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Social Justice in Love Relationships: Recent Developments

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RUNNING HEAD: Equity in Love Relationships

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Abstract

In all societies, people are concerned with justice. "What's fair is fair!" "She deserves better." "It's just not right." "He can't get away with *that!"* "It's illegal." "It's unethical!" "It's immoral" are fairly common laments. In the 11th century, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1998) argued that the will possesses two competing inclinations: an affection for what is to a person's own advantage *and* an affection for justice; the first inclination is stronger, but the second matters, too. Equity theory, too, posits that in personal relationships, two concerns stand out: firstly, how rewarding are people's societal, family, and work relationships? Secondly, how fair and equitable are those relationships? According to equity theory, people feel most comfortable when they are getting exactly what they deserve from their relationships—no more and certainly no less.

In this paper, we will begin by describing the classic equity paradigm and the supporting research. We will then recount the great debate that arose in the wake of the assertion that even in close, loving, intimate relationships, fairness matters. We will end by describing what scientists have learned in the past 35 years about the competing claims of altruism, reward, and fairness in love relationships.

Key Words: Equity. Social Justice. Romantic affairs. Passionate love and sexual desire.

I. Classic Equity Theory and Research

A. Equity Theory[4]

Equity theory is a straightforward theory. It consists of four propositions:

PROPOSITION I. Men and women are "hardwired" to try to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

PROPOSITION II. Society, however, has a vested interest in persuading people to behave fairly and equitably. Groups will generally reward members who treat others equitably and punish those who treat others inequitably.

PROPOSITION III. Given societal pressures, people are most comfortable when they perceive that they are getting roughly what they deserve from life and love. If people feel over-benefited, they may experience pity, guilt, and shame; if under-benefited, they may experience anger, sadness, and resentment.

Insert Figure 1 about here

PROPOSITION IV. People in inequitable relationships will attempt to reduce their distress through a variety of techniques—by restoring psychological equity, actual equity, or leaving the relationship.

We would argue that notions of social justice came to be writ in the mind's "architecture" because a concern with social justice possessed survival value (see Tooby & Cosmides, 1996). A concern with social justice, in all its forms, is alive and well today (in all cultures and all social structures) because fairness in love and work remains a wise and profitable strategy. (For a further discussion of these points, see Hatfield, et al., 1978; Jost & Major, 2001.)

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[4] Equity theory was an attempt to integrate the insights of evolutionary, economic, and reinforcement theory in predicting men and women's social behavior.

B. The Nature of Justice

All people are concerned with social justice. Historically, however, societies have had very different visions as to what constitutes "social justice," "fairness," and "equity." Some dominant views:

- "All men are created equal."
- "The more you invest in a project, the more profit you deserve to reap. (American capitalism)
- "To each according to his need." (Communism)
- "Winner take all." (Dog-eat-dog capitalism.)
- It's a man's world.

Nonetheless, in all cultures, fairness and justice are deemed important.

Although equity has been found to be important in a wide variety of relationships—social relationships, romantic and family relationships, helping relationships, exploitative relationships, and work relationships—in this essay we will focus on romantic and marital relationships, the topics with which the first author has been most intimately involved throughout her career.

C. Assessing Equity

Technically, Equity is defined by a complex formula (Traupmann, Peterson, Utne, & Hatfield, 1981; Walster, 1975). In practice, however, a relationship's fairness and equity can be reliably and validly assessed with the use of a simple measure. Specifically, research participants are asked: "Considering what you put into your dating relationship or marriage, compared to what you get out of it . . . and what your partner puts in compared to what (s)he gets out of it, how does your dating relationship or marriage 'stack up'?" Respondents are given the following response options:

+3: I am getting a much better deal than my partner.
+2: I am getting a somewhat better deal.
+1: I am getting a slightly better deal.
0: We are both getting an equally good, or bad, deal.
-1: My partner is getting a slightly better deal.
-2: My partner is getting a somewhat better deal.

-3: My partner is getting a much better deal than I am.

On the basis of their answers, persons can be classified as over-benefited (receiving more than they deserve), equitably treated, or under-benefited (receiving less than they deserve). (For a comprehensive list of the rewards and costs found to be important in dating relationships or marriages, see Appendix I).

D. Equity in Love Relationships: Classic Research

There is considerable evidence that in love relationships, equity matters. Specifically, researchers find:[5]

1: The more socially desirable people are (the more attractive, personable, famous, rich, or considerate they are), the more socially desirable they will expect a mate to be.

