partners and coordinate appropriately. Most people are able to do this, but a few people may lack the cogni-

tive mechanisms necessary for one of the models. Although a complete lack of the mechanisms may be rare, systematic cognitive biases or aberrations in the mechanisms may be more common. Because each of the four models operates as a more or less independent module, most difficulties are probably specific to just one model. If the analogy with linguistic competence is any guide, general intelligence is probably not strongly related to these social capacities.

The capacities used in each model can be defined quite precisely (see Chapter 9 of Fiske, 1991a). For example, to reciprocate according to EM, people must be able to keep track of turns owed to them or owed by them, adding and subtracting to arrive at the current balance. Furthermore, people must recognize when someone is attempting to form an EM relationship; a person who ignores or misinterprets such an initiative will encounter ridicule, censure, or anger.

Second, to relate reasonably harmoniously, people's social motives have to correspond approximately with the social opportunities and constraints that exist in their culture and situation. In any given type of relationship, a person whose relational motivation is much stronger or much weaker than his or her partner's is likely to be disappointed or repelled by the partner's level of engagement. An intense need for very strong CS relationships may be fulfilled in a commune or in a society that greatly values romantic love and may facilitate life in such milieus. However, the same need might be frustrated in a more autonomous, atomized, individualistic society or in an institutional framework characterized by distrust. Under these conditions, intense CS motives would lead to rebuffs or ridicule, disappointment, friction, and confusion. An American with strong AR motivation might be content only in the military or similar institutions, whereas the same level of AR motivation might mesh with wider cultural expectations and have great scope for fulfillment in, for example, many cultures of traditional Africa or China. To some degree, however, it may be possible in any mobile, voluntaristic culture for people to seek individuals with corresponding levels of motivation and join with them to create mutually satisfactory relationships.

Third, to engage in satisfactory relationships people must know how to realize each model according to the paradigms and prototypes of their specific culture. No model can be implemented without reference to cultural guidelines, and these guidelines require interpretive work to apply them to every concrete situation. Confusion, frustration, feelings of betrayal, and anger, or sometimes disbelief or ridicule, inevitably result from attempts to implement a model in a manner that does not correspond appropriately to the expected cultural paradigms and prototypes. This issue is related to social cognitive capacity because meaningful social relationships depend on effectively learning how to implement each model correctly in innumerable social contexts. It is also related to levels of motivation because discordant motivational intensities may lead to mismatched implementations, especially in the many situations in which implementation is ambiguous.

Implementation requires intricately detailed cultural competence. People have to know which model to implement with whom and with regard to what. It is not enough to have the requisite models if you do not know when to use them. Suppose you are in a building labeled "Court of Common Pleas" and are conversing with a man in a black robe who is seated at a high desk. If you attempt to implement MP by making him a public offer to dismiss your case in return for a reasonable sum of money, you will not get the results you intend. Conversely, if you eat a meal at a restaurant and attempt to leave, offering only respectful appreciation and thanks, you will be equally disappointed. Or suppose that you are (unreflectively) organizing housework with your spouse with reference to CS, while your spouse is acting, and evaluating the interaction, with reference to EM. You will be offended repeatedly by what seems to be his or her lack of generosity, lack of flexibility, and failure to allow for your respective needs, temperaments, and capacities. He or she will be offended repeatedly by what seems to be your unfair, irresponsible, unreciprocal failure to match his or her efforts, to take turns fairly, or to balance your respective

contributions. Yet neither of you is likely to recognize that the other's apparent violations of your own standards result from conscientiously implementing a valid but different model.

However, knowing when, where, and with whom to implement each model is not sufficient. You also have to know how. If you are going to sell lemonade on the sidewalk, you will not be successful if you demand \$50 a cup—you have to know your market. Or imagine that you are a stranger in a society where you know that agonistic challenges to honor are framed according to EM. A man knocks over your drink. Should you ignore it, curse him, say something insulting, strike him, shoot his dog, or politely challenge him to a duel? If you do not know how to even the score tit-for-tat, you risk being ridiculed, discounted, and exploited on the one hand or being killed on the other.

