

**Ethnicity, Interdependence and the Investment Model  
of Commitment Processes<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

In the present chapter, we examine ethnicity as a potential moderator of interdependence processes within Rusbult's (1980) investment model. Using Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture (which contends that ethnic groups differ in the cultural values that they embrace) as a point of departure, we review empirical evidence concerning the hypotheses (e.g., Triandis, 1989, 1996) that Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) original version of interdependence theory in general is limited to individualistic (rather than collectivistic) ethnic groups. We conclude that the evidence does not support Triandis's hypotheses. Nevertheless, we argue that a revamped version of Triandis's theory that incorporates elements of Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) revised interdependent theory and Rusbult's investment model (e.g., as articulated by Rusbult & Arriaga, 2000) can serve as the basis for developing new, testable hypotheses concerning ethnicity as a moderator of interdependence processes. Implications for the relevance of subjective culture to relationship science are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Collectivism, ethnicity, individualism, investment model, subjective culture.

### **Ethnicity, Interdependence and the Investment Model of Commitment Processes**

In *The Analysis of Subjective Culture*, Harry Triandis (1972) provided one of the earliest conceptual frameworks for understanding the potential impact of *culture* (i.e., “the [hu]man-made part of the environment”; Herskovits, 1955, p. 305) on social behavior (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). Triandis distinguished between *objective culture* (comprising physical manifestations of culture, such as tools) and *subjective culture* (comprising psychological manifestations of culture, such as norms; e.g., Triandis, 2004). In turn, Triandis emphasized *cultural values* (i.e., organized sets of beliefs that are transmitted from earlier generations to later generations within a given society, with the caveat that not all persons necessarily embrace those beliefs to the same degree within the same society; e.g., Triandis, 1995) as aspects of subjective culture that are especially likely to influence interpersonal behavior (see Heine, 2016).

In the present chapter, we contend that Triandis’s (1972) conceptual framework constitutes a full-fledged theory of subjective culture, with potentially important implications for the extent to which empirical links among the constructs within Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) interdependence theory in general – and Rusbult’s (1980) investment model in particular – may be moderated by *ethnicity* (i.e., persons’ presumed biological and/or cultural heritage; see Markus, 2008). Triandis’s (1989, 1996) assumption that different ethnic groups embrace the cultural values of *individualism* (i.e., persons’ orientation toward the welfare of themselves) and *collectivism* (i.e., persons’ orientation toward the welfare of others instead of, or in addition to, themselves; see Gaines, 1997) to different degrees is especially important to our adaptation of Triandis’s theory of subjective culture in order to understand how (if at all) culture is relevant to interdependence processes.

We draw upon Le and Agnew's (2003) meta-analysis of the generalizability of Rusbult's investment model across ethnic groups in the process of evaluating Triandis's theory of subjective culture, especially the results of two studies (in order of appearance, Lin & Rusbult, 1995; and L. E. Davis & Strube, 1993) in the process of evaluating relevant evidence. In addition, we propose both a critique and a prospective revamping of Triandis's theory (drawing upon the cultural perspective on marriage as advanced by K. K. Dion & K. L. Dion, 1993; as well as the suffocation model of marriage as presented by Finkel, Hui, Carswell, & Larson, 2014) in a manner that could add conceptual insight into Rusbult's model.

### **An Overview of Triandis's Theory of Subjective Culture**

So far, we have noted Triandis's (1972) constructs of objective and subjective aspects of culture, as well as Triandis's (2004) constructs of individualism and collectivism as cultural values (keeping in mind that some of Triandis's writings refer to person-level individualism as *idiocentrism* and person-level collectivism as *allocentrism*; e.g., Triandis, 1995). However, at the core of Triandis's (1972, pp. 22-23) theory of subjective culture, one finds an intricately developed model that links distal antecedents (e.g., economic activities, social and political organizations), proximal antecedents (e.g., language, religion), basic psychological processes (e.g., cognitive learning, instrumental learning), subjective culture (e.g., cognitive structures, behavioral intentions), and consequences (e.g., developed abilities, patterns of action). Given that some critics have questioned the need for an interdisciplinary field of cultural psychology (Shweder & Sullivan, 1994), Triandis's model and broader theory of subjective culture offers considerable promise to social psychology regarding the development and testing of novel, culturally informed hypotheses concerning determinants of interpersonal behavior.

