Human Sociality

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The Inherent Sociability of *Homo sapiens*

This essay is a short introduction to relational models theory and the evidence supporting it. I begin by characterizing what a "social relationship" is, and then describe four elementary relational models that people use to coordinate all kinds of social interaction, thought, values, and emotions. The theory integrates the work of the major social theorists and builds on a synthesis of empirical studies across the social sciences, including anthropological fieldwork. I summarize the many studies that show how the four relational models organize everyday social action and naturally occurring cognition about real relationships . I conclude by discussing applications of the theory to psychopathology, family processes, business management, and public policy debates.

The most striking characteristic of *Homo sapiens* is our sociality. Social relationships pervade every aspect of human life and these relationships are far more extensive, complex, and diverse (within and across societies) than those of any other species. And for survival and reproduction we are far more dependent on our social relationships and our cultures than any other animal. But what does it mean to say that we are social animals—and what *is* a social relationship?

The characteristic feature of a social relationship is that two or more people coordinate with each other so that their action, affect, evaluation, or thought are complementary. That is, what each person does (or feels, judges, or thinks) makes sense with reference to what the other persons do (or are expected to do or feel): their actions complete each other. A girl gets off the swing in the expectation that her playmate will take the next turn; a man kills his wife's lover to avenge his honor; a woman prepares a salad to share with her friends at a potluck; a man pours libations on an altar to demonstrate his dependence, submission, and respect to the ancestors; a child cleans the kitchen while her parents are away to surprise them; a woman taking a shower explains to her husband her suggestions for remodeling the house—and then comes out to discover that he left the bathroom before she started talking. As the last three examples show, it is not necessary that the 'other persons' be present or even exist--nor, if they do exist, that they actually perceive the action or perceive it as it was intended. We can appropriately say that a social relationship exists when any person acts under the implicit assumption that they are interacting with reference to imputedly shared meanings.

Relationships are patterns of coordination among people; they are not properties of individuals. We can say that a person "is a mother" or "is the boss," but this means that

(in appropriate contexts) a person performs a role vis-à-vis certain "children" or "employees." A mother is a mother *to* certain children, and relates in other ways to other people. (And the same mother may be a professor to her children if they attend a class she teaches.)

Although cultures and individuals vary considerably in the strength and—above all—in the forms of their sociality, all humans are deeply social by nature. Even self-interested individualism itself is a form of culturally organized interdependence in which people organize their interaction with reference to models of "self-expression" and "self-esteem"—which are socially accomplished, socially displayed, and oriented to social values. Calculative, competitive models of "success" and "achievement" are no more natural and no more fundamental than cultural models of altruistic caring; all are socially defined and validated. (Robinson Crusoe can't show off his unique identity, can't win or be "the best" at anything.)

People typically seek to join with others and belong, to defer and take responsibility for others, to exchange gifts and take turns for the sake of the social relationships themselves. It is rare for social interaction to be primarily a means to extrinsic asocial ends; the only people who persistently organize their lives this way are sociopaths. Sometimes people even buy and sell for the satisfaction of the social game, not just for the material objects they acquire. Even when people act in pursuit of material goods, they typically do so for the sake of the social significance of the goods: to create or transform social relationships. Your house, your car, your clothes, your meals, and of course your money mediate your relationships with your social world. Even your health or your life may be valuable to you primarily because of the social relationships that it permits.

The inherent sociability of *Homo sapiens* must stem from the adaptive advantages to our ancestors of socially organized production, exchange, consumption, decision-making, moral judgment, and sanctioning. Our unique communicative abilities, complex technical capacities, and delayed maturation resulted in unique opportunities for kin selection and reciprocal altruism to generate ultrasocial adaptations. These adaptations involve extraordinarily strong social motives, such that humans need to engage in relationships—and are strongly disposed to judge and sanction others.

How Do People Coordinate Relationships?

What is adaptive (in every sense of the word) is coordinating interaction with the people around you. Patterns of interaction differ greatly across cultures, so people need to be able to fit their sociality to their particular community, meshing their motives and actions with the culture. But the diversity of culturally organized, complex social relationships presents a seemingly impossible learning problem: how can a child, an immigrant, or a visitor possibly discover the principles that underlie relationships in a strange culture (such as the one into which you are born)? The coordination of interaction is all the more challenging because of the variety of domains that must be coordinated: work, exchange, distribution and consumption, moral judgments, sanctions and forms of

redressing wrongs, aggression, sexuality, social identity, the meaning of objects, places, and time. If people use different models to coordinate each domain, how can they deal with the resulting cognitive complexity of social life, let alone integrate several domains to form a personal relationship or an institution?

