

A Theory of Communal (and Exchange) Relationships

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative distinction between communal and exchange relationships (Clark and Mills, 1979; Mills and Clark, 1982) together with a quantitative dimension to communal relationships (Mills and Clark, 1982; Mills et al., 2004) is described. A review is given of empirical work supporting the theory and its implications for such things as: non-contingent helping; donor and recipient reactions to giving help; emotional expression and reactions to others' emotional expressions; keeping track of contributions and of needs in relationships; and, more broadly, what constitutes healthy and unhealthy intimate and non-intimate relationships. In the process, the theory, details of its development, refinement, and testing as well as challenges to our approach from other researchers are commented upon and placed in historical perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Why, when purchasing a gift for a friend, do we expect price tags to be on items yet, after the purchase, we make sure they been removed? Why did a friend who rented a vacation house and arrived to find no hot

water, find it maddening the real estate agent tried to elicit her sympathy by explaining that the owners were experiencing severe personal problems? When we began work on a distinction between communal and exchange relationships in the 1970s, social psychologists did not have ready answers to these questions. Yet the questions were intriguing and we set to work to provide theoretical answers backed with empirical support.

At that time, the now flourishing area of social research on close relationships had yet to emerge. There was work on interpersonal attraction to be sure. There was work on norms governing how people regulated the giving and receiving of benefits and rewards in relationships with equity theory being the most prominent (see, for example, Adams, 1965; Messick and Cook, 1983; Walster et al., 1978). Yet no social psychologist had suggested the possibility that the rules governing behavior might differ by relationship context. It was in that atmosphere that we set forth a qualitative distinction between communal and exchange relationships (Clark and Mills, 1979).

We drew our inspiration from some brief observations made by sociologist Irving Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman had noted differences in the nature "social" and "economic" exchange. Social exchange, he said, was compromised by agreement in advance as to what was to be exchanged. Something given in a social exchange "need only be returned if the relationship calls for it; that is when the putative recipient comes to be in need of a favor or when he is ritually stationed for a ceremonial expression of regard." In contrast, in economic exchange, "no amount of mere thanks can presumably satisfy the giver; he must get something of equivalent material value in return." (Goffman, 1961: 275-276). The distinction was made briefly, no experimentation nor indeed any systematic research had been done to document it, and we did not completely agree with Goffman. Yet we thought his comments were important.

A QUALITATIVE DISTINCTION BETWEEN EXCHANGE AND COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS

The qualitative distinction we initially drew between exchange and communal relationships dealt with the norms that governed the giving and acceptance of benefits. We defined the term benefit as something one member of a relationship chooses to give to the other that is, in the donor's opinion (and typically in the recipient's and outside observers' as well), of use or value. Benefits take many forms. Services, goods, compliments, provision of information, supporting a person in reaching a goal, and symbols of caring such as cards or flowers, can all be benefits. Importantly, benefits are not the same as rewards. For our purposes the term "reward" refers to all pleasures, satisfactions or gratifications that the recipient might enjoy (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959: 12). For instance, a person might enjoy the reflected glory of being associated

with a famous individual but unless the famous person chose to associate with the person *in order* to confer that reflected glory the enjoyment is a reward, not a benefit. Also, not all benefits constitute rewards. A person may give another person a benefit intending to meet the person's needs or desires but the benefit might *not* be a reward from the recipient's perspective. One of our students once received a bouquet from an admirer. The flowers were a benefit. They had value and the donor intended to give them to the recipient. The recipient generally liked flowers, yet she did not experience receiving *those* flowers as rewarding due to her lack of any desire for a relationship with the donor.²

The nature of exchange relationships

In our initial papers (Clark and Mills, 1979; Mills and Clark, 1982; Clark, 1985) we posited that in many relationships members assume that a benefit is given with the expectation of receiving a comparable benefit (or benefits) in return. We chose the term "exchange relationship" as a label for these relationships rather than Goffman's term "economic exchange" because many of the benefits people give and receive do not involve money or things for which a monetary value can easily be calculated. Yet such benefits can still be exchanged, one for another. In these relationships, we said, the receipt of a benefit incurs an obligation (debt) to return a comparable benefit. In such relationships each person is concerned with how much he or she will receive in exchange for benefiting the other and how much is owed for benefits received. (We were using, and still use, the term "exchange" in a narrower sense than some others in the fields of social psychology and sociology.) Exchange relationships are often (but not always) exemplified by relationships that are called, in lay language, business relationships, relationships between acquaintances, and relationships between strangers meeting and interacting

for the first time (assuming no desire for a friendship or romantic relationship.)

The nature of communal relationships

Not all relationships follow exchange rules. In some relationships benefits are given in support of the partner's welfare *non-contingently*; that is, benefits are given without the donor or the recipient feeling the recipient has an obligation to repay. This does not rule out the possibility that giving benefits increases the recipient's desire to behave communally toward the donor. It might and often does. Yet it might not. It simply means that the proximal motive for giving benefit is to improve the recipient's welfare and that neither the donor nor the recipient (if both were following a communal norm) feel that benefits come with a price tag, implicit or explicit. The donor may *hope* that the recipient will be similarly responsive to his or her needs as they arise which is likely why Goffman stated that something given in a social exchange, "need only be returned if the relationship calls for it." Yet, *hope* for the recipient having a similar motivation seems more appropriate to us than saying that a benefit "need only be returned when the relationship calls for it" because one can't demand such responsiveness. Moreover, we say *may* hope because there are communal relationships in which abilities to be responsive to one another's welfare differ greatly and, especially in these relationships, donors may not hope for similar responsiveness from the partner. For instance, parents may gladly pay their child's college tuition, yet if one of them decides to return to college they may well *not* hope that the child will strive to pay their tuition even if they must stretch to pay that extra tuition themselves. Ability to provide support matters (a factor that often explains why some communal relationships are asymmetrical in the sense that parties do not feel equal amounts of responsibility for one another's welfare — an aspect of communal relationships that

entails differences in communal strength which is discussed in more detail below). Even when ability does not vary, some communal relationships may be asymmetrical and that may be OK with both sides.