One can detect echoes of Triandis's (1972) model of antecedents and consequences of subjective culture in other (and, arguably, better-known) models and theories of cognitive and behavioral processes within cultural psychology. For example, Markus and Kitayama's (1991) model of antecedents and consequences of self-construals, as elaborated by Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, and Nisbett (1998, p. 918), bears more than a passing resemblance to Triandis's earlier model (for a review of the conceptual rationale and subsequent research concerning Markus and Kitayama's model, see Matsumoto, 1999). Nevertheless, Triandis's model and underlying theory of subjective culture tend not to be cited by name within cultural psychology, possibly due to the game-changing influence of Hofstede's (1980) research and cultural dimensions theory concerning work-related values (positing an individualism-collectivism dichotomy as one of several "cultural syndromes") within the field (see Heine, 2016).

In previous chapters on culture as reflected in close relationship processes, we drew primarily upon Triandis's *Individualism and Collectivism* (1995) when we contended that (1) cultural values might serve as direct predictors of interdependence dynamics (Gaines & Hardin, 2013) and (2) ethnicity might serve as a moderator of the effects of cultural values on interdependence phenomena (Gaines & Hardin, 2018). However, in the present chapter, we delve into Triandis's *The Analysis of Subjective Culture* (1972) as we argue that interdependence processes themselves might be moderated by ethnicity *because the promotion of specific cultural values across generations may differ from one ethnic group to another*. As we shall see in the following sections, not only did Triandis (1989) speculate that "exchange theory" in general (Triandis's preferred term for the original formulation of interdependence theory by Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) is likely to be relevant to close relationship

processes among those ethnic groups who presumably embrace individualism (rather than collectivism) to the greatest extent; but Triandis (1996) also speculated that the effects of rewards and costs on relationship stability in particular are likely to be significant among those ethnic groups who presumably embrace individualism (rather than collectivism) to the greatest extent.

### **Interdependence Theory: Universal or Limited to Individualistic Ethnic Groups?**

Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory initially focused on the mutual influence that relationship partners typically exert upon each other's *behavior* (rather than each other's thoughts or feelings; see Kelley, 1997). If one were to operationalize Thibaut and Kelley's earliest version of interdependence theory solely in terms of the rewards versus costs that individuals experience within close relationships, then one might be tempted to conclude that reinforcement is the defining process of close relationships (U. G. Foa & E. B. Foa, 1974). However, even in their earliest version of interdependence theory, Thibaut and Kelley acknowledged that relationship dynamics cannot be reduced solely to partners' receipt of net profits (i.e., preponderance of rewards over costs; Berscheid, 1985). Moreover, in their major revision of interdependence theory, Kelley and Thibaut (1978) noted that many interpersonal situations may require that partners incur net losses over the short term, in order for partners to obtain net profits over the long term (Berscheid & Reis, 1998).

Prior to the 1990s (i.e., the "decade of ethnicity"; see Shweder & Sullivan, 1994), Thibaut and Kelley (1959) viewed their interdependence theory as universal in scope, generalizing across a variety of ethnic (e.g., racial, religious, and national) groups (e.g., Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau, & Peterson, 1983/2002). However, according to Triandis's (1972) theory of

subjective culture, “[w]e expect that in collectivistic cultures[,] the applicability of exchange theories will be more limited than in individualistic cultures” (Triandis, 1989, p. 509). For example, among persons from the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Germany (all of whom Triandis classified as individualistic, due to historical circumstances that ostensibly led persons in those nations to prioritize individual rights over ingroup rights), Triandis (2004) would expect reinforcement to be a defining feature of close relationship processes. Conversely, among persons from Japan, India, Russia, and Brazil (all of whom Triandis categorized as collectivistic, due to historical circumstances that supposedly led persons in those nations to prioritize ingroup rights over individual rights), Triandis would expect reinforcement to be irrelevant to close relationship processes.

