

Affective Attachments to Nested Groups: The Role of Rational Choice Processes

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This paper puts forth an emotional/affective explanation for action in the collective or group interest. The explanation is based on the *choice process theory of affective attachments to groups* (Lawler 1992)—a theory that focuses on individual- to-group ties in a nested-group context where a subgroup is encompassed within a larger group. According to this theory, choice processes that give actors a sense of control arouse positive emotions, and these lead to affective group attachments. A broader implication is that freedom, choice, and self-determination promote action on behalf of the collective interest through an emotional/ affective process. The choice process, furthermore, has an important impact on the allocation of affective attachments to the subgroup and the larger group, independent of the consequences of the actual choices made. In this paper, I show how the *choice process theory of affective attachments* supplements in some respects, and modifies in other respects, a rational choice approach to collectively oriented behavior in groups.

Affective attachments are important to understanding rational choice phenomena because they promote preference shifts from the individual or self-interest to the group or collective interest. In rational choice terms, there are at least three broad ways to characterize such a preference shift. First, affective attachments lead actors to include the group welfare along with their own individual welfare as components of their utility function (Becker 1976; Harsanyi 1982). In this account, group benefit or group welfare becomes a part of and contributes to individual profit maximization. Second; affective attachments make the group welfare a distinct and separate utility function for actors (Margolis 1982). This presents them with decisions about how to allocate time, effort, or other resources to the group utility function (G-utility) versus the self-utility function (S-utility). In this account, the group's welfare is important in its own right, not just because it contributes to individual benefit (see Margolis 1982). Thus, maximizing profit does not necessarily entail maximizing individual welfare (S-utility); it can involve maximizing group welfare, individual welfare, or both. Third, affective attachments may change metapreferences, or the choice among "sets" of options, without necessarily determining the choice or

preference within a given set (Sen 1973). Sen (1973, 1977) suggests that different option sets reflect different goals or values; as a result, a preference for a given option involves a choice of metapreference (for example, goal, value) as well as a choice among options within this metapreference. From this approach, the interests of a larger group, local subgroup, and individual member involve distinct metapreferences. Affective attachments should shift the choice of metapreference to the group (local or larger). “Group welfare” involves one or more distinct utility functions, but for Sen, individual maximization remains the underlying motivation.

I adopt the general approach of Margolis and Sen, focusing on their similarities. Affective attachments presuppose that the group is a distinct social object for actors, a “reality” toward which they direct emotion and action. Affective attachments give the group and its corresponding utility function (G-utility) or value in its own right, that is, something from which individuals derive intrinsic satisfaction. In Margolis’s (1982) terms, the choice of metapreference is a choice of G-utility or S-utility, and the propensity toward G-utility is based on the intrinsic value of group membership. The stronger the affective attachments to groups, the greater the intrinsic value of group membership as such, and the more individuals’ profit maximization will be constrained, framed, or directed toward the group interest. In this manner, group memberships which initially have an instrumental foundation become more “expressive” and “taken for granted,” and actors are willing to nurture the collective welfare by, for example, contributing to public goods (Lawler and Yoon 1996).

The ties between an individual and a group, like those between individuals, can take three basic forms: utilitarian, affective, or normative (Kanter 1968, 1972). Individuals can be attached to social entities because those groups are means to particular ends, because they are valued in their own right, or because they have rules and norms that direct or guide the actors’ behavior (Parsons 1951; Kanter 1968, 1972). The first is instrumental; the second is emotional/ expressive; and the third tends to contain both instrumental features (that is, group sanctions) and expressive features (internalized

beliefs). These forms of attachment, of course, are interrelated. I consider in particular the connection between the instrumental and emotional/affective bases of attachment and theorize how expressiveness emerges from an instrumental foundation (see also Lawler 1992; Lawler and Yoon 1993, 1996).

Understanding the emotional aspects of person-to-group ties, apart from person-to-person ties, is fundamental to the problem of social order, as Parsons and others have suggested (Kanter 1968, 1972; Tajfel and Turner 1985; Markov-sky and Lawler 1994). Once the group is “objectified” or becomes “real” to actors, people are prepared to act toward the group as a distinct entity and therefore distinguish relations to specific others in the group from relations to the “group itself” (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Tajfel and Turner 1985). This has important implications for how moral orders are created and sustained.

