

1. Introduction

Equity theory states that people attempt to have the outcome of a social relationship to be to their advantage. The outcome is the difference between what one invests or gives and what one obtains or profits by. The difference of these two is called profit, when it is to one's advantage (this condition is strived for); it is called cost when one invests more than one receives (this condition is usually avoided).

In a social context the outcome of one's own investments and profits is related to the outcome of another person (or a group of other people). This comparison is the object of the so-called equity theory. A balance state is optimal but this seldom takes place. A disturbance of social balance causes the people taking part to feel uncomfortable regardless of whether they are the victim or the beneficiary. If a persons receives less than he feels he deserves, he feels angry; if he receives more than he expects a feeling of obligation (indebtedness) is experienced.

People who find themselves in a situation of social imbalance are inclined to balance it. ~~The subject of~~ This attempt at balancing is a special aspect of the theory.

Equity theory states that the individual is not an acting person but an observer. It is not concerned with a directly experienced input-output relationship that is disrupted but with the valuation of an imbalanced input/output situation. The forefathers of the equity theory, namely Thibaut & Kelley

(1959), Homans (1961), as well as Adams (1963) have not taken our knowledge of this special aspect into consideration.

How do people react in different social contexts to a disturbance of the principle of justice? A harmdoer who commits an "everyday wrongdoing" directed against other people will be judged in varying ways (degree of punishment or else liking) depending on:

- 1.1. how much harm he has suffered (none at all, ^{moderate} ~~average~~ amount, extreme)
- 1.2. how closely the harm-situation is connected to the original wrongdoing. (directly contingent, indirectly contingent, not at all contingent)

The theory of social equity states that the principle of justice is disturbed by ~~an~~ extreme as well as by no harm of the harmdoer and therefore in both cases, slight liking is expected.

Liking
Sympathy
Rejection



Figure 1: Prediction as to the liking-judgment

According to equity theory, when the harmdoer himself suffers harm that far exceeds the punishable offense, some liking should be expected. Since the observer wished punishment to the harmdoer but now this punishment has occurred in reality to a great ^{and} extent, the observer feels somewhat as an accomplice because of the "much-to-high felt" punishment! The harmdoer should not

have to suffer so much. The observer will therefore try to remove himself from the incident of the "punishment." According to Homans (1961) contact and liking are connected, so liking will be removed automatically through "distancing".

The allotted punishment in the case of extreme harm will be lower than in the ~~case of the~~ other two cases in spite of an imbalance. Equity ~~has~~ already exists because of the outside punishment that the harmdoer has suffered.



Figure 2: Prediction relative to allotted punishment.

The closer the situation (in which the harmdoer is harmed) is connected with the original offense, the stronger the effects anticipated. (that is, the greater will be the punishment.)

Liking and punishment are not justified because low liking of the harmdoer should not imply a wish for high punishment.

2. Pilot study for equity theory

In the summer of 1972 an attempt was made to carry out the above described questioning with three populations: grade school children, college students, and people ~~who~~ who were spoken to on the street~~s~~. The experimenter presented a short description of an unfair situation at a soccer^e game at the school playground^d, to which either a liking-judgment or a punishment allotment was set down (in hours to remain after school, mea-

sured in hours). Each cell was composed of 20 people from each population.

Two experimental designs were tested:

2.1. Balance experiment A

2.1.1. Hypotheses:

One: The more the harmdoer himself suffers, the less he is considered for punishment.

Two: If the event by which the harmdoer suffers is removed spatially and temporally from the original wrongdoing, the effects mentioned under One above will be weaker.

2.1.2. Design: 2 Factors

Measure of own harm (three degrees: no harm, average, severe)

2 "Nearness" to original event (direct, far)

2.1.3. Dependent variable:

Number of hours after school (0-7) that were assigned as punishment.

Note:

~~the~~ the names of the harmdoer and victim have been changed.

2.2 Balance Experiment B

2.2.1. Hypotheses:

One: The harmdoer will be liked less when no harm or extreme harm is done to him. If he suffers "average" harm, he will be somewhat liked.

Two: If the event by which the harmdoer himself suffers is removed temporally and spacially from the original wrongdoing, its relationship to One above will linear in the following way: The less excessive the harm is, the less liked will be the harmdoer.