What evidence – if any – would support Triandis’s (1989) assertions concerning ethnicity as a moderator of the importance that reinforcement plays in close relationship processes? Unfortunately, Triandis did not cite any empirical research on ethnicity and reinforcement within close relationships. Instead, Triandis cited Mills and Clark’s (1982) distinction between *communal* and *exchange* relationships as conceptual support (i.e., personal or emotionally intimate relationships are communally based, characterized by partners’ attention to each other’s needs; whereas social or emotionally non-intimate relationships are exchange-based, characterized by partners’ attention to their own needs; see also Clark & Mills, 1979). In addition, the empirical studies that Triandis *did* cite (i.e., Triandis, Vassiliou, & Nassiakou, 1968, Studies 1 through 3) addressed individuals’ behavioral intentions alongside perceptions of social roles and social behavior in various types of social and personal relationships (e.g., greater likelihood for persons in the supposedly individualistic United States, compared to the likelihood for persons in the ostensibly

part-individualistic/part-collectivistic Greece, to indicate a preference for behaving more positively toward ingroup versus outgroup members without regard to the social roles that particular ingroup or outgroup members occupy) – *not* individuals' receipt of rewards or costs within close relationships. Thus, we conclude that Triandis's own studies have not adequately tested Triandis's predictions concerning ethnicity as a moderator of reinforcement in close relationships.

#### **The Investment Model: Universal or Limited to Individualistic Ethnic Groups?**

Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory proposes that, in order to properly understand why some close relationships persist (whereas other close relationships fail to stand the test of time), one cannot limit one's attention to presumed covariance (e.g., a significant positive correlation) between relationship *satisfaction* (i.e., individuals' experience of positive versus negative emotions toward their partners, presumably reflecting rewards versus costs that are received within the relationships) and relationship stability (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994). Rather, at a minimum, one must add *dependence* (i.e., the extent to which individuals count on their relationships to obtain rewards versus costs) as a potential covariate of satisfaction and relationship stability (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Unless individuals experience low satisfaction *and* low dependence, they will tend to remain in their current relationships (see Rusbult & Arriaga, 2000).

According to Rusbult's (1980) *investment model*, dependence mediates the impact of satisfaction on relationship stability (i.e., satisfaction is reflected positively in dependence, which in turn is reflected positively in relationship stability; Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012). Furthermore, individuals experience dependence subjectively as *commitment* (i.e., individual's decision to persist in their relationships; Arriaga, 2013). In fact, commitment – rather than dependence *per se* – emerges as the



pivotal variable in Rusbult's investment model (e.g., Rusbult & Agnew, 2010). Not only is commitment positioned as the primary *consequence* of various constructs in addition to satisfaction (e.g., perceived quality of alternatives, investment size, prescriptive support); but commitment also is positioned as the primary *antecedent* of several constructs (e.g., accommodation, derogation of alternatives, willingness to sacrifice, perceived superiority; Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

Just as Thibaut and Kelley (1959) cast their interdependence theory as universal in scope, so too did Rusbult (1980) view her investment model – a direct extension of interdependence theory (Rusbult, Olsen, J. Davis, & Hannon, 2001) – as universal. It turns out that Triandis (1996) did not criticize the universality of Rusbult's investment model *per se*. However, Triandis *did* comment directly upon the universality of the presumed impact of rewards and costs (which Rusbult treated as proxies for, if not direct influences on, satisfaction in some of her earliest research; e.g., 1980, 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986) upon individuals' maintenance versus termination of ongoing relationships:

Collectivists pay much attention to the needs of members of their ingroups in determining their social behavior. Thus, if a relationship is desirable from the point of view of the ingroup but costly from the point of view of the individual, [then] the individual is likely to stay in the relationship. Individualists pay attention to the advantages and costs of relationships, as described by exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If the costs exceed the advantages, [then] individualists drop the relationship. (Triandis, 1996, p. 409)