Background

Instrumental and expressive forms of attachment have often been pitted against one another, yet it seems fairly clear that expressive attachments often develop from instrumentally based group memberships, and expressive relations often become instrumental for actors over time. To assert that social relations are inherently either instrumental or expressive or to presume that one particular relationship obtains between the instrumental and the expressive is to ignore the fact that the instrumental and the expressive are likely to be interrelated in a variety of ways across different contexts. Of particular relevance here, the processes of making rational calculations and choices should have emotional consequences for actors, and these consequences may bear on how they perceive the group and their own connection to it. Rational choice theorists have given little consideration to the intrinsic value of choice, autonomy, or freedom, although some have acknowledged their importance

and the potential that they might alter rational choice explanations (see Sen and Williams 1982; Harsanyi 1982). It is well known, for example, that perceived choice, freedom, or self-determination arouses positive emotion under certain conditions (for example, White 1959; Deci 1975, 1980; Westcott 1988). Attention to the emotions generated by rational choice processes has the potential to refashion and improve rational choice explanations of social solidarity (Hechter 1987) if we can specify how and when emotion produced by rational choice processes has an impact on affective attachments to the group.

The role of group attachments in producing preference or metapreference shifts is complicated by the fact that in most social contexts, people act and interact in “nested groups,” that is, in a local subgroup subsumed within a larger group. Examples are a state within a nation, a division within a corporation, a department within a university, or an ethnic community in a larger city. When people make choices in the context of nested groups, the “group welfare” can mean the subgroup or the larger group, and clearly this choice—implicitly a choice of metapreference—has a bearing on the locus of social solidarity. My *choice process theory of affective attachments* addresses this problem. The theory formulates general principles for explaining when and how choice processes lead actors to develop stronger affective attachments to subgroups versus the more encompassing group.

Emotion and Rational Choice

The broader theoretical issue being addressed is the emotional side of rational choice processes. Just as psychologists have transcended the sharp dichotomy between cognition and emotion and have come to see these as interrelated in a variety of interesting and complex ways, theorists of rational choice and emotion can benefit from more systematic understanding of how rational and emotional processes are intertwined. Choice behavior is a good context for doing this. The recent work of Robert Frank (1988) on “passions” as commitment devices or signals and of Bruno Frey (1992a) incorporating

intrinsic motivation into neoclassical economic principles offer interesting and important pathways for development, as do Hochschild's (1983) ideas on the tactical management of emotional expressions in work settings, and Clark's (1990) analysis of emotions as strategies for making status claims. A recent special issue of *Rationality and Society* on emotion suggests a shift in thinking about the relevance of emotion among sociological rational choice theorists.

An ecumenical spirit, however, should not overlook the fact that rational and emotional approaches to human behavior adopt disparate and somewhat incompatible metatheoretical assumptions. Rational choice theorists begin with the reasonable premise that social structures entail constraints on choice options and generate incentives (preferences) for adopting certain choices over others (Elster 1986). In rational choice theory, one imagines relatively "free" actors who make choices among the options available, based on the incentives associated with those options. Social institutions are regularized mappings of options and incentives that account for congruent behavior of large numbers of actors in the same group, organization, or society and for the "taken for grantedness" of much behavior. Given the emphasis on choice and its consequences, sociological rational choice theorists accord somewhat less attention to the process of means-ends deliberation by which choices are made and virtually no attention to the emotional aspects of this process (see, for example, Hechter, Opp, and Whippier 1990).

Sociological theories of emotion—although revealing less metatheoretical unity or consensus than rational choice theories—also begin with a reasonable premise, namely, that the "social" in social action presupposes a nonrational—emotional or normative—foundation for behavior (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Scheff 1990; Collins 1981). Social solidarity is in part a priori and constitutive of the social world. From such theories, one imagines actors who have a common bond to one another and who are constrained to do what is normatively sanctioned by their group; therefore, choice and choice

processes play a minimal role. The choices people actually have are trivial, compared to the importance of those already structured into social institutions.

Yet people do make choices all the time; they at least act like some of these are important; and emotions such as fear, happiness, elation, and depression are clearly induced by people's choices (for example, Festinger 1959). Moreover, recent work on emotion emphasizes that the expression of emotion, while constrained by the social context, is a matter of some choice (Hochschild 1983; Frank 1988; Clark 1990). Emotions such as anger, shame, and happiness are complements of strategic choices, helping to present the desired impression or image, to convey commitment to a line of action, or to even solve the "mutual assurance problem" in mixed-motive settings (see Frank 1988, 1990). As Hochschild (1983) argues, emotions are managed by actors as much as they are dictated by the social context.