Communal relationships are often exemplified by relationships commonly referred to as friends, family members, romantic partners, and spouses. Yet there are plenty of exceptions to this rule. Early on, when we first said that family relationships often exemplify communal relationships, a colleague responded, "Not my mother! She kept careful track of what relatives gave us for wedding presents and then made sure her gift to their child was exactly comparable." Our sense was that this mother did have a communal relationship with her son but considered her relationships with many other relatives to be exchange in nature.

There is, we believe, an evolutionary basis for the existence of communal relationships. Newborn infants would not survive without someone attending to their needs non-contingently. Kin have likely long supported one another on a non-contingent basis. The very nature of small hunter-gatherer societies was such that there was an unpredictability of who would find food, shelter, and other necessities of life and who would need it. This likely dictated communal sharing and consumption of benefits (cf. Clark, 1984a; Clark and Jordan, 2002; and see Chapter 18, "Twists of Fate" in Kelley et al., 2003). Developmentally, an infant's need for and (one-sided) understanding of a communal norm would seem to emerge prior to his or her need for and understanding of an exchange norm which, in current society, is needed to give and receive benefits from a widening group of nonfamily members and nonfriends (see also Pataki et al., 1994). We once observed a young child at a community pool request a bag of potato chips at a snack bar and happily walk away without paying and without apparent guilt. The attendant called after the child telling him he must pay. Here, we thought, was an example of a child who likely understood communal norms well given that he was given food,

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unconditionally, by family members, and had some learning left to do when it came to understanding an exchange norm. Historically, the need for exchange in addition to communal relationships likely expanded greatly with the advent of civilization and specialization in skills, which increased differentiation between the skills and goods individuals could supply to one another.

Not all relationships are communal or exchange in nature

Although we have long focused upon communal and exchange relationships, we did not (and do not) believe that all relationships must be communal or exchange in nature. For example, there are also exploitative relationships which fit neither our conceptual definition for communal nor our conceptual definition for exchange relationships. Relationships that seem to be some sort of hybrid of a communal and an exchange relationship also exist. For instance, elementary school teachers are responsible for attending to many aspects of their young students' welfare, especially their need to learn. They do not expect direct repayment from those children nor do the children give much thought (if any) to repayments. But the obligations are circumscribed and the same teacher is paid for these services albeit by the school district or school in exchange for these services and would not provide the services without pay.

Early studies demonstrating the validity of the qualitative distinction

In the 1970s, social psychologists studying interpersonal interactions typically were conducting studies of interactions between strangers. We recall Ellen Berscheid, commenting at the time, that in our zeal to maintain control and to conduct true experiments on social behavior we were all busy studying relationships between people who had never seen

one another before and who never expected to see each other in the future. We knew little about interactions in the relationships that matter most to people – those with their friends, family members, and romantic partners. All that has changed rapidly over the last three and a half decades (see, for example, Clark and Lemay, 2010) but to understand our research it is important to understand the context *at the time* the original research was conducted.

Once we had drawn the qualitative distinction, our challenge was to devise a true experimental manipulation of whether our participants would desire a communal or exchange relationship (and would therefore behave differently depending upon experimental condition when interacting with a partner if our postulates were correct). To create desire for a communal relationship a target person had to be interpersonally attractive, the research participant had to be “in the market” for new communal relationships and the target had to be available and interested as well. In the absence of these factors, we thought an exchange relationship would be preferred. We settled on a strategy of bringing two previously unacquainted people together, one of whom was a confederate, the other a true participant. We recruited college students in their early years at a residential college figuring that such students having just been uprooted from family and high school communities were typically “in the market” for new friends and, possibly, a new romantic partner. We selected a physically attractive, relaxed, engaging young woman whom we knew to be popular as our confederate figuring that she would be an appealing potential friend or romantic partner. Then we manipulated *her* availability and seeming interest in a new communal relationship. In our communal condition, we described her as new at the university and eager to form relationships (making her similar to and available to our participants). In our exchange condition, we described her as married and about to be picked up by her husband (making her dissimilar to and unavailable to our participants).

This manipulation worked (see, for instance, Clark and Mills, 1979; Clark, 1986) and was used with minor modification in many of our initial experimental studies.

DO PEOPLE IN (OR DESIRING) COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS SHUN BEHAVIORS WHICH SUGGEST THEY OR A POTENTIAL PARTNER MAY BE FOLLOWING AN EXCHANGE NORM?

Our inaugural studies focused on demonstrating that exchange behaviors would occur and be welcomed in our exchange conditions, but would be avoided and reacted to negatively (if they did occur) in our communal conditions. We *had* to start here because, at the time, equity theory was the dominant theory for explaining how people gave and received benefits in relationships. The overall extant assumption was that giving benefits created inequities, resulted in discomfort, and called for repayment (see Walster et al., 1978). We predicted that *only* if an exchange relationship was desired would people positively respond to being repaid for a favor they had given to a target; reactions to such a payment would be negative when a communal relationship was desired. This should occur, we reasoned, because acting in accord with an exchange norm would imply that a communal relationship was not desired.

Our participants were male. They encountered a female target with whom they were led to desire either an exchange or a communal relationship. Each participant and confederate worked on a task. They were allowed to help one another. Tasks were assigned to enable the real participant to finish his task with materials to spare. The experimenter asked if he wished to give materials to the female. All did so and the confederate repaid him or did not with an extra credit point. Finally, under the guise of preparation for another task the male participants indicated their liking of the female confederate.