Given that, as noted in the preceding section, Triandis (2004) depicted certain nations as individualistic (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany) versus collectivistic (e.g., Japan, India, Russia, Brazil), what evidence – if any – would lend support to Triandis’s (1996) claims about ethnicity as a moderator of the direct or indirect effects of rewards and costs upon individuals’ maintenance versus termination of close relationships? As was the case with reinforcement in general (e.g., Triandis, 1989), Triandis did not cite any research on ethnicity and the impact of rewards or costs on relationship stability. Instead, once again, Triandis cited Mills and Clark’s (1982) distinction between communal relationships (supposedly characteristic of collectivistic nations, where individuals’ own rewards and costs are not likely to affect relationship stability) and exchange relationships (ostensibly characteristic of individualistic nations, where individuals’ own rewards and costs *are* likely to affect relationship stability). Furthermore, Triandis did not cite any of his own research as direct support for his claims about ethnicity and the impact of rewards versus costs on relationship stability. Therefore, we conclude that Triandis did not test those hypotheses from his theory of subjective culture (Triandis, 1972) that are most relevant to Rusbult’s (1980) investment model.

#### **Results of Studies on the Universality of the Investment Model: Empirical Challenges to the Theory of Subjective Culture**

We are not aware of any studies in which relationship scientists (as distinct from cultural psychologists) have overtly applied Triandis’s (1972) theory of subjective culture to tests of Rusbult’s (1980) investment model across ethnic groups. However, results of Le and Agnew’s (2003) meta-analysis of links among investment model variables indicated that – across several nations (i.e., the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Israel, and Taiwan), and as expected – (1)

satisfaction is a significant positive predictor of commitment; (2) *perceived quality of alternatives* (i.e., the extent to which individuals believe that they could acquire relatively high rewards and accrue relatively low costs by leaving their current relationships and entering other relationships; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015) is a significant negative predictor of commitment; and (3) *investment size* (i.e., the degree to which resources that individuals have put into their relationships are perceived as irretrievable; Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015) is a significant positive predictor of commitment. Furthermore, when Le and Agnew examined race (i.e., White versus non-White) as a potential moderator, none of the investment model links differed significantly across racial groups. The non-effect of race as a moderator concerning path coefficients within Rusbult's investment model is particularly noteworthy in light of Triandis's (1976) assertion that White persons' and Black persons' perceptions of the social environment differ qualitatively (e.g., White persons are more likely to view social interactions through an individualistic lens; whereas Black persons are more likely to view the same interactions through a collectivistic lens). Therefore, at first glance, the extant evidence provides an empirical challenge to a key tenet of Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture.

One might argue that Le and Agnew's (2003) general distinction between White and non-White groups is not sufficiently comparable to Triandis's (1976) specific White-Black distinction for us to question the relevance of Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture to the universality of links among investment model variables, even indirectly. However, L. E. Davis and Strube's (1993) study of investment model correlations among a sample of White versus Black couples – which was included in Le and Agnew's meta-analysis -- *did* apply a White-Black distinction. L. E. Davis and Strube concluded that, in and of itself, race did not affect

the magnitude or direction of correlations among investment model variables. One glimmer of hope regarding Triandis's theory of subjective culture can be found in a significant interaction effect involving race (the between-couples variable) and gender (the within-couples variable), such that the positive correlation between satisfaction and commitment was significant among White men, but not among Black men (a result that is consistent with Triandis's general hypothesis that the interdependence theory of Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, is applicable to "individualists" but not to "collectivists"). Nevertheless, the interaction effect raises questions of its own – for example, if race were as important to close relationship processes as Triandis's theory would predict, then why was the satisfaction-commitment correlation significant and positive among White women and Black women alike (and why were the alternatives-commitment and investment-commitment correlations significant and in the expected direction among all race/gender subgroups)? All in all, L. E. Davis and Strube's results lead us to question Triandis's assumptions about race as a moderator of interdependence processes (in this instance, correlations among investment model variables).