Communication is a key aspect of knowing how to implement each model in a culturally meaningful manner: You have to know what constitutes a relational act and how to signal your intentions. Suppose you attempt to show your respect for your commanding officer by kissing him on the cheeks, or imagine affectionately standing at attention and saluting your date. Similarly, if you want to conduct MP transactions at an auction, you have to know what constitutes a bid; otherwise, your itchy ear may cost you a lot of money. If you mother spits on you as you depart for boarding school, what does it mean? (See Camara, 1966, for one of the many African cultures in which spitting is a blessing.)

Finally, effective engagement in social relationships requires a practical appreciation of the links among relationships. Relationships are interdependent. Some relationships generate others, some are mutually exclusive, and all relationships have potentially extensive implications for other relationships. If you are a Moose husband living in a village in Burkina Faso, you can bring home a second wife or have your lover over to visit for a few days; but if you live in many other places, you had better not try this. Wherever you are, if you publicly befriend your friend's enemy, you may lose your original friend. Similarly, it is essential to act appropriately if your sister marries; you must recognize that you now have in-laws. Moreover, you must appreciate, according to the culture, whether you should avoid your sister's husband and refrain from speaking directly to him; insult and tease your brother-in-law, making lewd remarks to him and taking liberties with his property; or treat him cordially, establishing a relationship of mutual support and friendship. In any event, the conjunction of your sibblingship with your sister and her marriage constitutes the in-law relationship, a social fact that must be taken into account. If you do not link your relationships together in a culturally suitable manner, you jeopardize all of them.

Some of the principles linking relationships are universal. For example, many relationships are ideally transitive; thus, to get along well in a hierarchy, it is important to be able to infer that if Charles is subordinate to Bob, and Bob is subordinate to Arthur, then Charles is subordinate to Arthur. Another general principle is that transgressions ramify: If you fail to sanction a major transgression, you yourself have committed a transgression. Hence, if I know that Stan is embezzling corporate funds and I fail to stop him or turn him in, then I have committed a relational violation. (And if you condone my inaction, you have committed yet another violation.)

Social life requires an understanding of how relationships are embedded within other relationships. For example, no parent can interact with one child without taking into account the impact of that interaction on their own relationship with the other children or on the child's relationships with his or her siblings. In a number of cultures, a polygynous man has AR relationships with each wife, but there is an EM relationship among these relationships: He must treat each wife equally, giving them matching gifts and perhaps sleeping with them in turn.

In summary, there are four psychological prerequisites for minimally satisfactory social relationships:

1. The social cognitive capacity to recognize and use each of the four relational models competently

2. Relational motives compatible with cultural expectations or at least compatible with available roles and partners
3. Understanding the myriad cultural paradigms and prototypes for implementing each relational model with the appropriate people at the appropriate times in an appropriate manner
4. Appreciation of the interdependence among relationships, including the ability to foresee how action within each relationship will affect other linked relationships

These four prerequisites are not sufficient for ideal relationships, but they are necessary for minimally satisfying interaction. What do these basic requirements imply about how to conceptualize troubled relationships and how to design interventions for them?

## **BASIC TYPES OF RELATIONAL PROBLEMS**

### **Social Cognitive Capacity**

Relational theory proposes that the capacity to use the four models in social interaction is largely built into the human mind, given adequate maturational experiences. Like language, but unlike calculus or chess, the relational models are not primarily learned from direct instruction, are not readily accessible to conscious reflection or explicit articulation, and do not require effortful cognitive processing. This claim does not imply that social cognition is unsophisticated or that instruction is unnecessary for culturally appropriate implementation of the models. However, it does suggest that intellectual limitations will not underlie most difficulties in the use of the models. It is well known that social skill is often sharply dissociated from intellectual ability, with Down syndrome and autism providing notable, contrasting examples (e.g., Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1986). Nevertheless, there are several respects in which limitations in specific aspects of social cognition may impair the use of relational models.