The results were clear. Repayment increased liking (relative to no repayment) in the exchange conditions; in contrast it reduced liking in the communal conditions. In a second study (Clark and Mills, 1979, Study 2) participants were female and we manipulated desire for a communal or an exchange relationship with a female target. This time participants received help or did not followed by a request to return a comparable benefit or no request. After receiving a benefit, receiving a request for a comparable benefit increased liking in our exchange conditions but decreased liking in our communal conditions. Finally, receiving a request for a benefit in the absence of having received one decreased liking among our exchange condition participants (where it presumably created a debt) but not among our communal condition participants.

These studies and other early studies showing, for instance, that people who are not repaid feel exploited when they desire an exchange relationship but not when they desire a communal one (Clark and Waddell, 1985) and that giving and receiving non-comparable benefits results in a relationship looking more like a friendship than does giving and receiving comparable benefits (Clark, 1981) were greeted with enough interest to be published. Yet they also generated skepticism.

Reviewers and audience members at conferences suggested an alternative explanation: perhaps people in our exchange conditions wanted an *immediate* balancing of accounts whereas participants in our communal conditions still kept track of benefits given and received, but were content to let accounts be balanced across time. This was possible. Yet, we did not "buy" this interpretation for many reasons. It left open many questions: *Why* should there be a difference in time course? Also, even if the projected time courses were different why would someone be liked less in our communal conditions for prompt repayment than for failing to repay? Moreover, in the initial studies reported in Clark and Mills (1979) it seemed unlikely that there was simply more time to "balance the books" in the communal than in

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the exchange conditions for there was no guarantee that the relationship in the communal conditions would be ongoing. Furthermore, there are plenty of long-term business (exchange) relationships in which bills still must be paid promptly. Why couldn't those debts wait as well? It also seemed impossible to us that people simply could not (even if they wished to) keep track of and balance all the myriad benefits that are given and received over time in intimate relationships. In addition, an exchange rule could not explain such things as, why parents would ever care for a severely handicapped child or why the spouses of many Alzheimers patients continue to care for their partners even after the partners can no longer reciprocate or even recognize them. Finally, and importantly, following an exchange rule simply does not afford the benefit of the unambiguous inferences of being caring (by donors) and of being cared for (by recipients) of benefits. We sensed that these feelings were terribly important in friendships, family relationships, and romantic relationships.

We, of course, could reason all we wished about why we were right. What was needed to convince our critics was evidence that people do not keep track of benefits in all relationships as would be necessary to maintain equity across time. Thus, three studies were conducted to demonstrate this (Clark, 1984a,b). In the first, desire for a communal or an exchange relationship was manipulated; in the second two, we contrasted the behavior of strangers working together with that of friends working together. In each, participants engaged in a task in which they and a partner were working together to find certain number sequences in a large matrix of numbers. For each sequence found the pair earned a monetary reward to be divided afterwards. The partner always started working in either red or black ink. Then it was the participant's turn. Pens of both colors were available. The participant chose one and our dependent measure was whether the participant chose to work with the same color pen (making it unclear, in the end, how many sequences

each person found) or a different color pen (making it absolutely clear who had contributed what). The results of all three studies were clear. Strangers who expected to remain strangers kept track of benefits – the vast majority choosing to use a different color pen; people led to desire a communal relationship or those with an existing communal relationship did not – each time fewer than the 50 percent did so. (This effect also was conceptually replicated by Clark et al., 1989). Indeed, when trying to *form* a communal relationship people seemed to “bend over backwards” not to choose a different color pen choosing one significantly less often than 50 percent of the time.

These results were important. If people who desire or have a communal relationship do not keep track of benefits in the moment they cannot be quietly keeping those inputs in mind across time to make sure the books even out in the end.³

DO PEOPLE IN COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS FOLLOW A COMMUNAL NORM?

Having established that people led to expect a friendship or romantic relationship (or those having such a relationship) react negatively to and avoid exchange behaviors, we turned to demonstrating that people led to desire communal relationships behave in more communal ways than those led to desire exchange relationships. In one set of studies we showed that people led to desire communal relationships would keep track of a light that indicated that a partner in the next room was experiencing a need (even if they could do nothing about it) whereas those who desired an exchange relationship were less likely to do so (Clark et al., 1986, Study 1; see also Clark et al., 1989). We also demonstrated that attention to needs would take place in exchange relationships *if* the person who could attend to those needs knew that he or she would soon be in the same position as the

partner and would want the partner to attend to his or her needs. In that case, repayments might well be needed. Indeed, when roles were to be reversed, attention to needs in our exchange condition rose to levels comparable with those observed in our communal conditions (whether or not role reversals were scheduled). In the communal conditions attention to needs did not vary with the other person's opportunity to repay (Clark et al., 1986, Study 2). Also fitting with findings of attending more to needs when communal relationships are desired or exist, we found and reported evidence of people responding more positively to a partner's expressions of emotion (which are signals of needs or lack thereof) when a communal rather than an exchange relationship is desired (Clark and Taraban, 1991; Yoo et al., 2011, Study 1). We also found that people express more emotion when a communal rather than an exchange relationship is desired (Clark and Finkel, 2005a; Clark et al., 2001). Furthermore, the willingness to express negative emotions prospectively predicts college students forming more relationships over the course of a semester with previously unknown fellow students and with the establishment of more intimacy in the closest of those relationships (Graham et al., 2008). Meanwhile other researchers have reported on links between suppressing emotions and lower social support, less closeness to others, and lower social satisfaction in normatively close relationships (Srivastava et al., 2009), lower rapport in such relationships, poorer communication, and lower chances of relationship formation (Butler et al., 2003).