Additionally, one might argue that Le and Agnew's (2003) distinction between White and non-White groups emphasizes one aspect of ethnicity (i.e., race) while simultaneously de-emphasizing another aspect of ethnicity (i.e., nationality) that Triandis (2004) had identified. However, Lin and Rusbult's (1995) study of investment model correlations among a sample of American versus Taiwanese individuals – which, likewise, was included in Le and Agnew's meta-analysis – applied a variation on a U.S.-China distinction (consistent with Triandis, 1995). Lin and Rusbult concluded that, on its own, nationality (which they labelled as "culture") did not affect the magnitude or direction of correlations among investment model

variables. In the absence of interaction effect tests involving nationality and gender, it appears that – among American and Taiwanese persons alike – (1) satisfaction is a significant positive correlate of commitment; (2) quality of perceived alternatives is a significant negative correlate of commitment; (3) investment size is a significant positive correlate of commitment; (4) *relationship centrality* (i.e., the extent to which individuals perceive their relationships as integral aspects of their selves; see Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006) is a significant positive correlate of commitment; and (5) *prescriptive support* (i.e., “normative support,” or the extent to which individuals believe that members of their larger social networks approve of particular relationships; Gaines & Agnew, 2003) is a significant positive correlate of commitment (see also Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004, regarding “subjective norms” as comparable to prescriptive support). All things considered, Lin and Rusbult’s results lead us to question Triandis’s assumptions about nationality as a moderator of interdependence processes (in particular, correlations among investment model variables).

### **Beyond Social Exchange: Conceptual Challenges to the Theory of Subjective Culture**

In an attempt to infuse Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) interdependence theory with constructs from cultural psychology (Gaines & Hardin, 2013), we began with a quote from Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult, and Van Lange (2003, p. 136) that acknowledged the potential relevance of culture to interdependence processes. Given that Kelley and colleagues had cited Markus and Kitayama (1991), we focused on Markus and Kitayama’s constructs of *independent self-construal* (i.e., individuals’ mental representation of themselves as separated from significant others) and *interdependent self-construal* (i.e., individuals’ mental representation of themselves as

bound together with significant others; see also Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998) as potentially direct influences on Rusbult's (1980) investment model variables. However, Kelley et al. did not refer overtly to direct effects of independent and/or interdependent self-construals on interdependence processes (indeed, they did not mention Markus and Kitayama's self-construal theory by name). Instead, Kelley and colleagues emphasized ethnicity (in the form of unspecified social groups who presumably differ in the cultural values of individualism and/or collectivism) as a moderator of interdependence processes, *when interpersonal situations are low or ambiguous in interdependence* – an important qualifier that we had not noted in our previous writings (see also Gaines & Hardin, 2018).

One conceptual problem with Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture is that – when one takes Triandis's focus on the original version of Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory into account – Triandis's theory addresses exchange but ignores *coordination* (i.e., partners' engagement in joint activities with each other, as distinct from giving or denying rewards to each other; see Kelley, 1979) in close relationships. Consequently, one might argue that Triandis's theory (as well as the research by Triandis, Vassiliou, & Nassiakou [1968] that Triandis cited in support of his theory) should not be applied to genuinely high-interdependence relationships (i.e., those relationships that are high in coordination as well as high in exchange). Instead, one might be better off examining ethnicity as a moderator of the effects of rewards and costs on satisfaction among individuals who have not made a long-term commitment to their would-be relationship partners (although such an approach would not allow one to test the full investment model of Rusbult, 1980).

Perhaps a more fundamental problem with Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture is that it fails to incorporate the concept of *transformation of*

*motivation* (a process whereby individuals in high-interdependence relationships progress from acting primarily in their self-interest over the short term to acting primarily in the interest of their relationships over the long term) that serves as a centerpiece of Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) revised interdependence theory (see Kelley, 1979). Triandis's (1989, 1996) subsequent omissions of transformation of motivation from his elaborations on the theory of subjective culture lead one to wonder whether Triandis was aware of the importance of that concept to the evolution of interdependence theory. As Rusbult and colleagues increasingly explored consequences of commitment (e.g., by examining *accommodation*, or individuals' refraining from reciprocating partners' anger or criticism, instead responding in a manner that is intended to promote their relationships; Rusbult et al., 1991), it became clear that transformation of motivation is an essential feature of high-interdependence relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Therefore, we anticipate that the original formulation of Triandis's theory will not be applicable to those relationships in which transformation of motivation routinely occurs, regardless of individuals' ethnicity or presumed cultural value orientations.

