

The Social Psychology of Intimate Relationships(1): Communal versus Exchange Relationships

Katsuhide MOROI

Clark and colleagues have drawn a distinction between two types of relationships based on the norms governing the giving and receiving of benefits. Communal relationships are often exemplified by relationships between friends, romantic partners, and family members. In such a relationship, each person feels a special responsibility, and a special desire, to be concerned with the other's welfare. Exchange relationships are often typified by interactions between strangers, casual acquaintances, and business associates. In such a relationship, benefits are given to repay debts created by benefits previously received or in anticipation of receiving specific repayment in the future.

In this paper, we reviewed a series of experiments by Clark and colleagues, which provided three categories of empirical support for the communal-exchange distinction: (a) appropriate behaviors in accord with exchange norms, (b) appropriate behaviors in accord with communal norms, (c) individual differences in relationships orientation. Implications of the distinction were discussed for understanding intimate relationships.