Of course, levels of helping and responsiveness to another's sad emotion ought to be higher when communal relationships are desired or exist than when exchange relationships are desired or exist and we demonstrated this in a study by Clark et al. (1987, Study 1). People were randomly assigned to desire a communal or exchange relationship by giving them time alone to view an attractive confederate's photo and questionnaire responses that led them to believe that the

confederate was either married or single, new to campus, and thinking that doing the study might be a good way to meet people. Participants were then provided an opportunity to voluntarily help a fellow participant by performing a mundane task. Participants in the communal condition helped for longer time periods than did people in the exchange condition. In addition, knowing the other was sad significantly increased time spent helping in the communal but not in the exchange conditions. Other studies revealed that people's moods improve in reaction to having helped a potential partner when communal (but not exchange) relationships are desired (Williamson and Clark, 1989; 1992) and that people feel badly about not helping when communal (but not when exchange) relationships are desired (Williamson et al., 1996). Moreover, people desiring a communal relationship care how much time another spends in picking out a gift *for them*; people desiring an exchange relationship do not (Clark et al., 1998).

ADDING A QUANTITATIVE DIMENSION TO THE THEORY

Whereas we started with a qualitative distinction, early on we added a quantitative dimension to our theory – communal strength (Mills and Clark, 1982) and later we developed a measure of the dimension of communal strength (Mills et al., 2004). Although we considered it necessary to begin by emphasizing the qualitative distinction in order to emphasize the very existence of communal relationships and their distinction from exchange relationships, we knew from the beginning that communal relationships vary in how much responsibility in terms of time, effort, or money a person takes on for another person (what we call communal strength). Clearly, for instance, most people feel more communal responsibility for their children than for their friends and will spend more time, effort, and money to benefit their child than their friends. (Consider, for instance,

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the fact that many people pay college tuition for their children and almost no one does so for a friend although both relationships are, qualitatively, communal in nature.). Our measure of communal strength (Mills et al., 2004) has been shown to tap a construct distinct from behavioral interdependence as measured by Berscheid et al.'s (1989) Relationship Closeness Inventory and distinct from a measure of liking for the partner. (Consider, for instance, that one may feel considerable communal responsibility for a cranky elderly relative whom one does not like very much or that one can feel considerable liking for an attractive, potential romantic partner whom one has just met but for whom one feels little communal responsibility.) The communal strength scale correlates with Rubin's (1970) Love Scale and has been shown to predict allocation of benefits to peers and diary reports of giving help to and receiving help from friends. (See also Monin et al., 2008, for an additional methodology for measuring communal strength and further evidence that communal strength is not the same construct as liking).

People have very low-strength communal relationships with many other people. For instance, many people if stopped by a stranger

and asked the time or for simple directions will provide the requested service to meet almost any requestor's needs without expecting anything in return. They have higher-strength communal relationships with others such as friends and people often have extremely high-strength communal relationships with a single other person or a very select group of people such as children and a spouse or romantic partner. Figure 38.1 depicts one person's set of hierarchically arranged communal relationships. The hierarchy of relationships appears along the x-axis, the degree of felt responsibility appears along the y-axis and the line running through the graph depicts the degree of responsibility felt for various people. The needs of a person high in a communal hierarchy take precedence over equivalent (and sometimes nonequivalent) needs of a person lower in communal strength in the event of a conflict. For instance, a person might forego attending a friend's birthday party in order to be at her own child's birthday party and the friend is very likely to understand and to accept this. Of course, Figure 38.1 depicts just one possible hierarchy. The ordering of people (and of the self) in these implicit hierarchies will vary considerably between persons and cultures.

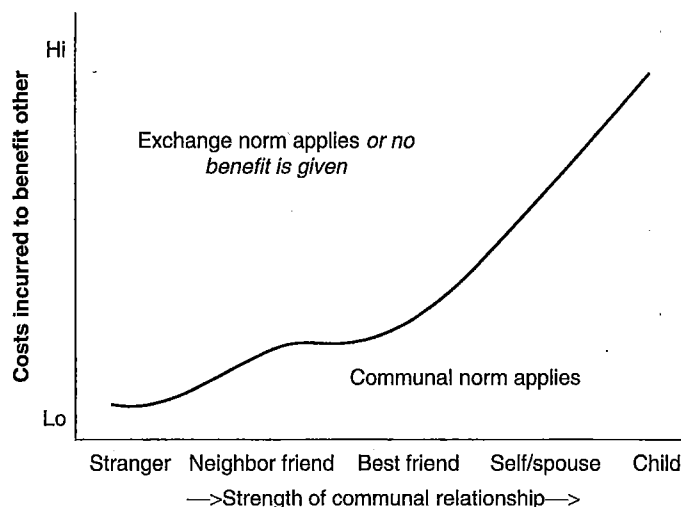


Figure 38.1 Costs one hypothetical person would be willing to incur to benefit a variety of relationship partners

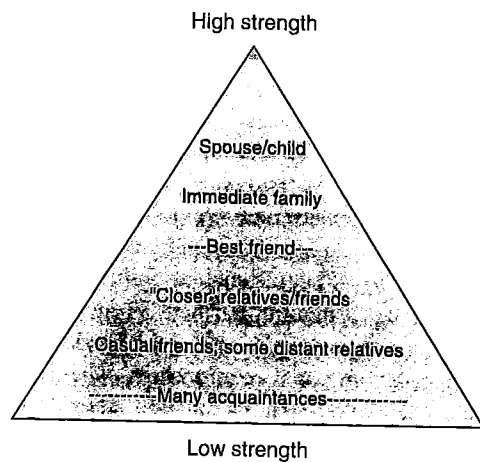


Figure 38.2 One person's hypothetical hierarchy of communal relationship partners

Reis et al. (2004) suggested that people's sets of communal relationships likely fall in a triangular shape as depicted in Figure 38.2 with most people having many low-strength communal relationships, fewer medium-strength communal relationships, and very few very-high-strength communal relationships. There is, after all, a limit on the number of people for whom an individual can assume responsibility. It is also the case that once one has an established network of communal family members, friends and a romantic partner who feel responsibility for one's own welfare, adding more adds little to one's own security.