One universal form of limitation is simply social development. The models emerge in an orderly developmental sequence corresponding to their increasing cognitive and formal complexity (Fiske, 1991a). Relational difficulties may therefore arise between children who have not yet reached or mastered a certain social developmental stage and adults who attempt to engage the model corresponding to that stage. Appeals to egalitarian fairness will not be understood by children younger than age 4 whose social-cognitive maturation has yet to reach EM. Difficulties of this sort may also arise between children of similar age if one is at a more advanced stage than another.

Such difficulties may be especially acute in the case of MP, which is the last model to be achieved (often after age 9 or 10 and the most cognitively demanding; it is also the only model for which there appear to be no precedents among other primate species [Haslam, 1997]). MP saturates contemporary Western culture but may be the most difficult for children and adults with intellectual limits to employ. This unfortunate conjunction opens many possibilities for exploitative relationships. People who have difficulty implementing MP relationships may feel manipulated or cheated by others who do so more skillfully and may develop a generalized distrust that impairs their other relationships. However, it is important to recognize that a person's perceptions of exploitation may not result from deliberate trickery; it may just be that one person is implementing MP and the other person is either unaware of this or is not capable of doing the same.

Another form of cognitive limitation that may affect relationships is less a matter of capacity than of bias. People may possess the cognitive capacity to recognize and realize all four of the models but have a systematic tendency to use one in an unusually extreme range of circumstances, in an unusually restricted range of circumstances, or indiscriminately. Some people may, for instance, be inclined to construe relationships in AR terms and engage in dominating or submissive behavior more often than others in their culture deem appropriate. This kind of

cognitive bias will often produce relational difficulties, either when people are not aware that a discrepant model is governing their partner's actions and understandings or when they are affronted by such an awareness. In addition to suffering from troubled interactions, people who have such biases will be judged negatively by others, whether their bias is toward overuse, underuse, or unexpected and culturally inappropriate use of a model. People who use AR excessively will be judged as either bossy or servile and those who use it insufficiently will be judged as either disrespectful or passive. Negative attributions for overuse and underuse of the remaining models are not hard to imagine: for CS, dependent or cold, respectively; for EM, rigid or cheating, respectively; and for MP, calculating or naive.

### Relational Motives

The interpersonal consequences of having relational motives that are incompatible with cultural expectations may be similar to those that result from cognitive biases toward systematic over- or underimplementation of a model. In both cases, people will tend to engage in systematically mismatched relationships, in which one person's rules of engagement are discrepant from the other's. People may, for example, behave in a more dependent fashion than their peers think appropriate. They might do this either because they have unusually strong *desires* for communal relating or because they tend to *perceive* other people's actions and intentions as communal when they are not. Similarly, children might seem uncooperative or selfish to their playground peers because they have unusually low *motivation* for EM relationships or because they mistakenly *believe* that turn-taking games are governed by MP. The origins of such motivational and cognitive abnormalities are open to question, and it is unclear precisely what developmental processes, contexts, or events give rise to them.

Discrepant motivations and discrepant beliefs or cognitive processes may co-occur, and strong social motives may be mediated by biased social judgments through a kind of wishful thinking. Nevertheless, motives and cognitive biases can be disentangled; it is possible to desire a kind of relationship strongly without having a bias toward overuse of the corresponding relational model, as it is possible to have such a cognitive bias that is not in the service of discrepant motives. Dodge's (e.g., Dodge & Frame, 1982) work on the attributional biases of aggressive children, for instance, showed how a cognitive explanation is more appropriate than a common-sense motivational explanation; these children misinterpret innocuous events as signs of intentional slights, rather than being excessively aggressive *per se*.

### Implementation

Understanding the ways in which the four relational models are implemented in a particular culture is a matter of knowing an extensive and piecemeal assortment of social facts. These facts can be thought of as a loose-knit set of prototypes and paradigms; under certain social conditions it is appropriate to engage in certain kinds of behavior. These conditions might concern specific people, social roles, subject matter, places, or times. People who do not know the conditions governing a particular kind of social behavior, or who do not know how to execute that behavior skillfully, will be likely to have difficulties in social relationships. Implementing relationships in a culturally appropriate manner requires subtle skills and sophisticated coordination with others because every situation has unique features resembling many prototypes and paradigms. It is not a simple matter for two or more interactants to choose a relational model and implement it in the same way. Yet to have meaningful relationships, they must do so continuously, moving swiftly together from one model to another and from one implementation to another.

