Social Exchange Theory

* Attempts to explain the social factors that influence how individuals interact within reciprocal relationships
* The main area of focus is the costs and benefits of a relationship, from the perspective of the individual
* Therefore it can be used to explain choices of marriage partners
* Social scientists use the theory to explain how individuals make decision to form and maintain relationships that might appear unacceptable to others
* The costs and benefits/rewards of a relationship, are balanced
* If the costs outweigh the befits the relationship might hurt the parties involved and therefore become dysfunctional
* Relationships are stable when the benefits that each individual receives balance the costs of the relationship
* Benefits are rewarding because they meet a perceived need
* Individuals prefer relationships that are cost-effective (benefits are greater than those of an alternative relationship)
* The **costs** of a relationship are those actions that meet the needs of another (eg. Physical or emotional needs)
* The **benefits** of a relationship are those act that meet a perceived need (eg. Physical and emotional security)
* A **stable** relationship, is one in which the benefits and costs are at equilibrium
* A **cost-effective relationship** is where the benefits are greater than those found in an alternative relationship
* A **trade-off in marriage** is where all the parties in a relationship bring different assets that they all share
* The fact that some people are offended by the cost/benefit analysis could be a limitation
* This theory assumes that human relationships are a straightforward process derived from economic goal
* Also assumes that different people have different values in regards to costs and benefits and a benefit to one person might not be a benefit to another
* Historically, in Hunter-Gatherer relationships, men and women would gather enough food for the family to survive and take care of each other, which is a benefit
* However, the members would have to invest their time and energy into providing goods and services for people other then themselves, which are costs
* This cost and benefit analysis stayed true with each following form of family
* The benefits of being a housewife in the past were that you were able to care for your home and children; the costs were that you weren’t able to contribute financially to the family
* Today the benefits are that you can contribute financially; the cost is that you aren’t always there to care for your children
* As well, Human Sexuality can be examined with this theory
* Same sex couples around the world have the benefit of being with their partner regardless of gender which gives them the emotional support and understanding they desire
* However, some costs would be a possible lack of support from their family and disapproval of various members of their society