#### **Revamping the Theory of Subjective Culture (I): Commitment as a Manifestation of Subjective Culture**

So far, our review of Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture has raised serious doubts concerning the utility of the theory in explaining relationship processes that already have been explained by Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory and Rusbult's (1980) investment model. However, rather than discard Triandis's theory entirely, we wish to consider ways in which portions of Triandis's theory can be integrated with Thibaut and Kelley's theory, bolstering both theories (and, by implication, future research in the fields of cultural psychology and

relationship science) along the way. We shall focus upon Thibaut and Kelley's core construct of commitment, which potentially represents a specific manifestation of subjective culture. We hasten to add that our perspective on commitment departs from Triandis's own statements on interdependence constructs, which (as we have seen) were limited to pronouncements about the importance of rewards and costs among ostensibly individualistic ethnic groups.

Throughout the present book, fellow relationship scientists have explored the meaning, antecedents, and consequences of commitment. In the tradition of Thibaut and Kelley (1959), interdependence theorists have tended to view commitment as a unidimensional construct (see Kelley et al., 1983/2002). Nevertheless, even those interdependence theorists who conceptualize and measure commitment as one construct (most notably Rusbult, 1980) have acknowledged that commitment is a complex construct, encompassing cognition (i.e., long-term perspective), affection (i.e., psychological attachment), and behavioral intent (i.e., propensity to maintain the relationship; Rusbult et al., 2001) and reflected in various stay/leave behaviors (Le & Agnew, 2003). As it happens, within the conceptual model that forms the foundation for Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture, the construct of subjective culture not only includes cognition, affect, and behavioral intent but also is presumed to influence individuals' social behavior. Such overlap begs the question: Can commitment be understood as a manifestation of subjective culture?

According to K. K. Dion and J. L. Dion's (1993) cultural perspective on marriage, romantic love (a specific form of psychological attachment; see Kelley et al., 1983/2002) is more likely to serve as the basis for entering into marriage (a specific form of stay/leave behavior; see Kelley et al., 2003) among persons from individualistic ethnic groups, rather than persons from collectivistic ethnic groups.



Conversely, adoption of traditional gender roles (a specific form of long-term orientation; see Kelley et al., 1983/2002) is more likely to serve as the basis for entering into marriage among persons from collectivistic ethnic groups, rather than persons from individualistic ethnic groups. Finally, within a particular ethnic group, persons may differ in the extent to which they contemplate getting married and staying married as separate prospects (a specific type of intent to persist; see Kelley et al., 2003); although such between-person variability historically has been associated with collectivistic ethnic groups, societal change in many areas of the world have resulted in increased variability from person to person concerning intent to marry and intent to divorce; see also K. K. Dion & K. L. Dion, 1996). Overall, even though K. K. Dion and K. L. Dion (1993) did not mention Triandis's (1972) theory of subjective culture or Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory, we believe that the Dions' cultural perspective offers a means toward conceptualizing aspects of commitment as special instances of subjective culture.

Before proceeding further, we note that unidimensional measures of commitment (e.g., Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) may not allow researchers to detect the specific cultural influences on commitment that we have predicted. For that matter, it is not clear whether multidimensional measures of commitment (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Stanley & Markman, 1992) necessarily would yield the cultural influences that we have predicted, for that matter. Perhaps enterprising researchers could compare the goodness-of-fit regarding culturally invariant versus culturally variant models of the factor patterns for unidimensional versus multidimensional measures of commitment (via a series of multiple-group confirmatory factor analyses; see Brown, 2015), in order to determine whether

commitment displays empirical (as distinct from conceptual) promise as an indicator of subjective culture.