It is also reasonable to suppose that choice *processes*, not just the *actual* choices, arouse feelings and emotions that people perceive as caused by groups in the social context and that form the basis for their attachments to these groups (Lawler 1992). Outcomes are important but so is process, and my theory focuses solely on the latter. In the following sections, I synthesize the main ideas of *the choice process theory of affective attachments* and illustrate its implications for rational choice explanations of various phenomena, including the role of intrinsic motivation in persons' response to price and regulatory incentive mechanisms (Frey 1992a,b), the differences between primary and secondary labor markets (Akerlof 1982, 1984), and the impact of person-to-collective dependencies on social solidarity (Hechter 1987).

The Choice Process Theory of Affective Attachments

The broadest prediction is that *people become more emotionally attached to those groups that give them a generalized sense of control* (Lawler 1992). “Sense of control” does not necessarily mean “real control,” only its perception; and it is grounded in what groups do for or to us, that is, how they enable or constrain our action. My argument is that the generalized sense of control has an impact on actors’ attachments above and beyond the positive benefits actually produced by this control. A key point of the theory is that affective attachments mediate the impact of instrumental conditions on the development of commitment, solidarity, and the like.

Obviously, groups are likely to vary in the degree that they provide persons the capacity, objectively or subjectively, to have an impact on the world around them. Everyday commonsense conceptions of control tend to be embedded in myths about the primary sources and forms of “human agency” in a given group, organization, or society. Most groups, organizations, or societies contain myths about how the collective “empowers” individual members, and the everyday interaction of members can reaffirm or weaken the force of such myths. Inferences about control are therefore group-mediated, that is, they are social definitions developed and sustained in and by groups and organizations.

The scope conditions of the theory entail a choice situation in which individual actors in a nested-group context (for example, a work group in an organization) face some sort of “problem” and uncertainty about how to deal with the problem. They have a set of options to choose among and some degree of discretion (from none to much) to reshape the option set. The problem faced and the associated uncertainty constitute what is defined as a “choice situation”; the process of identifying, evaluating, and shaping options is the “choice process”; and the result is an actual choice (Lawler 1992). While group members interact with each other and therefore influence each others interpretation of

the choice process, this interpersonal influence process is treated by the theory as a given. This is not a very limiting condition, because theory and research on group formation indicate that even in the absence of interaction, people may perceive themselves as a member of a group and act differently toward in-group and out-group members (for example, Tajfel and Turner 1985; Rabbie and Horowitz 1988; Kramer 1993). Some research supports the distinct and separate effects of person-to-group, as opposed to interpersonal, ties (see also Hogg and Abrams 1990; Markovsky and Lawler 1994).

The key question addressed by the theory is: When and how do choice processes have an impact on actors' affective attachment to subgroups versus more encompassing groups? The theory holds that choice processes increase or decrease actors' *generalized* sense of control by producing more or less perceived choice, and this cognition then arouses positive or negative emotions. The social-structural context shapes these cognitions and emotions.

Social-Structural Context

Social structures have both constraining and enabling features (Elster 1986; Giddens 1984). The constraint is embedded in the "set of feasible options" among which actors are able to choose (Elster 1986); "enabling" is found in the opportunities provided by the choice. In other words, a social structure not only limits choice, it also frees actors to choose among a set of feasible options. My theory assumes a socially defined option set that is partly exogenous (dictated by social structure) and partly endogenous (shaped by means-ends deliberation). To the degree that actors construct the options or the options provide them a wide range of opportunities for action, they sense high control (Lawler 1992). The control may not be realized in the consequences or effects of a particular choice, but as a generalized capacity, it remains there to be used in the future.

Emotion is defined as a short-term positive or negative feeling that involves neurophysiological, neuromuscular, and often cognitive components (Kemper 1978). Emotion is a transitory feeling; affect,

an enduring feeling or sentiment attached to an object (Kemper 1978; Gordon 1981). The objects of concern are subgroups and groups. Emotions are relatively diffuse feelings, and groups are a possible target for such feelings. The theory contends that in choice situations, cognitive appraisals of choice and freedom arouse diffuse emotion that then produces further cognitive work.¹ This additional cognitive work involves an attribution process that forms, strengthens, or weakens affective group attachments (Lawler 1992).

The attribution process concerns the inferences actors make from the choice process, rather than from the consequences of the actual choice (Lawler 1992). I argue that actors develop a commonsense understanding of the social (external) sources of their choice opportunities and their generalized capacity for control, regardless of whether they attribute choice consequences to internal or external conditions (Weiner, Russell, and Lerman 1979). These socially constructed understandings determine the responsibility that actors attribute to nested groups for the positive (or negative) feelings generated by the choice process. Thus, even in the case of an internal attribution for a behavior or actual choice (that is, an attribution to the person), I argue that actors have some understanding or interpretation about where the choice of behavioral options comes from; this can be viewed as a “second order” attribution process.