Note that the "self" is also depicted in Figures 38.1 and 38.2 because people do generally feel a communal responsibility to the self as well as to others. Most people place the "self" high in their hierarchy of communal relationships and consider their responsibility to care for themselves high and to take precedence over their responsibility to many other (but very often not all) other communal partners. For instance, a woman might think that taking care of herself takes clear precedence over taking care of the needs of a casual friend but not over taking care of her child.

Note also that Figure 38.1 implicitly conveys that a person may have both a communal and an exchange relationship with the same relationship partner within different "cost" ranges.

For instance, a person might give a friend advice, a ride, presents, lunch, and include that friend in social events all on a communal basis but sell the friend a car on an exchange basis. More commonly, we believe, benefits are given on a communal basis up to some "cost" threshold and above that they simply are not given or discussed.

Whereas the communal nature of a relationship has a quantitative dimension, exchange norms do not have an equivalent quantitative dimension (Mills and Clark, 1982). If a relationship is exchange in nature, it just is. Benefits given require comparable benefits in return. Repayments may be missed. After all these norms are ideals; violations will occur. For instance, given limited resources and many debts, some people may be forced to choose who to repay and who not to repay. They may do so based on liking, the importance of the exchange relationship to their well-being, the length of the relationship, and/or the demandingness of the person to whom the debt is owed. Yet unpaid debt remains, and with it comes guilt on the debtor's part and annoyance or anger on the grantor's part. There is no parallel in an exchange relationship to a friend's understanding that one could not attend to his need because one's child had a need at the same time. People may try to excuse unpaid debts in exchange relationships by appealing to having other debts but the person who is unpaid will just not understand.

THE DISTINCTION IS NOT ONE OF SHORT- VERSUS LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

From the time we published our first paper on the distinction between exchange versus communal relationships, many people made two assumptions about its basis, neither of which we shared. Daniel Batson raised both in a paper challenging our distinction (Batson, 1993). He actually did us a favor in the sense of pushing us to address in print two issues that others had raised as well (see Clark and

Mills, 1993 assumption 1 relationships are each benefit whereas communal relationships are not. In fact, the distinction is not one of short- versus long-term relationships. Some relationships are earlier examined the time with. Other times (tensions) one communal benefit once occurred an incoming for housing school and (daughter) in communal relationship parent-child last a long time desires occur arise across relationships equal across and there are actual long-term which benefit the most communal relationship between the youngest early adulthood need help a both parties in fact very never arises.

THE DISTINCTION OF SELFISH RELATIONSHIPS

A second assumption others have made is that relationships are un-

Mills, 1993 for our response). The first assumption he made was that exchange relationships are short-term relationships with each benefit given being quickly repaid, whereas communal relationships are long-term relationships with benefits balancing out across time. As we have already noted in talking about record keeping, this is not the basis for our distinction. Communal and exchange relationships can be either short- or long-term. Some (generally weak) communal relationships are one-time occurrences as in our earlier example of a person telling a stranger the time without expecting anything in return. Other times (as in some emergency situations) one can provide another with larger communal benefits on a short-term basis as once occurred to one of us when the parent of an incoming college student had no money for housing upon bringing her daughter to school and stayed (along with her pets and daughter) in our home for awhile. Other communal relationships, such as many marriages, parent-child relationships, and friendships do last a long time. Responsiveness to needs and desires occurs as those needs and desires arise across time. In symmetrical communal relationships, benefiting may well be roughly equal across time. Yet there are no guarantees and there are also many cases of asymmetrical long-term communal relationships in which benefits may never even out. Perhaps the most common examples are the relationship between parents and children during the younger individuals' childhoods and early adulthood. Of course, if the parents need help as they age it is often given but both parties are unlikely to be distressed (and in fact very likely to be happy) if that need never arises.

THE DISTINCTION IS NOT ONE OF SELFISH VERSUS UNSELFISH RELATIONSHIPS

A second assumption Batson (1993) and others have made is that communal relationships are unselfish in nature and exchange

relationships selfish. We do not make that assumption. Once a communal norm is adopted, benefits are given on a non-contingent basis; once an exchange norm is adopted, benefits are given on a contingent basis but *either* selfish or unselfish motives can drive a person to adopt each norm.

Consider a communal norm, for instance. There exist many possible "selfish" reasons for adopting such a norm. One may have just moved to a new community, wish to form new friendships, and act on a communal basis toward potential friends to start a friendship. One may care for a disagreeable, elderly relative on a communal basis because one would feel guilty if one did not or because one fears criticism by others. There also exist unselfish reasons for following a communal norm such as feelings of empathy for one's partner. So too may the drive to communally care for one's offspring compel one to adherence to a communal norm in a manner that seems unselfish to us (though some might consider it selfish in the sense of promoting the survival of one's genes across generations).

The adoption of an exchange norm also may be driven by relatively selfish or relatively unselfish motives. It is likely that most times when a person adopts an exchange norm the motive is selfish. For example, when a person goes to the store to buy a loaf of bread it is because he wants that bread and almost never because he wants to benefit the grocer. When a person forms a car pool it is likely to save time and money for him or herself. Yet people may also adopt an exchange norm for unselfish reasons. It might, for instance, be possible to exploit an employee given a dearth of jobs and to pay the person less than his or her work is worth. If that were done the relationship would not adhere to an exchange norm but would be best characterized as exploitative in nature. In such a situation, unselfish motives (to be moral, to be fair) might drive the decision to follow an exchange norm by paying the person a fair wage. Of course, both selfish and unselfish motives might drive adoption of an exchange (or a communal) relationship.

For instance, currently people advocate buying "fair trade" coffee on an exchange basis seemingly *both* because they want coffee (a selfish motive) and because, although equally good coffee might be purchased at a lower price, they do not wish to exploit coffee workers and instead want to offer them a "fair" trade in exchange terms (a relatively unselfish motive although we know that some might say the buyer gets to feel good about himself and that makes it selfish).