### **Revamping the Theory of Subjective Culture (II): Developing Investment Model Influences as Basic Psychological Processes**

Notwithstanding differences of opinion within relationship science concerning commitment as a unidimensional versus multidimensional construct (for a review, see Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner, & Clarke, 2006), interdependence theorists generally agree that individuals possess a subjective sense that their relationships are generally rewarding versus costly (even if individuals do not consciously calculate running tallies of their net profits versus losses; Agnew & VanderDrift, 2018). Assuming that individuals not only learn to associate positive versus negative outcomes with their ongoing relationship interactions but also experience commitment levels that covary with those associations, one might argue that investment model influences on commitment can be interpreted as basic psychological processes – a prospect that is compatible with Triandis’s (1972) theory of subjective culture. Although we have already seen that the investment model generalizes across ethnic groups, we have not considered the possibility that the *development* of certain investment model variables can vary as a function of individuals’ ethnicity.

Perhaps the most obvious candidate for a basic psychological process that might be moderated by ethnicity within the context of Rusbult’s (1980) investment model is satisfaction. We believe that Rusbult and Arriaga’s (2000, pp. 83-84) hypothetical examples of differing *comparison levels* (CL, or the general levels of positive versus negative outcomes that individuals have learned to expect via interactions in one or more relationships across time), *comparison levels for alternatives* (CL-alt, or the lowest levels of positive versus negative outcomes that

individuals are willing to accept in their current relationships, keeping in mind the possibility of more versus less favourable outcomes that individuals might experience if they were to become involved with other partners in the future), and *goodness of outcomes* (i.e., individuals' actual experience of positive versus negative outcomes in their current relationships) can serve as bases for postulating ethnicity-as-moderator effects. For example, (1) within individualistic ethnic groups, CL (reflecting a concern with personal, as opposed to group, rewards and costs; see Triandis, 1989, 1996) will tend to be *higher* than goodness of outcomes; whereas (2) within collectivistic ethnic groups, CL will tend to be *lower* than goodness of outcomes. Therefore, over time, persons in individualistic ethnic groups will be less likely to become sufficiently satisfied with their relationships to make a commitment to those relationships (let alone proceed to get married and stay married), compared to persons in collectivistic ethnic groups. However, as far as we know, our hypotheses concerning ethnicity as a moderator of developing satisfaction have not been tested.

Another, less obvious candidate for a basic psychological process that might be moderated by ethnicity from the standpoint of Rusbult's (1980) investment model is dependence. It is not clear whether dependence is best regarded as (a) an aggregate of the predictors of commitment (usually limited to satisfaction, perceived quality of alternatives, and investment size); (b) the functional equivalent of commitment (rather than the predictors of commitment *per se*); or (c) an entity that is distinguishable from commitment or the other variables that typically are measured in studies of the investment model -- the latter of which would be consistent with the view that dependence is the inverse of *power*, which in turn refers to the degree to which individuals exert influence upon their partners' receipt of rewards versus costs (e.g., Simpson, Farrell, Orina, & Rothman, 2015). For the purposes of the present chapter,

the conceptualization of dependence as the inverse of power allows us to draw a parallel between (1) a portion of the model of subjective culture that Triandis (1972, pp. 22-23) articulated and (2) a portion of the model of the psychology of power that Galinsky, Rucker, and Magee (2015, p. 424) presented – namely, culture as a potential moderator of another basic psychological process (in this instance, individuals' developing sense of dependence, or lack of power). Returning to our interpretation of Rusbult and Arriaga's (2000, pp. 83-84) conceptual analysis of dependence, (1) within individualistic ethnic groups, CL-alt will tend to be even *higher* than CL; whereas (2) within collectivistic ethnic groups, CL-alt will tend to be even *lower* than CL. Thus, across time, persons in individualistic ethnic groups will be less likely to become sufficiently dependent upon their relationships to make a commitment to those relationships (let alone proceed to get married and stay married), compared to persons in collectivistic ethnic groups. However, to our knowledge, our hypotheses concerning ethnicity as a moderator of developing dependence have not been tested.