To have long-lasting effects, choice situations and, hence, choice processes need to recur so that actors repeatedly experience the sense of control or lack of it, and so their episodic attributions about control crystallize. Social structures establish such conditions by reproducing the same sort of choice situation for actors over time. If choice situations repeatedly give actors a broad range of options or

¹ Actually, the uncertainties of the choice situation itself are likely to produce baseline emotions in the form of fear, anxiety, and interest (Izard 1977). Such emotions should focus people’s attention on the choice problem and produce cognitive appraisal, while subsequent choice processes add another layer of cognitive appraisal that fosters other emotions such as feeling good, happy, or relieved, which, in turn, generate more cognitive appraisal. My emphasis is how individuals’ cognition about the choice process (about the means-ends deliberation) impacts emotions felt by actors and how these emotions are then interpreted by the actors.

substantial discretion to shape them, then choice processes should repeatedly generate a sense of control and related positive feelings. Choice processes, through such cognitions and emotions, essentially make people more aware of the constraints and opportunities embedded in social structures and also make them more likely to attribute these to relevant subgroups and groups.

Overall, people sense more control when social structures allow them to decide how to manipulate their world and thereby generate a product (see Kohn and Slomczynski 1990 for cross-national empirical support). To go further and say that a choice process arouses emotion is similar to saying that a production process (not just the product itself) engenders an emotional response because, regardless of how satisfying or dissatisfying the particular product, the process reflects actors' generalized capacity to produce better results in the future. This idea is compatible with Deci's work on intrinsic motivation and with White's analysis of "effectance motivation" (Deci 1975; White 1959). It is also compatible with Marx's (1964) notions about when the labor process alienates people from the products of their labor, and with the role of efficacy in Giddens's (1984) structuration theory. Choices that affirm a person's self-determination or freedom make him or her feel good and are likely to have intrinsic value (Westcott 1988). The question, then, is whether and when these bear on person- to- group ties.

Choice Process and Affective Attachments

Three basic ideas capture the main propositions of the theory. The first idea is that *positive emotion generated by choice processes strengthens affective ties to groups credited with making choice opportunities available; negative emotion weakens ties to those blamed for constraining choice* (Lawler 1992). I argue that actors singly or jointly attempt to understand the source or causes of these feelings, because they want to be able to reproduce good feelings and avoid bad ones; this attribution process leads to a shared understanding of the responsibility (credit/blame) relevant groups and subgroups have

for such emotions. For example, an ethnic community that creates more opportunities (choices) for housing or employment for new immigrants should generate stronger affective attachments, if the new immigrant attributes responsibility for these choices to the ethnic community more than to the larger nation (Lawler 1992).

The attributions of a set of individuals “aggregate” in part because the second-order attribution—understanding the social bases or causes for choice opportunities or constraints—produces a sense of shared experience and of membership in a larger collective entity. The group or subgroup becomes more salient and also a more distinct utility function, in Margolis’s (1982) terms, as people come to believe that something they experience individually (an emotion) is due in part to something they share with others—group membership. The mutual awareness of a shared emotion should be stronger where the task is a joint one involving several people, because they have an opportunity to communicate their feelings to one another, but even individual tasks can generate a sense of some larger collective under “minimal group” conditions (for example, Tajfel and Turner 1985). Sharing the emotion should further enhance the impact of a sense of control on affective attachments and, in turn, the degree that affective attachments promote behavior in the group’s welfare (see Collins 1981).

To summarize, the link between social structure, the choice process, and affective attachments to groups can be portrayed as follows. Social structures generate a balance of constraints and opportunities for actors engaged in means-ends deliberation; and the choice process fosters emotions that call for a commonsense explanation or understanding by actors. The commonsense understanding is likely to make group memberships more salient and lead actors to attribute to the group some degree of responsibility for the choice opportunity (or constraint) and therefore the generalized control (or lack thereof) sensed by individuals. The greater the perceived responsibility of the group for choice, the stronger the affective group attachments.

The second basic idea of the theory is that *positive emotion produced from choice processes strengthens affective attachments to a subgroup more than to the larger group it is nested in; whereas negative emotion weakens attachments to the larger group more than to the subgroup* (Lawler 1992). The theory distinguishes two rules by which actors can distribute responsibility for a generalized sense of control and related emotion—proximal and distal. The former allocates responsibility to the smaller, immediate group; the latter, to the larger, more encompassing group. The theory predicts a proximal rule for positive emotion and a distal rule for negative emotion. Thus, actors tend to give more credit to the local group or subgroup for choice and freedom (opportunity), and more blame to the larger group for little choice and freedom (constraints).