According to Hypothesis One above, liking is expected when the harm is high, because the observer postulates a guilty conscience. When the harmdoer suffers greatly, he hasn't deserved to (to such an extent). An observer feels sympathetic in this situation because he wishes a punishment--now punishment has taken place and the observer wants to distance himself from it. He doesn't want to have anything to do with it and also does not want to show any liking for the harmdoer.

The judgment of the situation mentioned in Hypothesis 2 can be substantiated by the spatial and temporal distancing of the 2 harm-events. No causal relationship between the harmful act of the harmdoer and the harm which falls upon him can be established. Therefore, in this case of extreme harm, the observer will experience liking towards the harmdoer. The harmdoer has himself become, so to say, a victim of a balance relationship which can be equalized or balanced through increased liking.

2.2.2. Design: 2 Factors

Measure of own harm (three degrees: none, comparable, severe)

"Nearness" to the original incident (two degrees: direct, far)

2.2.3. Dependent variable: Worth on a 15 cm scale with 4 points:

I like him very much.

I like him a little.

I do not like him much.

I do not like him at all.

Note
~~However~~ the names of the harmdoer and victim have been changed.

For all designs different people were questioned.

The data gathered in Germany show hardly any difference between the single experimental conditions. (see table in appendix 2).

The same questions were tested in an experiment by Bill Austin at the University of Wisconsin. A detailed report on both sides is being written at this time in Wisconsin.

3. Plan of an experiment about ecclesiastical assignment of ^{penance} ~~penitence~~
 Since the independent variable showed no effect in this part of the pilot test (probably because of the artificiality of the situation), it was decided to carry out an experiment in an everyday situation. The so-called "Confession study" would be planned, which would be organized in Germany by Gisla Grabitz-Gneich and Wolfgang Gibowski as a parallel to an experiment in Wisconsin by Elaine Walster and Phil Lambert.

It was planned that a person (experimenter) would go to a church and confess a story (the basic story line being held constant) which would be varied as far as the amount and type of own suffering.

3.1. Hypotheses:

One: More penitence will be experienced by the confessor, who did not suffer during the committed sin, than by he who suffered much during it.

Two: Whenever the sinner suffered only through an external influence in the situation, he will feel more penitence than when he himself suffers indirectly through remorse (guilt).

3.2. Design: 2 Factors

Measure of suffering (three degrees: none, ^{moderate} average, extreme)

Type of suffering (two degrees: external, self)

3.3 Sample: 60 priests (father confessors)

3.4 Dependent variables:

- a) amount of penitence
- b) length of the priestly admonition.
- c) tape-recorded consternation of the priest

3.5 Problems and solution considerations with the planning.

During the preparation of the study it proved that the importance of the measurement must be calculated with considerable difficulty as to the construction of the confessed sin.²

It would be necessary in the discourse with the subjects to disclose the relationship between confessed sin and assigned penitence.

Next the advice was sought of the Jesuit father Karl Weich at the Mannheim Institute for Christian social teaching about the association between sin and penitence. He showed that in earlier years (especially before the 10th century) there existed certain books that contained lists of sins with statements of an appropriate ^{penitence} ~~sin~~ for each ^{sin} ~~penitence~~ (fasting, penalty, physical punishment, prayers). In the course of time the treatment of sin became more publicized. Regret attained a meaning, therefore there was also no fixed association of penitences to certain sins (therefore Hypothesis Two expressed in certain ways a regulation of conduct to the confession father).

² The confession story used in Wisconsin cannot be tested in Germany because here another meaning could be assigned to it.

The question of the principles of instruction of young priests relative to the occupation of a confession father led to a discussion about the social-educational aspects of the ministerial duties in general. This discussion showed that there is no unified direction for the imposition of penitences in connection with confession

but that it varies greatly from district to district and from country to country and ^{depending on the social environment} ~~with~~ the individuality of the priest.

For the construction of the confession case a ranking of frequency of the specific sins confessed was necessary;

A meeting was agreed upon in Mannheim's Franciscan cloister "St. Bonifatius" with father Pankratius. There were two other fathers present on the discussion evening who helped clarify some questions. It was shown that the frequency of confessed sins is dependent on context; in the Renaissance, for instance, the frequent sin was gambling, in certain communities drunkenness is a frequent vice, in border communities it is smuggling, etc. Today and in this church circle there are three dominant confessions (1) the problem of prayers, the lost contact with God, (2) sexuality and especially the discrepancies between the church's ~~regulations~~ and society's regulations about where one can live, (3) getting along with other people, that is, the problems of love for fellow man.