The answer, surprisingly, is that people use just four fundamental models for organizing most aspects of sociality most of the time in all cultures (Fiske 1991a, 1992). These models are Communal Sharing, Authority Ranking, Equality Matching, and Market Pricing. Communal Sharing (CS) is a relationship in which people treat some dyad or group as equivalent and undifferentiated with respect to the social domain in question. Examples are people using a commons (CS with respect to utilization of the particular resource), people intensely in love (CS with respect to their social selves), people who "ask not for whom the bell tolls, for it tolls for thee" (CS with respect to shared suffering and common well-being), or people who kill any member of an enemy group indiscriminately in retaliation for an attack (CS with respect to collective responsibility). In Authority Ranking (AR) people have asymmetric positions in a linear hierarchy in which subordinates defer, respect, and (perhaps) obey, while superiors take precedence and take pastoral responsibility for subordinates. Examples are military hierarchies (AR in decisions, control, and many other matters), ancestor worship (AR in offerings of filial piety and expectations of protection and enforcement of norms), monotheistic religious moralities (AR for the definition of right and wrong by commandments or will of God), social status systems such as class or ethnic rankings (AR with respect to social value of identities), and rankings such as sports team standings (AR with respect to prestige). AR relationships are based on perceptions of legitimate asymmetries, not coercive power; they are not inherently exploitative (although they may involve power or cause harm).

In Equality Matching relationships people keep track of the balance or difference among participants and know what would be required to restore balance. Common manifestations are turn-taking, one-person one-vote elections, equal share distributions, and vengeance based on an-eye-for-an-eye, a-tooth-for-a-tooth. Examples include sports and games (EM with respect to the rules, procedures, equipment and terrain), baby-sitting coops (EM with respect to the exchange of child care), and restitution in-kind (EM with respect to righting a wrong). Market Pricing relationships are oriented to socially meaningful ratios or rates such as prices, wages, interest, rents, tithes, or cost-benefit analyses. Money need not be the medium, and MP relationships need not be selfish, competitive, maximizing, or materialistic—any of the four models may exhibit any of these features. MP relationships are not necessarily individualistic; a family may be the CS or AR unit running a business that operates in an MP mode with respect to other enterprises. Examples are property that can be bought, sold, or treated as investment capital (land or objects as MP), marriages organized contractually or implicitly in terms of costs and benefits to the partners, prostitution (sex as MP), bureaucratic cost-effectiveness standards (resource allocation as MP), utilitarian judgments about the greatest good for the greatest number, or standards of equity in judging entitlements in proportion to contributions (two forms of morality as MP),

considerations of "spending time" efficiently, and estimates of expected kill ratios (aggression as MP).

People often use different models for different aspects of their interaction with the same person. For example, roommates may divide the rent evenly and take turns cooking dinner for each other (both EM), buy ingredients for the meal at the store (MP), share their food and drink at the table without regard to who consumes what and share living and bath rooms (CS), pay for long-distance calls according to the costs they each incur (MP), and one may sell her used car to the other. On the softball field one is a coach, the other player (AR); yet in their sexual relations they like to reverse these roles of domination and submission.

People commonly use different models simultaneously for different aspects of the same interaction, or nest one model inside another. For example, in a corporation the AR supervisory relationships involve setting salaries and of course are evaluated as a means to MP profits. Suppose raiders from group A kill a person from group B. Members of group B, responding collectively to this attack in a CS manner as an injury to all of them together, may consider it appropriate to avenge themselves in an EM tit-for-tat idiom, aiming to restore the balance between groups by killing any member of group A, indiscriminately, treating all out-group members as CS equivalent for their purpose.

People use these models to construct, coordinate, and contest social action, as well as to interpret, plan, and remember. The term "models" may suggest that these relational coordination devices are primarily cognitive, but they integrally comprise emotions, motives, needs, evaluative attitudes and judgments. They are "directive" in D'Andrade's (1984) sense: models *of* sociality and at the same time models *for* sociality. However, like the grammar of a language, they are generally implicit: people use them unreflectively and without being able to articulate them clearly.

This theory derived from a synthesis of some of the ideas of Weber, Piaget, and Ricoeur, and also builds on the theories of Marx, Tönnies, Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, Karl Polanyi, Sahlins, and many others. It also incorporates a great deal of prior empirical research across the social sciences, including my own ethnographic fieldwork in West Africa and an integration of anthropological research from around the world (see Fiske 1991a).