Subgroups are likely to receive more credit for choice and less blame for constraint because of an “interaction advantage.” Subgroups are closer and more immediate, especially if these promote face-to-face interaction with friends, co-workers, or others with similar social backgrounds. Proximate groups or subgroups are fertile contexts for mutual sharing of emotional responses to choice processes and also for the development of common understandings about the sources and degree of individual control that, all things being equal, favor the local group or subgroup.

One important implication is that more decentralized systems should produce a greater difference in affective attachment to the subgroup vis-a-vis the larger group. In fact, the more decoupled the subgroup from the larger group, the greater the difference in affective attachment (Lawler 1992). This helps to explain why immigrants often become more attached to ethnic communities than the host nation, why academics often are more committed to their departments than their universities, why workers often are more committed to their union local than to the national organization, and why gang members are more committed to their gang than to the local community. In each of these examples, a subgroup is perceived as a prime source of opportunities, and the larger group as a prime source of constraint. In fact, within a highly decentralized organization or society,

policies of the larger organization that empower members should generally strengthen affective attachments to subgroups more than to the larger groups or organizations because of the “interaction advantage” afforded the local subgroups.

The third basic idea of the theory is that *given recurrent choice situations, repeated affirmations of control or freedom increase the likelihood of actors adopting options that are in the group's welfare.*

The theory conceptualizes actors as choosing among three metapreferences (Sen 1973, 1977): the subgroup's welfare, the larger group's welfare, and the individual's welfare. The choice process involves selecting a metapreference as well as an option within it, and the main prediction is that stronger affective attachments shift metapreferences from the individual to a group and, in particular, to that group providing actors the greatest sense of control—real or imagined.

I argue further that a choice process which repeatedly affirms actors' sense of group-mediated control and freedom is likely to become symbolic or emblematic of the relevant group's empowering force. The choice process then is a ritual expression of the group, and the process is used even when it is unnecessary, that is, when the outcome of the choice is obvious and is known in advance. Once a choice process becomes symbolic of the group itself, an orientation toward that group's welfare should be a taken-for-granted reality whenever the choice process is enacted or activated. In this way, choosing the group-welfare metapreference becomes a ritual, and means-ends deliberation is confined to the options subsumed by this metapreference.

The idea of “ritual behavior” is a fruitful way to understand the result of affective attachments producing a change in metapreference. Rituals are repetitive behaviors or interaction patterns that are expressive, symbolic, or emblematic of common group memberships (Wuthnow 1987; Collins 1981, 1989). People undertake ritual behavior singly or jointly simply because they are members of the group and because such behavior is part of the group's taken-for-granted reality. My theory indicates that

social structures produce repetitive choice processes that repeatedly produce positive emotion; and under such conditions, the choice process may become symbolic of the group by virtue of the fact that it is likely to produce a common focus for actors, mutual awareness of the common focus, and public displays of positive feeling (see Collins 1981, 1989 on the theory of interaction ritual chains). A “revealed” group-welfare metapreference, therefore, can be construed as ritual behavior. Such ritual frames choice without eliminating it, because considerable choice still can occur within a given metapreference.

To conclude, the *choice process theory of affective attachments* indicates one way that freedom and constraint exist side by side and, in combination, produce and reproduce stronger affective attachments than otherwise would occur. Perceptions of choice or freedom stem from the range of options within a given taken-for-granted metapreference; constraint, in the lack of choice over the metapreference (Lawler 1992). If the choice process becomes symbolic or expressive of the group as such, adopting the subgroup metapreference becomes an everyday ritual (Collins 1981). This means less free riding, less costly systems of monitoring, and more voluntary compliance with group norms, all of which remain contingent on the continued provision of choice within the ritualized metapreference².

² Departures from the theoretical predictions are likely when affective attachments become so strong that the choice of metapreference and the choice within are one and the same thing. This may be the case in highly collectivistic cultures and in some cults where the experience of control is socially defined in collective rather than individual terms, and the choice is about how the group can control the external environment impinging on individuals. However, a similar result is likely to be produced by institutionalized patterns of behavior that become so routine and ritualized that actors no longer have to deal with the problems (for example, uncertainty) that gave rise to them in the first place. My theory focuses on less extreme circumstances where affective attachments are not already so strong.

