Who remains a friend after divorce?

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This paper examines the usefulness of a simple, but general model of the (dis)investment in relations within a given social structure, as an explanation for network changes following a particular status transition, viz. a divorce. Divorce is a life-event of particular interest because part of the personal networks of the spouses will have to be divided in the course of the separation. These changes will allow examination of the mechanisms leading to the break-up or maintenance of social relationships. Our theoretical model places individual rational action within the restrictions of the social structure. A social network is seen as the independent social context that both restricts and facilitates individual action, which, in turn, influences and changes the structure of a social network. The link between individual action and social structure can be found in the concept of "social capital". The key idea in our proposition is to conceive of personal social networks as a means to achieve one's ends, i.e. as social capital that produces more agreeable conditions of life. This idea does lead not only to the networks-as-resource argument, but it also suggests that the (dis)investment in persons depends on the present value of future help. Important life events may change the value of social capital as well as the expectation of actually having to make use of former investments. Following this line of reasoning, explanations of changes in social networks come within reach.

The theoretical model will have to deal with the changes in social relations following a marital separation or divorce. On a continuum these changes vary from the emergence, maintenance and strengthening on the one hand, to the weakening and breaking off on the other hand. Since dyads are the unit of analysis, the central actors in the theoretical model are the divorced individual and a member of his/her personal network. A more comprehensive explanation will have to consider at least four dyads: the mutual ties within a network between the divorced male and female and a couple, known to both the ex-partners. Accordingly, changes in a number of network structures that are possible with dyads, triads and quadrants should be explained. Yet, the model presented here is restricted to the choice alternatives of one actor, the divorced individual.

Crucial to an explanatory model are the auxiliary assumptions that specify the choice situation of the ex-partners in terms of the more general behavioral theory: the behavioral alternatives are restricted and/or facilitated by the situation of the actor. Several restrictions in the social structure can be distinguished: the size and density of the personal network and the amount of time and money available to maintain social contacts. The choices made by the actors will be determined by the

ease with wich existing relations can be replaced by new ones. The extensive zone of acquaintances is important as a pool out of which new contacts can be recruited in case existing contacts fail or become a burden or do not furnish the expected support. In general, people will cling longer to a particular relationship (even if its expected value for future help has diminished) when they are not capable to substitute the existing relationships. The substitution of network members is assumed to be easier in a loose-knit network than in a strong-knit network. The break-up with a few network members will almost always affect the ties with other network members in a dense network. This is much less the case in a open network, in which network members hardly interact. In addition, the actor's circumstances such as the time and money available can limit the possibilities to maintain relations.

Within the structural limits that determine the kind and number of ties to be maintained, created or broken off, individual action is based on two choices: the decision to change the number or content of ties or not and the selection of the tie(s) to be affected. In the theoretical explanation of these choices, we combine ideas from two different theoretical perspectives with the general theory of rational action, namely the cognitive-motivational theory of mental incongruity and the theoretical notion of social capital.

In the general theory of rational choice, it is assumed that the realization of the ultimate goal or goals people may pursue (eg. well-being) requires the achievement of some intermediate goals. One of these intermediate goals, viz. access to (available) social resources, is attained when having social relations.

From more cognitive-based behavioral theories (e.g. the theory of mental incongruity), the assumption is adopted that the degree of mental incongruity between the desired number of social relations and the perceived number of social relations, leads to the tendency to behave in a more or less active way. In addition, the subjective perception of available behavioral alternatives may differ from the objectively measured conditions for behavioural alternatives. With respect to our model of personal networks, it can be stated that the degree of the individual's orientation to change the number and content of the presently existing social relations, is determined by the wish to change the number and content of the ties and the perceived ability to change these ties.

The concept of social capital is introduced in order to explain why a particular contact is changed or not. The decision to invest or disinvest in a particular contact partly depends on the relative amount of social capital represented by the relationship in comparison with other available relationships. The expected value of future support from a relation depends on the prior investments of ego in this contact. The larger the investment, the greater the ego's expectation of a valued return. The expected value of maintaining a relation is also related to the perceived attribution of guilt and trespassing of norms by network members. The continuation of a relationship with somebody who disapproves of the divorce decreases the expected return of former investments.

To test this preliminary model we recently started a longitudinal research. From a sample consisting of 150 recently separated males and females, including 35 ex-couples, we gathered data about the size, content and density of their network before and after marital separation. In addition, we interviewed two network members of each divorcee by phone and asked them about the changes in the relation following the divorce.

The presented model is yet preliminary and needs elaboration on the following aspects. Network members are to be introduced as actors who are assumed to have the same structural constraints and choice of behavioral alternatives as the divorcee. Also, it is very likely that network members base their decision to (dis)invest in the relationship on the same kind of arguments as the divorcee, viz. the expectation and the extent of future support and the costs perceived to maintain the relation with the divorcee. Subsequently, the interaction between two, three and four actors must be taken into account. A weakness that often recurs in rational choice models, including the presented model, is that arguments are lacking in the relative weight of utility arguments. Also, the explanation of the consequences of a divorce for the social network of the persons enmeshed in this network, requires not only the explanation of individual decisions but also a worked-out transformation of all individual effects into a new network structure, just as in the explanation of "real macro-phenomena". Obviously, the changes in personal social networks following a divorce are not merely the sum of all the changes in social relations. Finally, the actual elements that make up the content of the model can also be questioned, or more generally, the use of rational choice with respect to behavior in which emotions are involved.

Personenpaare und Beziehungskisten

Donald Bender (München)

Ein Plädoyer zur Benutzung von Datenbankprogrammen und ein Bericht über die Möglichkeiten der lokalen Rollenanalyse in der Netzwerkforschung.

In den Gesellschaftswissenschaften, mit Ausnahme der Wirtschaftswissenschaften, werden hauptsächlich univariate und multivariate Analysen über Individuen oder Institutionen gemacht. Daraus liesse sich schliessen, dass sich diese Wissenschaften nur mit den Individuen oder Institutionen, nicht jedoch mit dem Beziehungsgefüge zwischen diesen Individuen und Institutionen bzw. der Gesamtstruktur der Gruppe, der Gesellschaft oder dem Staat beschäftigen. Weil diesen Analysen immer zweidimensionale Datenmatrizen mit Fällen und Variablen zugrunde liegen, lässt sich - ein bisschen provokativ - daraus die Hypothese ableiten: Die Art der Datenhaltung wirkt sich auf die analysierten Datenmodelle aus und damit indirekt auf den Fortgang und die Möglichkeiten in der Forschung.

In der Familienforschung werden unter anderem soziale Gebilde wie Haushalt, Familie, Verwandtschaft und soziale Kontakte untersucht. Eine der Fragen