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| **Theories of Romantic Relationships: Equity Theory AO1** | | | |
| **The Role of Equity**  ‘Equity’ menas fairness. Walster et al (1978) stated that what mattered most with equity is that both partners’ level of profits (rewards minus cost) is roughly the same. This is not the same as equality which would mean the profit and loss would be the same for both partners. When there is a lack of equity, one partner overbenefits and the other underbenefits which will result in dissatisfaction and unhappiness.  Both overbenefit and underbenefit are examples of inequality, although it is the underbenefitted partner who is likely to feel the greatest dissatisfaction, in the form of anger, hostility, resentment and humiliation. The overbnefitted partner will feel guilt, discomfort and shame. Thus, satisfaction is about perceived fairness. | | | |
| **Equity and Equality**  According to the quity theory, it’s not the size or the amount of rewards or costs that matters; it’s the ratio of the two to each other. If one partner puts a lot into the relationship but at the same time gets a a lot out of it, then that will seem fair enough.  e.g. imagine a relationship in which one partner has a diasability that prevents them from carrying out domestic chores or other physical activities. A precisely equal distribution of these tasks would probably not be seen as fair by either partner. The equity in such a relationship may well come from the compensations that the disabled partner could offer in othe areas, or from the satisfaction the more active partner gains from their behaviour. Satisfying relationships are marked by negotiations to ensure equity, that rewards are distributed fairly (not necessarily equally) between the partners. This inevitably involves making trade-offs. | | | |
| **Consequences of Inequity**  **Consequences:**  Problems arise when one partner puts a great deal in to a relationship, but gets little from it.  A partner who is the subject of inequity will become distressed and dissatisfied.  **Changes in perceived equity:**  At the start of a relationship, it may seem perfectly natural to contribute more than you receive, but if the relationship develops in such a way that you continue to put more into the relationship and get less out of it, this will not feel as satisfying as it did in the early days  **Dealing with inequity**  How do romantic partners react? The ‘put-upon’ partner will work hard to make the relationship more equitable as long as they believe it is possible to do so, and that the relationship is salvageable. The more unfair the relationship feels, the harder they will work to restore equity. On the other hand, another possible outcome is a cognitive rather than a behavioural one. They will revise their perceptions of rewards and costs so that the relationship feels more equitable to them, even if nothing actually changes. What was once seen as definitely a cost earlier in the relationship (untidiness, thoughtlessness, actual abuse) is now accepted as the norm | | | |
| **Theories of Romantic Relationships: Equity Theory AO3** | | | |
| **Supportive Research**  P: One strength of the equity theory as an explanation for adult romantic relationships is that there is supportive evidence.  E: For example, Utne et al (1984) carried out a survey of 118 recently-married couples, measuring equity with two self-report scales. The husband and wives were aged between 16 and 45 years, and had been together at least 2 years before marrying. They found that couples who considered their relationship equitable were more satisfied than those who saw themselves as overbenefitting or underbenefitting.  E: This is a strength because it supports the notion that equity (being fair) is more important in maintaining a relationship than simply equality (as proposed by the Social Exchange Theory). The equity theory is more valid and representative of real-life relationshsip than the social exchange theory.  L: As a result the explanatory power of the equity theory as an explanation for adult romantic relationships is increased.  ***MAID: Self-report technique*** | **Culture Bias**  P: One weakness of the equity theory as an explanation for adult romantic relationships is that it is culturally biased.  E: for example, Aumer-Ryan et al (2007) found that there are cultural differences in the link between equity and satisfaction. They compared collectivist cultures with individualistic cultures and found that couples from an individualist culture considered their relationship to be most satisfying when the relationship was equitable, whereas those in a collectivist culture were more satisfied when they were overbenefitting. This was true for both men and women.  E: This is a strength because it shows that the theory of equity is not applicable across all relationships in all cultures. It is not a universal necessity for a successful, romantic relationship.  L: As a result, the theory of equity as an explanation fro adult romantic relations is limited because it cannot account for this cultural difference. | **Individual Differences**  P: One weakness of the equity theory as an explanation for adult romantic relationships is that it does not account for individual differences.  E: For example, Huseman et al (1987) suggest that some people are less sensitive to equity than others. They describe some people as *benevolents,* who are prepared to contribute more to the relationship than they get out of it. Others are *entitleds* who believe they deserve to be overbenfitted and accept it without feeling distressed or guilty.  E: This is a weakness because Huseman’s research shows us that equity is not necessarily a global feature of all romantic relationships and, contrary to the claims of the theory, is certainly not a universal law of social interaction. Not all partners in romantic relationships are concerned about achieving equity.  L: As a result, this reduces the credibility of the theory as equity as an explanation for adult romantic relationships. | **Contradictory Research**  P: One further weakness of the equity theory as an explanation for adult romantic relationships is that there is further contradictory research.  E: For example, Berg and McQuinn (1986) found that equity did not increase in their longitudinal study of dating couples.  E: This is a weak ness because this research fails to support the predictions made by the equity theory that states that satisfying romantic relationships should become more equitable over time. Furthermore, the equity theory did not distinguish between those relationships which ended and those which continued, or other variables being significantly more importnant such as self-disclosure.  L: As a result, this casts further doubt over the credibility of the equity theory as an explanation of adult romantic relationships.  ***MAID: Longitudinal study*** |