In discussing whether communal relationships are selfish or not, it is also important to point out our assumption that people place themselves in their own hierarchies of communal relationships and that, typically, they place themselves high in those hierarchies. This means that most people do consider taking care of their own needs to take precedence over taking care of most other people's needs even when it may be said that they have communal relationships with those others. It is easy to illustrate this point. People send themselves, not their neighbors or friends, on vacation, but they still can act communally toward those friends.

They may also place certain others at a rank equal to the self in their hierarchies (e.g., a spouse may merit this rank) and some at higher ranks in their hierarchies (e.g., a young, completely dependent child is often "given" such a rank) and make sacrifices for such people and or forgive such people for major wrongdoings. The overall point to be made here, though, is simply that selfishness versus unselfishness is not the defining characteristic of communal relationships.

COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE SYMMETRICAL OR ASYMMETRICAL

Most communal relationships are symmetrical in the sense that each person assumes about the same level of responsibility for the partner's welfare, as does the partner for him or her. Friendships, romantic relationships, and marriages are examples of relationships

that are often both communal in nature and symmetrical in felt responsibility. Yet communal relationships can be asymmetrical as well. A mother generally assumes much greater responsibility for her young child's welfare than vice versa and this pattern often continues right into the child's adulthood. Indeed, one of us recently asked a large class of college students about whether their relationships with their friends and their relationships with their mothers were characterized by feeling "about equal responsibility for one another's welfare," the other feeling "more responsibility for me than I do for her/him," or the self feeling "more responsibility for her/him than s/he does for me." For friends, 84 percent of the students reported feeling equal responsibility, 6 percent said their friend felt more responsibility for them than they did for the friend, and 10 percent said they felt more responsibility for their friend than vice versa. Reports for their mother showed a very different pattern. Only 15 percent said they and their mother felt equal responsibility for one another, 85 percent reported their mother felt more responsibility for them than vice versa, and no student reported that he or she felt more responsibility for his or her mother than she did more the student. Clearly these particular Western, largely affluent, college students tended to have symmetrical communal relationships with their friends and asymmetrical ones with their mothers.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNAL AND EXCHANGE ORIENTATION

We believe most variability in communal responsiveness lies between relationships rather than between individuals (Clark and Lemay, 2010). That is, we assume that almost all people have relationships in which they strive to follow a communal norm as well as other relationships in which they make little or no effort to be responsive to partners. That said, differences in people's tendencies

Box 38. exchange

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Box 38.1 Scales to measure individual differences in communal and in exchange orientation

Communal Orientation Scale

- 1 It bothers me when other people neglect my needs.
- 2 When making a decision, I take other people's needs and feelings into account.
- 3 I'm not especially sensitive to other people's feelings.*
- 4 I don't consider myself to be a particularly helpful person.*
- 5 I believe people should go out of their way to be helpful.
- 6 I don't especially enjoy giving others aid.*
- 7 I expect people I know to be responsive to my needs and feelings.
- 8 I often go out of my way to help another person.
- 9 I believe it's best not to get involved taking care of other people's personal needs.*
- 10 I'm not the sort of person who often comes to the aid of others.*
- 11 When I have a need, I turn to others I know for help.
- 12 When people get emotionally upset, I tend to avoid them.*
- 13 People should keep their troubles to themselves.*
- 14 When I have a need that others ignore, I'm hurt.

Items from the Exchange Orientation Scale

- 1 When I give something to another person, I generally expect something in return.
- 2 When someone buys me a gift, I try to buy that person as comparable a gift as possible.
- 3 I don't think people should feel obligated to repay others for favors.*
- 4 I wouldn't feel exploited if someone failed to repay me for a favor.*
- 5 I don't bother to keep track of benefits I have given others.*
- 6 When people receive benefits from others, they ought to repay those others right away.
- 7 It's best to make sure things are always kept 'even' between two people in a relationship.
- 8 I usually give gifts only to people who have given me gifts in the past.
- 9 When someone I know helps me out on a project, I don't feel I have to pay them back.*

*Note: These are two independent scales. Respondents rate each item for each scale on a five-point scale from "extremely uncharacteristic" of them (1) to "extremely characteristic" of them (5). Scores for items followed by an asterisk are reversed prior to calculating a sum indicating the respondent's communal or the respondent's exchange score.

to follow communal or exchange norms also exist.

To measure such individual differences, scales of both communal orientation and of exchange orientation have been developed (Clark et al., 1987; Mills and Clark, 1994). These two separate and orthogonal scales appear in Box 38.1. The communal scale has been utilized more extensively than the exchange scale (but note that other researchers, for instance Murstein and his colleagues [1977] and Sprecher [1992], have developed their own methods for measuring exchange orientation and exchange orientation generally has been studied a fair amount).

High scores on communal orientation (using the scale shown in Box 38.1) have been shown

to predict: helping a fellow student in a nonemergency situation (Clark et al., 1987); agreement that support has taken place among friends (Coriell and Cohen, 1995); willingness to express emotion to relationship partners especially when the relationship context calls for so doing (Clark and Finkel, 2005a, 2005b); allocating rewards equally when negotiating a friend, which makes good sense communally assuming equal needs (Thompson and Deharpport, 1998); people giving partners more credit for joint successful performances on a task and blaming them less for failure while attributions to the self remain unaffected by communal orientation (McCall, 1995); greater satisfaction in elderly persons' best friendships (Jones and

Box 38.2 The ten-item communal strength measure

- 1 How far would you be willing to go to visit ____?
- 2 How happy do you feel when doing something that helps ____?
- 3 How large a benefit would you be likely to give ____?
- 4 How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of ____?
- 5 How readily can you put the needs of ____ out of your thoughts?*
- 6 How high a priority for you is meeting the needs of ____?
- 7 How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for ____?*
- 8 How much would you be willing to give up to benefit ____?
- 9 How far would you go out of your way to do something for ____?
- 10 How easily could you accept not helping ____?*

*Note: The items with asterisks are reversed prior to summing scores. The instructions for this scale are as follows: "As you answer each question, fill in the person's initials in the blank. Circle one answer for each question on the scale from 0 'not at all' to 10 'extremely' before going on to the next question. Your answers will remain confidential."