The case for the American section (see appendix 3) falls into 3 categories of confession problems. In spite of the fact that the data of W-Germany of the earlier section 175 of the penal code is no longer valid in West Germany, the confession story is employed not without exception for the German part of the experiment. Moreover, there appears a social context that is too specialized, namely the university with all hierarchial and career problems for the confession practice of a priest,

~~In the least~~ A new confession story for Germany must be developed which takes into consideration the special aspects addressed by the experts.

But out of the material so far collected the general question is asked if the execution of the planned confession study in Germany is significant overall. Resulting critical points have exposed many problems which could stand in the way of an adequate check of the theoretical considerations through a fictitious confession.

1. Representatives of the catholic church asked, after reading press reports, the necessity of the solitary confession. They pleaded for collective confession with general absolution. The Vatican decided that the solitary confession would not be abolished (Spiegel, 1972, 32, p. 50). The confession itself was also controversial.

2. Two Italian journalists have led 632 fictitious confession talks in 4 years and tape recorded them, 112 of which they publicized in their book Sexuality in the confessional (Valentine & Di Meglio, 1973). The report evoked anger in the

church--the authors and publishers were excommunicated. The public reacted differently; it was surprised over the inconsistencies and extremity of priest reactions and it was shocked over the intrusion of the journalists in one of the "last holy places." (from a report out of Time, 1973, 16, p. 11-12 and Spiegel, 1973, 14, p. 131)

There are a few further investigations that make use of similar methods, namely the assumed role of the exploration of an otherwise not directly comprehensible system. Rosenhan (1973) for example, reported of the experience of 8 pseudo-patients in 12 different psychiatric clinics of the USA. Walraff (Engelmann & Wallraff, 1973) publicized his experiences as a fictitious worker at a whole sale business in W. Germany. In the cited report the procedure does not serve to test a theoretical question as does this planned attempt, but rather to test the controls of powerful institutions. In spite of this, the prevention of the named procedure must be judged with criticism and rejection. The church will object on moral grounds even though the privacy of confession is not broken (as was argued in the case of the Italian experiment), because the confessor places no claim to the priestly professional discretion which is not violated by the confession father.

3. The collection of data by means of a tape recorder is problematic because of the objections cited under Two above. On the other hand, it appears difficult to remember all reactions in a "natural" setting, namely ^{during} a confession. Such a

complex situation in which the recorder must play an active role demands too much of an experimenter.

4. Whenever the atonement is contextually strongly dependent contextually on the single sin, it is conceivable that from town to town, perhaps from church to church, different customs and norms exist relative to the "churchly" penitential regulations. It is feared that the relationship of confessed sins and punishment is so loosely unrelated that a theoretical prediction in this field cannot be proven; the variance within the experimental group is, under circumstances, larger than that between the experimentally controlled conditions. The difficulties then lie in proving experimentally produced effects statistically (as long as it succeeds overall).

5. It was shown in the preliminary investigation that an understanding of the confession practice was expressed which allowed no check.

there should be no discussion of physical burdens (the objective sins also play a subordinate role). The act of voluntary accusation contains an aspect of repentance at the same time.

4. Alternative presentation for proof of the theory.

The preliminary study showed that the plan of a confession study must be modified in order to prove the theoretical predictions. The type of modification is dependent on which difficult point of interest one chooses. One can test either a real situation or make the churchly confession practice a paradigm of the experiment. If special weight is placed on the proving of a theory in a real situation, another context must be sought. One could take police penalty decisions as a measure of traffic crimes. One could choose parental education as a measure of disorderly children. In all cases the question of the consequences for the experimenter is a problem. When one lays special value on the experimental paradigm of confession then the possibility of questioning of the confounders enters. It is conceivable that a confession text will be laid before priests as well as practising catholics. Both populations should state the adequate measure of penitence from their experience. The experimental variations would be taken corresponding to the established hypotheses. Because of the "vicarious situation" an impressive but everyday confession story must be chosen possibly connected with the second problem area (the discrepancy of church norms and sexuality.).

An alternate possibility could be seen as in a written form of confession. In the experimental condition 10-20 priests could be written letters. The written confessions would be based on sickness (visit and telephone contact is not possible!). It would concern assignment of penitence.

The considerations for the operating of an experiment to prove the hypotheses discussed here are not yet conclusive.