Difficulties in the practical use and implicit understanding of implementation *prototypes and paradigms* are different in kind from abnormalities in the recognition and use of the *relational models*, although they are both essentially cognitive. First, implementation difficulties are

likely to be highly specific to domains and contexts, whereas abnormalities in the recognition and use of the models are apt to be systematically organized around a single model. Second, implementation difficulties are likely to be closely and concretely tied to specific behaviors, whereas abnormalities in the use of the relational models will have more wide-ranging implications for social conduct. Third, implementation difficulties are likely to involve the absence of specific social knowledge, whereas abnormalities in the recognition and use of the models may be matters of excessive or inflexible use of a particular model. That is, people with implementation difficulties lack specific elements in the practice of their social behavior rather than more general, structural abnormalities in their social cognition. Although abnormalities in the recognition and use of a particular relational model may impede the learning of implementation prototypes linked to that or to other models—for instance, an inflexible overreliance on AR might hamper learning how to engage in appropriate egalitarian turn taking in work teams—the two kinds of relational difficulties are best considered separately.

### **Interdependence Among Relationships**

Appreciation of the interdependence among relationships is the fourth psychological prerequisite for satisfactory relationships. This little-recognized capacity deserves attention because it is possible for someone to be adept at implementing each of the four models separately without being able to coordinate them in everyday social life. Such a difficulty would be serious to the extent that a person lives in an intricate social network, as distinct from a set of unconnected dyads. Fitting into a tenable social position among other people requires not only the ability to simultaneously assess the nature of relationships with each person individually but also the ability to comprehend the indirect relational consequences of actions for connected relationships. Therefore, social living involves not only cognitive complexity but also taking into account remote and indirect future consequences. Theorists have argued that it is precisely these demands of social life that have driven the evolution of human intelligence (Byrne & Whiten, 1988; Humphrey, 1976).

There are innumerable problems that can arise from lack of insight into the implications that connect relationships. For example, it is important to recognize that offering to play with one friend may make another friend jealous; it is equally important to take into account that Mom may not be able to help you right now because she has to feed your baby sister and that hitting your sister may cause Mom to give you a time-out. People who found it difficult to appreciate such connections among relationships would face many social difficulties.

This combination of complexity and foresight that is required to link relationships appropriately makes appreciation of the interdependence of relationships the most cognitively challenging of the four prerequisites. Among young children especially (whose egocentricity, present orientation, and concreteness have often been articles of faith among developmentalists), we would expect very limited appreciation of the connections among relationships. Nevertheless, to the degree that these limitations are due to insufficient use of existing mental resources, we might expect that certain kinds of remediation might be possible.

### **CONCLUSION**

This discussion of ways to conceptualize and intervene in relational difficulties is necessarily sketchy, as few writers have attempted a systematic treatment of how remediation of problematic relationships should proceed. However, it is the authors' hope that relational theory and this taxonomy of prerequisites for satisfactory relationships can spur practical developments in this field. At the very least, relational theory suggests the importance of a thoughtful diagnosis of relational difficulties. It makes a difference for any conceivable form of intervention, whether a

recurrent pattern of interpersonal problems, such as social withdrawal, ostracism, or bullying, is at the root a matter of broad social-cognitive biases or limitations, of unusually weak or strong social motivations, of failure to grasp specific contextual rules of conduct, or of general deficiencies of foresight and appreciation of the interdependence among relationships. Any intervention that targets the wrong alternative will probably have only limited success. Which of the relational models and relational prerequisites are most pertinent to specific populations remains to be seen. However, relational theory provides a fruitful conceptual scheme for helping people develop satisfying and meaningful social relationships.

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# Making Friends

## The Influences of Culture and Development

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*edited by*

**Luanna H. Meyer, Ph.D.**

Massey University College of Education  
New Zealand

**Hyun-Sook Park, Ph.D.**

California State University  
Sacramento

**Marquita Grenot-Scheyer, Ph.D.**

California State University  
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