Rusbult and Arriaga's (2000) analysis of the development of satisfaction and dependence does not address the roles of CL, CL-alt, or goodness of outcomes in developing other investment model influences on commitment. However, the *suffocation model of marriage* (postulating that the trajectory of history in the United States has given rise to individuals' heightened expectations concerning the fulfilment of growth-related needs over time, in the tradition of Maslow, 1968) as presented by Finkel and colleagues (Finkel, Hui, Carswell, & Larson, 2014; Finkel, Larson, Carswell, & Hui, 2014) suggests that successive generations' increase in CL within the United States has coincided with decreases in satisfaction, increases in perceived quality of alternatives, and decreases in investment size. Finkel et al. argued that, not

only is their model applicable to other Western nations at the present time; but their model is likely to be applicable to Eastern nations at some point in the not-too-distance future. Thus, in terms of basic psychological processes, Finkel and colleagues cast their model as universal. However, as Finkel et al. acknowledged, some of their critics (e.g., Feeney & Collins, 2014; Pietromonaco & Perry-Jenkins, 2014) have contended that the suffocation model primarily describes the social-psychological experiences of White Americans – a (stereo)typical example of a individualistic ethnic group (e.g., Triandis, 1976). In any event, the universality versus cultural specificity of the suffocation model have yet to be determined empirically.

#### **Tying Up Loose Ends: Unresolved Issues concerning Interdependence Processes within the Theory of Subjective Culture**

Throughout the present chapter, we have not questioned the assumption (popularly associated with Hofstede, 1980) that persons can be classified as individualistic versus collectivistic. However, results of a meta-analysis by Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002; see also Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, & Coon, 2002) indicate that, not only are scores on individualism and collectivism generally uncorrelated when surveys do not constrain respondents to answer in an either-or format; but individualism is especially unlikely to covary as a function persons' race or nationality (in contrast, collectivism frequently covaries with ethnicity). We strongly advise future researchers to include measures of individualism and collectivism alongside measures of Rusbult's (1980) investment model variables (e.g., Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) across various ethnic groups, rather than accept the individualism-collectivism dichotomy at face value.

Also, we have not questioned the assumption (popularly associated with Triandis, 1995) that – even if persons within a given ethnic group vary widely in the cultural values that they embrace – the “me-value” of individualism and the “we-value” of collectivism are the only values that should be measured. However, certain “we-values” in addition to collectivism (e.g., familism, romanticism, spiritualism) may be relevant to interdependence processes (see Gaines, 1997). We encourage future researchers to expand their conception of cultural values when conducting studies of Rusbult’s (1980) investment model, especially when making East-West comparisons (where the logical counterpart to individualism might be spiritualism, or persons’ orientation toward the welfare of all living entities, whether natural or supernatural; see Braithwaite & Scott, 1991).

Finally, we have not questioned the assumption (which one can find in Hofstede, 1980; as well as Triandis, 1995) that race and nationality are the only aspects of ethnicity that warrant investigation. However, Cohen (2009, 2010) argued that religion deserves to be added as a culturally relevant variable. We believe that future researchers should complement L. E. Davis and Strube’s (1993) study of race as a moderator, as well as Lin and Rusbult’s (1995) study of nationality as a moderator, with religion as a moderator of the investment model processes that Rusbult (1980) initially viewed as universal (see also Wesselmann, VanderDrift, & Agnew, 2016).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

At the beginning of the present chapter, we identified Triandis’s *The Analysis of Subjective Culture* (1972) as a potential blueprint for understanding the role of ethnicity in moderating interdependence processes. As we have seen, only a handful of studies (i.e., L. E. Davis & Strube, 1993; Lin & Rusbult, 1995) have addressed

ethnicity as a moderator of Rusbult's (1980) investment model; and even those studies have focused exclusively upon Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory when testing predictions about universality of the investment model. We hope that the present chapter will spark relationship scientists' interest in Triandis's theory of subjective culture as a complement to interdependence theory in future research.

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