Appendix 1

Samples:

- I. Students (N=240)
 - a. all school types
 - b. 12-15 year olds
- II. Students at University of Mannheim (N=240)
 - a. all faculty
 - b. 18-22 years old
- III. Adults on the street (N=240)
 - a. possible range (hair dressers, train, department store, soccer field, waiting room, bus stop, train station, etc.)
 - b. around 30-50 years old.

All 3 samples should consist of half males and half females.

Each of the 2 dependent variables (A, B) should be gathered collectively on 120 subjects per sample (that is to say, each cell of the 2 x 3 design contains 10 males and 10 female subjects, each experiment is run once with "liking" and once with "penalty"

The experimenters for samples I and II were Volker Herrling and Joachim Koch, for sample III, Manuela Ziskoven.

General Instructions

The University of Mannheim (especially the research area of social psychology) is conducting an experiment about equality and justice. We are interested in "What is fair?"

We would like for you to tell us what you would do in certain situations. You will receive an account of an actual occurrence. Please give your opinion of it.

If you desire, you may write further comments at the bottom of the page. When you have completed this, mark on the reverse of the paper:

- your age
- your sex
- for students: school and class
- for University students: area of study and semester
- for adults: occupation

You have received various stories; we have changed the names in them.

Special Instructions

The letters represent the conditions and the measure:

nearness: close, C
 another, A

harm: none, N
 just right, R
 extreme, E

penalty, P

liking, L

EW + GG (CN, P)

Instructions: Read the following story. Afterwards give your opinion.

Stephen and Thomas play soccer on Monday during their recess. They are on opposing teams. As Thomas rushes the goal with the ball, Stephen trips him. Thomas falls against Stephen and they both fall to the ground. Stephen only gets his clothes dirty, but Thomas sprains his knee badly and received^s a wound to his upper lip. The doctor orders that Thomas lie in bed 3 days and not go to school.

The director of the school names a student-committee that will decide on Sat. how much punishment Stephan should get. The director informs the committee that it should decide how many hours Stephan must remain after school.

You are on the committee. How many hours should Stephan stay after school? Circle the answer.

0 hrs. 1 hr.-----7 hrs.

EW + GG (CR, P)

.....Stephan receives a few painful abrasions on his hands and knees, and Thomas sprains his knee badly and gets a wound on his upper lip.....

EW + GG (CE, P)

...Stephan hits his mouth on a rock and breaks a tooth and Thomas sprains his knee badly and gets a wound on his lip.

EW + GG (AN, P)

.....nothing happens to Stephan but Thomas sprains his knee badly and wounds his lip.

As Stephan goes walking on Wed. he slips on a wet leaf and fall down; but only his clothes get dirty.

EW + GG (AR, P)

.....nothing happens to Stephan but Thomas sprains his knee badly and wounds his lip.

As Stephan goes walking on Wed. he slips and receives painful abrasions on his hands and knees.

EW + GG (AE, P)

.....nothing happens to Stephan but Thomas sprains his knee badly and wounds his lip.

As Stephan goes walking on Wed. he slips and breaks his tooth on a stone.

EW + GG (AN, L)

....nothing happens to Stephan but Thomas sprains his knee badly and wounds his lip.

As Stephan goes walking on Wed. he slips but only his clothes get dirty.

Indicate your liking for Stephan.

I like him
very much

I like him
a little

I don't like
him very much

I don't like
him at all.

EW + GG (AR, L)

.....nothing happens to Stephan but Thomas sprains his knee badly and wounds his lip.

As S. goes walking he slips and receives painful abrasions to hands and knees.

Indicate your liking for Stephan.

EW + GG (CN, L)

....nothing happens to S. but T. sprains his knee badly and wounds his lip.

As S. goes walking he slips and breaks a tooth on a rock.

Indicate liking for Stephan.

EW + GG (CN, L)

.....Stephan gets his clothes dirty and Thomas sprains knee and wounds his lip.

Indicate liking for S.

EW + GG (CR, L)

.....Stephan receives abrasions to hands and knees and T. sprains knee badly and wounds lip.

Indicate liking for S.

EW + GG (CE, L)

.....Stephan breaks tooth on rock and T. sprains knee badly and wounds his lip.

Indicate liking for S.

Appendix 2

Table 1: Average liking-judgment of the 3 random samples (scale range: 0-15)

Note: From the commentaries it was found that a liking-judgment was given unwillingly after reading only a short story.

Table 2: Average penalty allotment of the 3 random samples (scale range: 0-7)

Note: From the commentaries it was found that staying after school was ~~not an adequate~~ not viewed as an adequate punishment.