Illustrations and Implications

The theory has implications for many issues of relevance to rational choice theory, and I illustrate several here. First, rational choices that induce perceptions of control and self-determination should take on intrinsic value and impact person-to-group ties. As an illustration, I use recent articles by Frey (1992a, b) on how changes in intrinsic motivation toward certain choices alters the impact of pricing and regulation mechanisms on economic behavior. The second implication concerns the difference between primary and secondary sectors of an economy or labor market. The common notion that employees in primary compared to secondary labor markets develop greater organizational commitments could be due partly to the range of choices and resulting sense of control fostered in primary sectors. This also can illuminate the similarities and differences between Hechter's (1987) theory of group solidarity and the choice process theory of affective attachments. The third implication is that instrumentally motivated exchanges by the same actors over time may yield a more expressive relation, maintained as an end in itself. Each illustration suggests a way that the theory of affective attachments complements and builds on rational choice ideas.

Choice and Intrinsic Motivation

Sen's (1973, 1977) view that the value of autonomy, self-determination, and freedom is an important omission in rational choice theory is echoed in recent work by Frey (1992a,b). Frey (1992a) criticizes "standard economics" for ignoring the fact that external instruments, such as pricing and regulation, can affect intrinsic motivation to engage in a line of economic behavior. Intrinsic motivation is motivation to do something for its own sake, meaning the act or choice has value in and of itself. Economic structures that strengthen intrinsic motivation for a given behavior will produce more of that behavior than otherwise, and economic structures that undermine intrinsic motivation will produce less of the behavior than economic models predict. Frey's (1992a) focus is two basic dimensions of economic

structure, pricing and regulation. Following Deci (1975, 1980), he argues that these economic dimensions affect the intrinsic motivation for resulting economic behavior to the extent that they bear on actors' sense of self-determination. Autonomy or the sense of self-determination is a key determinant of intrinsic motivation.³

One of Frey's key predictions is that direct regulation of economic behavior using punishments reduces actors' perceived self-determination more than price incentives and therefore does more damage to the intrinsic motivation for the "desired" behavior. A second major prediction is that price incentives damage intrinsic motivation if these make actors feel the choice is clear-cut, meaning that it is obvious and warrants little means-ends deliberation. That choices must seem "real" to actors is an important notion reflected in key propositions of the choice process theory (see Lawler 1992). If little means-ends deliberation is necessary, actors will infer less control, freedom, or self-determination from a choice.

My theory can take the ideas of Frey (1992a) a step further by suggesting that pricing and regulation also should modify affective attachments to the relevant group, organization, or society. Pricing and forms of regulation that create a greater sense of choice, control, and self-determination ostensibly should produce more affective attachments to those groups or subgroups perceived as responsible for the choice opportunities. In other words, the conditions that Frey views as producing more intrinsic motivation are also conditions that tend to foster stronger affective attachments to the subgroup or larger group that constitutes the context for economic choices. Affective attachments to a relevant subgroup (for example, city, state, province, nation) will be enhanced more than the

³ Frey (1992a,b) also includes positive self-evaluations as a second determinant of intrinsic motivation. Economic behavior that enhances both the perception of self-determination and positive self-evaluations will have the greatest intrinsic value.

attachments to the larger society as long as the proximal rule operates.⁴ If pricing and regulation repeatedly create choice situations and processes that actors interpret as evidence of their self-determination, then these should not only come to have intrinsic value but also become symbolic of the relevant group.

Applied to Frey's propositions, the choice process theory predicts that regulation will not harm intrinsic motivation if it is directed at the choice of the group's metapreference rather than at the choice among options falling within or framed by this metapreference—assuming, of course, that there is a sufficient range of options within the metapreference. In addition, strong price incentives designed to induce the group's metapreference (that is, behavior in the collective interest) should not have a negative impact on the intrinsic motivation for choices within that metapreference, so long as the options within give actors a sense of control and self-determination. This illustrates one way that, in combination, constraint directed at the choice of metapreference, and freedom directed at the choice among options within the desired metapreference, can generate, maintain, or strengthen affective attachments to groups.

Primary and Secondary Labor Markets

Akerlof's (1982, 1984) idea of gift exchange specifies that primary labor sectors provide workers more wages than necessary and, in the process, purchase more loyalty from them. This loyalty is based solely on instrumental conditions—the fact that wages are higher in the primary sector. There are no wage incentives for an actor to move to a firm in the secondary sector. Thus, firms in primary sectors are “compensatory groups,” in Hechters (1987) terms, because they attain solidarity by making workers

⁴ While the theory predicts that, all things being equal, a proximal rule for positive emotion will occur, distal rules emerge when collective rituals, symbols, and the like make the larger collective more salient and more empowering than the local subgroup (see Lawler 1992 for more discussion).

more highly dependent on the organization, that is, by providing payoffs that are greater than alternatives.