Is it plausible to think that only four relational models are sufficient to generate the amazing diversity and complexity of social life? Perhaps it is, given that only four basic forces are sufficient to construct the entire physical universe. The complexity of social life comes from the combinations of models that people use. The diversity of social relationships comes from the fact that using the models to generate action, affect, or evaluation requires cultural implementation rules that are indefinitely variable. The models themselves are not sufficient to determine behavior or cognition without setting cultural parameters, paradigms, and prototypes that specify how, when, where, and with respect to whom the models can be implemented. For example, Authority Ranking is

available to all humans as a model for organizing decision making, but cultures differ in the kinds of decisions they make in this manner, and how positions in each hierarchy are ascribed or achieved. In many African societies, Communal Sharing governs the organization of work and the use of land and resources; but there is considerable variability in how the Communal groups are constituted (according to matrilineal or patrilineal kinship of different kinds, or according to age sets). Traditional Africans pool labor, food, and living space to an extent that often astonishes Americans. But in these same societies, people almost never disclose their past actions, their plans, their aspirations, their attitudes or their feelings even to family members—the Communal Sharing of these subjective matters in America often astonishes Africans.

Even if it's plausible to imagine that these four models could govern most of everyday social life, do they? What's the evidence? Nick Haslam and I, as well as several other researchers, have conducted dozens of studies that show how the models shape diverse aspects of everyday, real life social cognition, interaction, and evaluation. In a series of 11 studies, we found that the theory predicted how people confuse one person with another in naturally occurring social errors. People often call someone they know by the wrong name (calling your daughter by your younger sister's name), or they misremember with whom they did something (thinking they told you something, when actually they told someone else). Sometimes people also inadvertently misdirect an action at an unintended person, for example telephoning the wrong person or driving to the wrong person's house. Although we found that many factors affect the substitutions that people make, the major principle structuring these errors is that people usually select another person with whom they the same kind of relationship (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske 1991, Fiske 1993). That is, for example, when you are relating to a person in the framework of Equality Matching and you address or refer to the person by someone else's name, you generally select someone else with whom you have an Equality Matching relationship. The relational models predict these naturally occurring error substitutions quite reliably in diverse samples from five cultures. Furthermore, the same effect is apparent in another study we did of intentional substitutions, when you originally intend to do something with someone and then decide to do it with someone else instead: you select a substitute with whom you have the same kind of relationship (Fiske & Haslam 1997). If your original choice was a person with whom you relate primarily according to Communal Sharing, you choose a substitute with whom you are relate in a Communal way. In both intentional and unintentional substitutions, the type of relationship affects the choice of a substitute far more than personal attributes; the individuals confused with each other or substituted for one another are often are of different ages, races, personalities, and sometimes different genders. These results suggest that when people are speaking, acting, or remembering interactions, they are thinking primarily about one or another of the four relational models.

When we ask people to freely categorize a large, random sample of their own relationships, or to rate the degree of similarity among pairs of their own relationships, the categories and clusters that emerge correspond to the four types of relational models (Haslam & Fiske 1992). When we ask people to simply recall everyone with whom they have interacted over the past month, their recall exhibits clustering (runs) of

associates with whom they have one kind of relationship, and then another (Fiske 1995). Again, the relational models predict the pattern of recall better than the features of the individuals.

In these studies, we have repeatedly tested relational models theory against other, competing theories, and we have consistently found that relational models theory predicts everyday cognition and social action better than Talcott Parsons's pattern variables, Foa and Foa's resource theory, or Clark and Mills's communal versus exchange theory (see Fiske and Haslam 1996 for another short review). These alternative theories fail to predict some of the natural social cognition we have studied, while on other kinds of social cognition they have appreciably and consistently weaker effects than the relational models. Furthermore, we have used a variety of statistical methods in several studies to test the prediction that people think about their own everyday interactions in terms of four distinct, discrete categories of relationship. This prediction has been strongly confirmed in every case: people do *not* think about their own social life in terms of continuous variables such as power and solidarity; nor in terms of game theoretic motives such as competition, cooperation, aggression, cooperation, or altruism; nor in terms of complementarity versus symmetry (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske 1991; Haslam 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1998; Haslam & Fiske 1992). The diverse statistical methods Haslam used in some of these studies were originally developed by Paul Meehl and others to distinguish between discrete categories and continuous variation in psychopathology or other traits of persons, but they have proven very effective in making these distinctions with regard to social relationships as well (for an introduction, see Haslam 1998). One of these methods uses, for example, the patterns of covariation of two indicator variables along different segments of the distribution of a third indicator of the qualities of relationships; covariation among the indicators is greatest where the sample contains a mixture of distinct types of relationship—but no such peak emerges if the relationships truly vary along a quantitative continuum. For one of the other methods, you make cuts at various points along each indicator variable and plot the mean of each of the other indicator variables for cases falling above and below the cut. Again, inverted U-shaped (peaked) functions indicate the existence of qualitatively discrete categories, while more or less linear plots indicate that the indicators measure a continually-varying quantitative distribution. (These methods are well-validated and extremely robust, but they require very large samples and several good ways of measuring the constructs being investigated.)

