

# Conflict Theory

Key Players, Concepts, and Assumptions

Resources

Distribution Rule Preferences

Power and Coalitions

Negotiation and Bargaining





# Conflict Theory

## Key Players

**Jetsey Sprey:** argued that conflict was normal and family research needed to focus on how families developed consensus and harmony

**Torstein Eckhoff:** gave us five principles of equality that can be applied to resource allocation

## Key Concept

**Conflict:** a process (!) whereby 2 or more people make sense of scarce resources, incompatible goals, and different means of getting from here to there

## Key Assumptions

Conflict is the normal state of society. We have to work towards harmony in families because they're composed of, at least, two self-interested parties



# Resources

**Resources:** All the things (knowledge, skills, techniques, materials, money, love, time, freedom) that are available to either a member of a family or groups within a family.

Conflict may be over control of these things, but having them can also be used to control a situation.

Anything other than a “fair” allocation of resources is likely to lead to competition over them.

**So, what makes different allocations “fair”?**

**DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE • PROCEDURAL JUSTICE**





# Distribution Rule Preferences

## Equality

divided into equal portions and one portion will be distributed to each person

## Equal Opportunity

fair procedures would be established so that everyone has an equal *chance* to get the resource

## Equity

the contributions of each person will be assessed and resources will be allocated relative to those contributions

## Based On Need

the people with the greatest need would get the most

## Status

those with higher status would be given the greater share



Equality



Equal Opportunity



Based On Need



Equity



Status



## RESPONDENT

Determines how  
resources (\$100) are  
to be allocated



### STIMULUS PARTNER Superior Performance

**Equity** \$ ( ) for R  
\$ ( ) for S

**Equity** \$ ( ) for R  
\$ ( ) for S

### STIMULUS PARTNER Similar/Equal Performance

**Equity** \$ ( ) for R  
\$ ( ) for S

**Equity** \$ ( ) for R  
\$ ( ) for S

### STIMULUS PARTNER Inferior Performance

**Equality** \$ ( ) for R  
\$ ( ) for S

**Equity** \$ ( ) for R  
\$ ( ) for S

# Distributive Justice Experiment



This line  
shows how  
much  
housework  
the  
HUSBAND  
does

About  
Equal

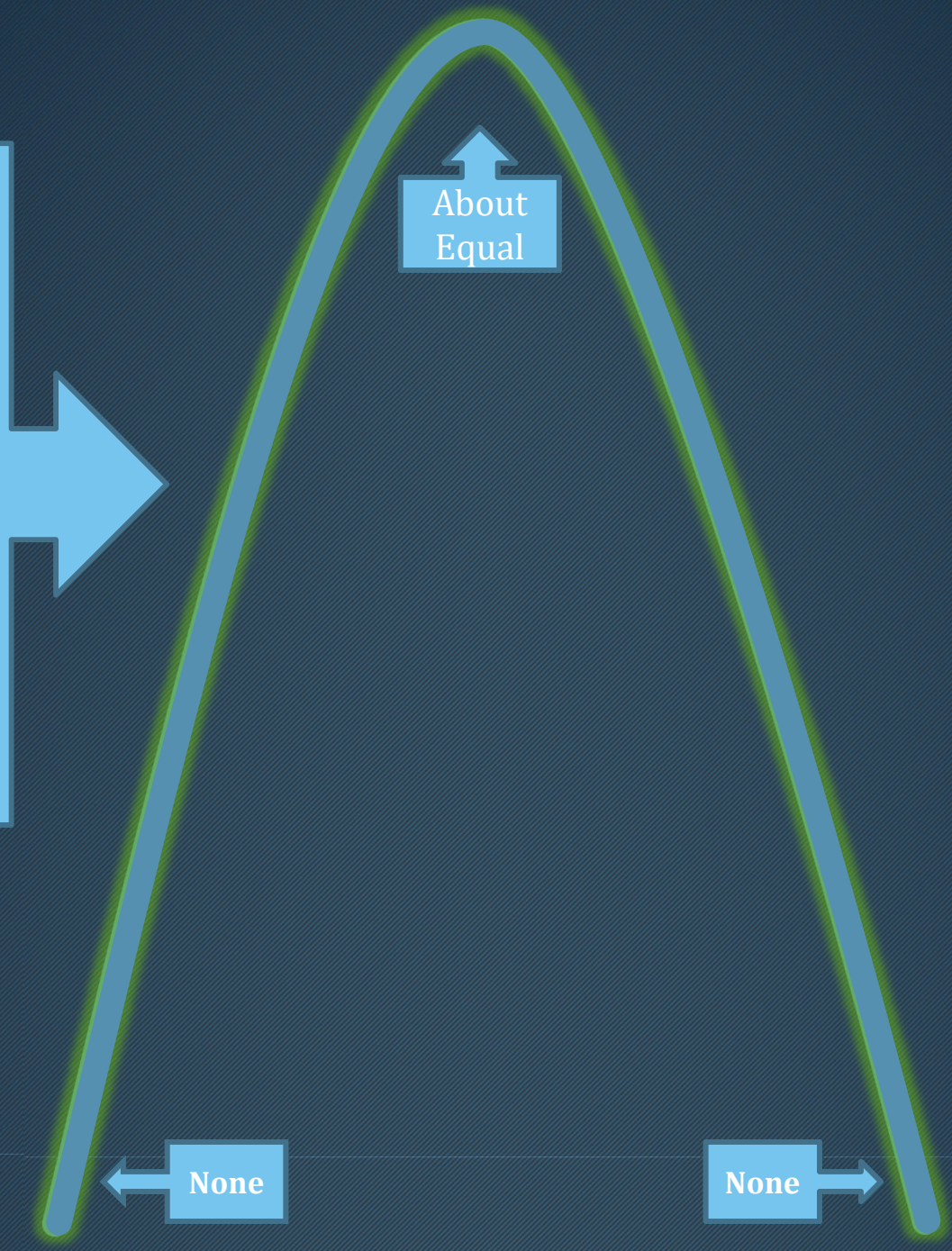
Husband Is  
Breadwinner

None

None

Wife Is  
Breadwinner

# Married Couples & Housework





# Power and Coalitions

**Scholars are resistant to focusing on power because families are supposed to be locations of intimacy and communalism. Who wants to think about “competition” and “coercion” when they think about their families?!**

**Power can be strengthened or gained through coalition formation. If you want to gain power, you have to build alliances with other powerful (or maybe lots of powerless) people and then exert that power.**

**Can the powerful inhibit or undo successful coalition formation?**





# Negotiations

**Negotiation is the mechanism whereby power is exercised. Two or more parties have to work with each other to reach a harmonious agreement.**

- 1. Both parties state their goals and they want to win!**
- 2. They use their resource holdings to induce or coerce the other person to move closer to that goal. If they don't have enough personal resources (a "power base"), building a coalition might be a way to gain some. Symmetry and interdependence matters.**
- 3. Ultimately, both parties reach consensus. We either agree to disagree, take what we can get, or give in and appease the more powerful actor.**





# JOURNAL QUESTION

Think about the five distribution rule preferences. Which strikes you as the fairest of them? Which feels like the least fair to you? Why do you feel this way?

Now put yourself in the shoes of someone who feels differently than you about those rule preferences. Speaking for them, why are your choices unfair and fair?