Vaughan, 1990); and responding to cues of power with greater social responsibility (Chen et al., 2001). Low scores predict: burnout in nurses (Van Yperen et al., 1992) and leaders of self-help groups (Medvene et al., 1997); depression among caregivers of Alzheimer's patients (Williamson and Schulz, 1990); male physical abuse of female partners as well as males' associating with peers who endorse violence against female partners (Williamson and Silverman, 2001); and links between feeling under-benefited and feeling resentful (Thompson et al., 1995). *Matches* on communal orientation have been shown to be linked to better ability to capitalize on mutual opportunities in negotiations (Thompson and Deharpport, 1998). In other words, individual differences in communal orientation can be measured and predict behaviors that one would expect on the basis of following (or failing to follow) a communal norm.

High exchange orientation (using a variety of measures) has been found to predict one's marital satisfaction being tied to considerations of equity and, overall, to lower marital satisfaction, whereas the marital satisfaction of people low in exchange orientation has been shown to be both higher and unrelated to considerations of equity (Buunk and Van Yperen, 1991; see also Murstein et al., 1977) as well as to expectations of becoming

distressed over inequities in a relationship (Sprecher, 1992). High exchange orientation also has been linked to lower compatibility and friendship ratings among roommates and higher anxiety among women in those roommate pairs (Murstein and Azar, 1986).

Many situations clearly call for following one norm or the other and most people, no matter what their overall orientations, adhere to the norm that matches the situation. Yet individual differences in orientation likely do come into play in two types of situations. First, they are likely to come into play in situations lacking strong situational cues regarding how to behave. For instance, Clark et al. (1987, Study 2) found that communal orientation scores predicted how much help a person gave a young research assistant when no manipulation of relationship type had taken place. Second, these individual differences likely influence how easily and with how much equanimity people are able to follow the norm appropriate to a particular situation. That is, we suspect that exchange-oriented individuals likely must exert more effort and more self-consciously follow communal norms in marriage than others. They may also violate a communal norm/appeal to an exchange norm more often than others. In addition, we suspect that communally oriented individuals may have a tougher time

sticking to exchange orientation calls for a person being able to find a way to meet their needs that might minimize an emotional cost. This has not been the case in terms of employment.

Recent work has shown how the individual's attachment-related needs relate to adult attachment exchange norms. Higher levels of attachment are linked to situations in which there is evidence of slightly greater exchange with an exchange norm that are normative. Discomfort in a communal norm is called for (cf. Beck and Clark). Higher levels of attachment do not seem to be linked to communal situations and more to exchange orientations and more to exchange orientations. Communal attachment (Lydon, 2006,

Four additional

Our work on attachment calls for us to postulate of "high quality" relationships to being able to meet needs and set boundaries with partners. First, relationships are better when individuals are able to exert more strength of their own in their desired terms of the relationship. The nature of the relationship (the sense that it is strengthened)

sticking to exchange norms when the situation calls for using that norm but evidence of a person being needy exists. For instance, they might find it especially difficult to terminate an employee who needs the job but has not been living up to the (exchange) terms of employment.

Recent work also has begun examining how the individual difference dimensions of attachment-related avoidance and anxiety relate to adherence to communal and to exchange norms. Evidence suggests that higher levels of attachment-related avoidance are linked to: some reluctance to enter situations in which one may (or may not) receive evidence of another's communal interest; slightly greater tendencies to behave in accord with an exchange norm when in situations that are normatively communal in nature; and discomfort in situations in which adherence to a communal norm is occurring or seems to be called for (cf. Bartz and Lydon, 2006, 2008; Beck and Clark, 2009; Clark et al., 2010). Higher levels of attachment related anxiety do not seem to be linked to reluctance to enter communal situations but do seem to be related to ambivalence and discomfort in such situations and more reactivity to behavior suggesting adherence or lack thereof to both communal and exchange norms (Bartz and Lydon, 2006, 2008; Clark et al., 2010).

Four additional theoretical points

Our work on communal relationships has led us to postulate a few criteria for the existence of "high quality" close relationships in addition to being responsive to partner desires and needs and seeking such responsiveness from partners. First, because most peer communal relationships are symmetrical, couple members who implicitly agree on the appropriate strength of their communal relationship and its desired trajectory (Box 38.2) (both in terms of the slope and speed of strengthening the nature of the communal relationship or the sense that the relationship should not be strengthened) ought to feel more satisfied and

comfortable with their relationships than those who do not agree. If one person desires a stronger communal relationship than the other, first person may feel neglected and latter partner may feel smothered.

Second, in connection with people's (usually implicit) hierarchy of communal relationships, we suggest that a couple's or friends' complementarity in communal hierarchies will influence the quality of their relationships with one another. For example, spouses who are in agreement with one another that their newborn's welfare takes precedence over both of their own needs, their obligations to one another come next, and their obligations to their respective families of origin rank third, ought to experience less conflict in their relationship than a couple including a wife who puts her infant first, her parents second and her spouse third while the spouse puts her first (and expects her to do the same for him), his child second, and his own family of origin third (and, expects her to do the same with regard to their child and her family of origin).

Third, we believe that placement of the self within one's hierarchy of communal relationships has important implications for the nature of one's strongest communal relationships and, indeed, to one's ability to have very strong communal relationships. In particular, placing the self high in one's hierarchy but having another person (e.g., a spouse, a child) placed higher in one's hierarchy or at least "tied" with the self may be a requirement for "pulling off" very strong communal relationships. Here is why.