People can and do use different relational models in different domains of interaction with the same person; for example, organizing work together in terms of Equality Matching but making decisions according to Communal Sharing. However, in any given dyad there is a strong tendency to use the same model across exchanges, distribution and use of resources, organization of work, moral judgments, decision making, social influence, identity, and other domains (Haslam 1995a, Haslam & Fiske 1998). For this reason, it is often reasonable to make the simplification of characterizing the relationship between two people as if it were governed by a single model. Indeed, without this tendency to use a single model consistently across domains we would not have obtained most of the results described above: people's use of multiple relational

models with the same person actually must attenuate the rather strong results we obtained in these studies.

There are clear phylogenetic precursors to CS and AR in other species, but not MP; EM is an open question, but may be distinctive of *Homo sapiens* (Haslam 1997a). TenHouten (1996) uses the theory to construct an evolutionary theoretical taxonomy of emotions. Jackendoff (1992, 1994, 1995) suggests that the relational models constitute a modular human faculty of social cognition analogous to the modular language faculty. Jackendoff (in press), Fiske (1990, 1991a), and others have considered the possibility that the models represent four universal natural laws or natural logics of morality.

Relational models theory posits that people use the same schemas for intimate dyadic relationships, for organizing linkages between groups, for formulating public policy or contesting ideologies. Whitehead (1998a, 1998b) and Fiske (1991a, 1991b) have shown how the theory clarifies the way in which people in West Africa and New Guinea organize work, distribution of food, and food taboos; they have also shown that people in non-Western cultures may be averse to Market Pricing relationships, while strongly desiring and valuing Authority Ranking and Communal Sharing relationships. Sondak (1998) shows how the theory illuminates the relative success and satisfaction of string quartets and MBA students' preferences for the allocation of places in popular classes. Goodenow (1998) uses the theory to understand the allocation of household work. Sheppard and Tuchinsky (1996) analyze how corporations make strategic decisions about which relational model to use to coordinate with other corporations. Fiske and Tetlock (1997) analyze public policy debates and experimental findings, showing that people get angry when someone suggests trading off values that should be compartmentalized under different relational models.

When interacting people use the same model in the same way, relationships tend to be harmonious because they understand each other, have complementary motives and expectations, and judge actions in the same way (Fiske & Haslam 1998). However, sometimes interacting parties have discrepant relational desires, and one may impose a model on another (Whitehead 1993). For example, Connelley (1998) found that tensions resulted from discrepancies between managers' and various groups of employees' interpretations of the relational models that govern their interactions (and discrepant views of the models that they feel *should* be applicable). When a person has a consistent, characteristic tendency to use a model far more or far less than others in the culture, to use a model in inappropriate circumstances, or to implement it in an aberrant manner, that person's relationships will be frustrating and unsatisfactory; in many cases this may constitute a personality disorder (Haslam 1995b, 1997b; Fiske and Haslam 1998). On the other hand, it is commonplace for people to argue about what model should govern any given matter of public policy (Fiske & Tetlock 1997)

Untested Hypotheses, Unanswered Questions

We are currently studying the ontogenetic emergence of the relational models and the manner in which children discover how to implement them in a culturally appropriate

manner. But there are innumerable unanswered questions and untested hypotheses about the theory. The biggest mystery concerns the factors that affect the variations in cultural/societal, group/institutional, and individual implementations of the models. Much of the societal level variation may result from historical processes and individuals often do not have great latitude for choice, but we do not yet know much about the constraints or influences that affect the selection of models at any level.

We welcome comments or inquiries about our work; please feel welcome to contact afiske@ucla.edu, or haslam@newschool.edu if you have comments or would like reprints of the relevant articles or copies of the instruments we have used in our research. By the time you read this we expect to have set up a continually evolving web site to provide current information about relational models research and links to relational models researchers: go to http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/fiske

For further information, see the topical summary of the evidence supporting relational models theory and theoretical studies.

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