From the standpoint of my choice process theory of affective attachments, however, primary labor markets may produce greater employee commitment to a firm, partly because of the emotional effects of having a wider range of options in organizations within the primary sector. Beyond wage and salary differences, primary sectors tend to provide workers more opportunities for advancement (internal labor markets), more autonomy on the job, and more control over their career paths. Greater “generalized” control over work and career should repeatedly arouse positive feelings on the job that are attributed to the relevant organization or firm. This is a plausible interpretation of the fact that firms in a primary sector produce more worker commitment than firms in a secondary sector (see also Lincoln and Kalleberg 1985).

An important part of my argument is that the choice to stay in a firm or move elsewhere has different implications than the choice among options about how to accomplish tasks within a given firm. The choice to stay or not reflects the dependence of the actor on the organization, whereas the choice about how to do a job or shape one’s career reflects the degree of self-determination within a given organization. The choice process theory suggests that the emotional/ affective consequences of choice internal to the firm can counteract the effects of little choice about whether to stay in the firm. This, once again, shows how constraint and freedom operate side by side. The high levels of solidarity in Japanese organizations, for example, should be based not just on the lack of choice to leave—that is, the dependence on the work organization—but also on the way in which the organizations generate a sense of group-mediated control over work through institutional mechanisms like quality circles.

Hechter's Theory of Group Solidarity

The contrast of choices to stay in the group with choices provided within the group bears on the relationship of my theory to Hechter's (1987) theory of group solidarity. In Hechter's theory, group solidarity is based on the dependence of actors on the organization or the lack of a viable choice to exit; whereas, in my theory, affective attachments are based on the degree of perceived choice and sense of control provided by the organization the actors are dependent on. These theories are complementary in most respects, particularly if one views the internal choice as an additional source of dependence on the organization. Combining the two theories, we find that group solidarity should be greatest and have a more emotional foundation when actors are *both* highly dependent on an organization for instrumental goods and the organization internally provides greater opportunity for choice.

Yet there are noteworthy differences. When high dependence is combined with high internal choice, my theory predicts more solidarity than Hechter's theory and also suggests that less developed mechanisms of monitoring are necessary. Monitoring is analogous to regulation in Frey's analysis; it reduces actors' sense of control. In "obligatory groups"—where members confront "collective obligations" affirmed and monitored by the group (Hechter 1987)—my theory indicates that these obligations will be met without monitoring, if the relevant choices have intrinsic value. This is most likely where the "collective obligations" exercise minimal constraint over choices among the options that all meet collective obligations in some way.

Choice processes with intrinsic value could conceivably be treated as "immanent goods" by Hechter's theory, that is, goods that are jointly produced for use rather than exchange. However, this seems to stretch the meaning of "immanent goods" in Hechter's theory (see Hechter 1987: 42-43), and it would remove from my theory the expressive, symbolic aspect of action on behalf of the group welfare. If intrinsic value is a type of emergent or immanent good, emotional processes are again

subject to an instrumental interpretation, and the emotional is subsumed under the instrumental. Whether to take this approach or not is a question of metatheoretical directive or theoretical strategy. The divergent assumptions of rational and emotional perspectives on behavior, noted earlier, suggest different answers, and my theory is aligned more with emotional than rational approaches in this respect.

Commitment Formation in Exchange Networks

Emerson (1981) defined an “exchange relation” as a series of repeated exchanges among the same actors over time. Exchange relations are formed and maintained solely because of instrumental conditions—actors expect and receive more benefit from these relations than what is available elsewhere. However, exchange relations also tend to foster trust or interpersonal liking, and these perceptions or affective states form the basis for some sort of commitment among the actors (Cook and Emerson 1978; Emerson 1981; Cook and Emerson 1984; Tallman, Gray, and Leik 1991). The standard social exchange explanation ties commitment to the individual rewards from interacting with familiar and/or likable others.

Homans (1961), in his classic work, proposed that the mere frequency of exchange is sufficient to produce sentiment relations, that is, ones with a significant emotional component. He argued that the frequency of exchange should have this effect in particular where (1) actors have alternative others from whom they can receive individual rewards and (2) they expect lower benefits or rewards from these alternative others. Structural conditions such as these should produce repetitive exchange and “exchange relations/” as defined by Emerson (1981), and establish the foundation for emotional/affective commitments.