When the self is placed alone at the top of the hierarchy, especially when the self is placed well above everyone else, attending to the self's own needs will always take precedence over attending to others' needs. Compromises and sacrifices will not be made. Forgiveness for transgressions will not take place. Partners will not be able to relax self-defenses knowing that there is someone else to care for them as much or more than they care for themselves.

Finally, we do not suggest that adopting a communal norm is always the best strategy

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in relationships nor always healthy. Adopting a communal norm when the partner prefers an exchange relationship can be awkward and distressing to both parties. Similarly, acting in accord with a strong communal norm when one's partner desires a weaker communal relationship can produce problems as can mismatches in desires for asymmetrical versus symmetrical communal relationships.

DO PEOPLE REALLY BELIEVE IN AND FOLLOW COMMUNAL NORMS IN THEIR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS?

Do people really believe a communal rule is the "right" rule for their friendships, romantic relationships, and family relationship? Do they actually follow this rule in ongoing relationships? After all, one might think, most of the early research was done utilizing relationships between people who were meeting for the first time. Perhaps such people do follow a communal rule to win one another's affections but then drop the rule after commitments have been made. Recently we have been studying ongoing marriages and the results for this research suggest the answer to the first question posed above is yes. People do believe a communal norm is ideal for their marriages and that an exchange norm is decidedly not ideal, and in at least two samples of marriages the vast majority of people report that they and their spouse strive to follow a communal norm. The answer to the second question also appears to be yes (with some caveats). Specifically, both Grote and Clark (1998) and Clark et al. (2010) have found that individuals will rate a communal norm as ideal and an exchange norm as decidedly not ideal for their marriages. Clark et al. (2010) have also shown that, for at least the first two years of marriage, spouses report striving to adhere to such a norm, and that their partners strive to adhere to this norm as well. The caveats are straightforward.

Although members of both samples overwhelmingly reported that both they and their spouse strive to follow communal norms, research also suggests that, especially when they are distressed (Grote and Clark, 2001) or have chronic relationship insecurities (Clark et al., 2010), they may "fall down" on the job and calculate fairness according to an exchange rule.

Of course, it is also the case that the clinical and counseling literature on relationships provides overwhelming evidence that some relationships people normatively desire to be communal in nature (e.g., marriages) may come to be characterized by the antithesis of communal caring. Members may verbally and physically abuse one another, berate and criticize one another, and show contempt for one another. Although we have consistently said that family relationships, romantic relationships and marriages often exemplify communal relationships, at times, we hasten to add, they definitely do not. Adherence to a communal norm, we believe, characterizes well-functioning, healthy, marriages, friendships, and family relationships. Therapists will certainly encounter people in marriages and friendships and family relationships who do not follow communal norms. That ought not to be taken as evidence of a communal norm not applying to intimate relationships or of there being no differences in rules that govern the giving and acceptance of benefits in different relationships. Appeals to an exchange norm may be made in relationships that society calls upon to be communal in nature. When they are made, we suggest, they are signs of trouble. In contrast, when exchange norms are appealed to and followed in, say, a business relationship, they suggest the relationship is a healthy one. A person would not seek counseling because his business partner is keeping track of just who contributes what to the business and just who derives what benefits from the business. If his wife or mother or best friend did the same, it would not be surprising for counseling to be sought.

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CONCLUSION

When we set forth our distinction between communal and exchange relationships, we were forging new ground in social psychology. That has all changed dramatically as we pass the thirtieth anniversary of our first communal/exchange paper (Clark and Mills, 1979). Now work on relationships that are, normatively, communal in nature is thriving. Much knowledge has been gained about intra- and interpersonal processes characteristic of well and poorly functioning relationships that society calls for to be communal in nature. We have not attempted a review of the extensive work regarding factors that promote the healthy communal functioning of close relationships and the factors that interfere with such relationships (but see Clark and Lemay, 2010, for a review of such work, much of it done by others; and Clark et al., 2010; Grote and Clark, 2001; Grote et al., 2002, 2004; Lemay and Clark, 2008; Lemay et al., 2007 for theoretical ideas and results from our own laboratory suggesting factors that contribute to and detract from the communal health of a communal relationship.). Rather we have tried to convey a good sense of our original qualitative distinction between communal and exchange relationships, the quantitative concept of the communal strength of relationships, some implications of our theory for relationship functioning and of the empirical research that we, ourselves, have done to test our theoretical ideas.

We conclude by returning to the questions we posed to our readers at the beginning of this chapter. First, why, when purchasing a gift for a friend, do we expect price tags to be on items yet after the purchase make sure they been removed? The answer is that relationships with friends are communal in nature and relationships with storeowners are exchange in nature. Second, why did the friend who rented a vacation house and arrived to find no hot water find it maddening that her real estate agent tried to elicit her sympathy by explaining that the owners were experiencing severe personal problems? It is because

a rental arrangement is exchange in nature and the excuse called upon her to feel communal understanding for the unknown owners with whom she had no relationship at all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

1 After having been invited to prepare this chapter but prior to its completion, Judson R. Mills died. He was my mentor, the inspiration for the original communal/exchange distinction, central to the theoretical ideas expressed here and a co-author on much of the empirical work. In this chapter I have tried to stay true to his thinking. Yet had he lived he would forced me to be conceptually clearer and more precise, added new conceptual ideas, and most certainly debated the new ideas expressed here.

2 In excluding rewards from our theory, we immediately were addressing a more narrow set of issues than equity theorists had dealt with for many equity theorists had included rewards in their calculation of equity (cf. Walster et al., 1978).

3 In saying this it may be helpful to keep in mind that this does not mean that we believe people never violate a communal norm and keep track nor that when people feel their needs have been neglected that they sometimes retrospectively try to calculate "fairness." They do (Grote and Clark, 2001) – often in a very biased manner! It does mean that doing so is a violation of a norm typically followed in communal relationships.

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