Recent work by Lawler and associates (Lawler and Yoon 1993, 1994, 1996; Lawler, Yoon, Baker, and Large 1995) has taken up Homans’ theme and argued essentially that exchange relations, though

initially instrumental, become emotional or expressive ends in themselves if structural conditions produce repetitive exchange by the same actors. They examined the impact of equal power on repetitive negotiations of a dyad within an exchange network. The results of their experiments indicate that more equal power and greater mutual dependence produced more frequent exchange between the same two actors and, in turn, more commitment behavior in the form of token gift giving and a greater tendency to stay in the relation despite a profitable alternative relation, and more willingness to contribute to a new joint venture. Instrumental conditions account for the frequent exchange; but emotional /affective processes account for the link between frequent exchange and commitment behavior. Equal power produced more commitment behavior than unequal power indirectly via the positive emotion produced by repetitive exchange. Thus, rational choices to exchange with another had emotional effects that altered actors' exchange relation and made them willing to stay despite profitable alternatives and to do "extra things." The fact that emotional processes mediate these effects lends credence to the notion that an expressive relation is being formed from an instrumental base.

The theorizing of Lawler and Yoon (1996) argues that when positive emotion is produced in the context of accomplishing a joint task with another, of which exchange is one example, actors attribute their positive feelings to their relation or group. The *choice process theory of affective attachments* fleshes this out. A dyadic relation in a larger network can be construed as a nested subgroup, and thus, if exchange enhances actors' sense of control over uncertainty in the context, they will feel positive emotion and tend to view it as being caused by the relation (subgroup) rather than the larger group or network. Attributions for the emotion may be partly to the other person, forming the basis for interpersonal liking, or partly to self, but my point is that the relationship itself will be accorded some of the responsibility for the positive emotion; this generates "relational cohesion," that is, "the perception of the relation as a distinct, unifying object" (Lawler and Yoon 1996: 94). The emotions then can be reproduced by reproducing the relationship. An important implication is that if structural power

conditions produce different frequencies of exchange across dyads in a network, those dyads that exchange more frequently should endogenously generate greater cohesion and stronger affective commitments to their relation and, as a result, be less responsive to changes in the larger network (Lawler and Yoon 1993, 1996).

Conclusions

To conclude, my argument is that instrumentally based choice in the context of ongoing groups produces expressive or emotional attachments to something larger—relations, groups, organizations[^]- or societies—that subsumes the individuals. This occurs to the extent that (1) choice processes give actors a sense of control, (2) the sense of control makes them feel good or elated, and (3) those feelings are attributed to particular relations or groups. The emotion essentially makes group members more aware of their collective experience and common membership, more inclined to treat relevant groups as distinct social objects of attachment, and more willing to affirm and symbolize these attachments through action on behalf of one or more group's welfare.

The *choice process theory of affective attachments* shows when and how affective attachments to groups strengthen (or weaken) group attachments and produce preference shifts toward the group or collective interest. One implication for rational choice theory is that actors will make inferences about their own control from rational choice *processes*, aside from the results of their choices, and these will produce feelings about the groups that structure and frame their choice opportunities. These emotional processes can be construed as a by-product of rational choice, with inadvertent effects on how people perceive and evaluate their tie to multiple, nested groups in which their action takes place. The “consequentialism” of rational choice theory diverts attention from these potentially important

emotional by-products of perceptions of autonomy, freedom, and self-determination (Sen and Williams 1982).

There are several ways for the *choice process theory of affective attachments* to be developed further. One is to deal with the question of whether and when the theory applies to circumstances where affective attachments have become so strong that there is really no choice left—either between or within metapreferences. The sense of control may remain important even in this context, but individual control is no longer “group-mediated”; it is “group encapsulated” because actors don’t make any distinction between their individual control and that of the group or collectivity. Some principles of the theory should still apply—for example, “group-encapsulated” control should have the same consequences for individual emotion and for affective attachments to the empowering group. However, the duality of freedom and constraint at the heart of the theory is no longer relevant in these contexts.

A second direction for development is to take account of the fact that a sense of control is likely to be associated with positive self-evaluations. Frey (1992a, b) treats positive self-evaluations as a second condition for economic behavior to be intrinsically motivated. If groups that foster a sense of control are also a source of positive self-evaluations, only a modest theoretical step is necessary to propose that such groups also constitute and shape persons’ most salient and central identities (Stryker 1980). The theory could incorporate symbolic interactionist ideas about the impact of self-efficacy on self-esteem (Gecas 1986) and the role of identity salience in forming and maintaining identity commitments (Stryker 1980). Groups that produce the greatest sense of control and the strongest affective attachments are also likely to be the source of highly valued identities for actors.

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