2. Dating couples are more likely to fall in love if they perceive their relationships to be equitable.

3. Couples are likely to end up with someone fairly close to themselves in social desirability. They are also likely to be matched on the basis of self-esteem, looks, intelligence, education, mental and physical health (or disability).

4. Couples who perceive their relationships to be equitable are more likely to get sexually involved.

5. Equitable relationships are satisfying and comfortable relationships; inequity is associated with distress, guilt, anger, and anxiety.

6. Those in equitable relationships are less likely to risk extramarital affairs than are their peers.

7. Equitable relationships are more stable than are inequitable relationships.

E. The Great Debate

Equity theory appeared in an era in which traditional views of gender roles, women's liberation, and the rules of love and sex (including innovations such as marriage contracts) were being hotly debated. Thus, it is not surprising that the contention that couples care about "What's in

[5] Documentation for these contentions can be found in (Hatfield, et al., 1978).

it for me?" and "Am I being treated fairly" sparked criticism. In *The Art of Loving*, for example, Erich Fromm (1956) declared that while flawed "human love relationships [may] follow the same pattern of exchange which governs the commodity and labor market, the truest form of love is unconditional love (love given without any thought of return" (p. 3). A variety of social commentators agreed with the contention that people are generally *not* concerned with reward or fairness in their love relationships (see Clark & Mills, 1979; Douvan, 1974; Murstein, et al., 1977).

However, an equally prominent group of theorists insisted that in most intimate relationships, people do indeed care about pleasure and pain, fairness, and equity (Bernard, 1964; Blau, 1964; McCall, 1966; Patterson, 1971; Scanzoni, 1972; Storer, 1966.) Not surprisingly, this "great debate" sparked a flurry of research.

III. Current Research: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

At the current time, some of the most interesting research into the nature of social justice emanates from scholars of three different intellectual traditions: (1) primatologists and evolutionary psychologists, who argue that a concern for justice arose early in humankind's evolutionary history, and who speculate about how this ancient "wiring" affects visions of social justice of contemporary men and women; (2) cultural researchers interested in societal definitions as to what is fair and equitable; and (3) social psychologists, who have explored people's definitions of fairness and justice and have studied the impact of perceived fairness and equity on couple's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

A. Equity: The Evolution of a Cultural Universal

> *Is it not reasonable to anticipate that our understanding of the human mind would be aided greatly by knowing the purpose for which it was designed?*
> —George C. Williams—

In the past 25 years or so, social psychologists have become interested in the evolutionary underpinnings of social justice. As Cosmides and Tooby (1992), for example, observe:

> It is likely that our ancestors have engaged in social exchange for at least several million years. . . Social exchange behavior is both universal and highly elaborated across all human cultures—including hunter-gatherer cultures . . . as would be expected if it were an ancient and central part of human life. (p. 164)

Today, paleoanthropological evidence supports the view that notions of social justice and equity are extremely ancient. Ravens, for example, have been observed to attack those who violate social norms. Dogs get jealous if their playmates get treats and they do not. Wolves who don't "play fair" are often ostracized—a penalty that may well to lead to the wolf's death (Bekoff, 2004; Brosnan, 2006).

Primatologists have amassed considerable evidence that primates and other animals do care about fairness. In a study with brown capuchin (*Cebus apella*) monkeys, Brosnan and de Waal (2003) found that female monkeys who were denied the rewards they deserved became furious. They refused to "play the game" (refused to exchange tokens for a cucumber) and disdained to eat their "prize"—holding out for the grapes they thought they deserved. If severely provoked (the other monkey did nothing and still got the highly prized grapes instead of the cucumber) capuchins grew so angry that they began to scream, beat their breasts, and hurl food at the experimenter. Interestingly, in a later study, the authors found that chimpanzees *(Pan troglodytes)* were most upset by injustice in casual relationships. In *chimps'* close, intimate relationships, injustice caused barely a ripple. (Brosnan, Schiff, & de Waal, 2005). We see, then, that different species, in different settings, may respond differently to injustice.

Potentially, this fascinating animal research may provide some insights into three questions that have intrigued equity researchers: (1) when, in primates' long pre-history, did animals begin to feel "guilty" about receiving "too much," as well as feeling outraged when they are "ripped off?" (Brosnan, et al., 2005; Brosnan, 2006); (2) are animals more (or less) concerned about fairness in despotic, hierarchical societies than in those that are relatively equalitarian? (Brosnan, 2006); (3) are primates and other animals more (or less) concerned about inequities in

close kin relationships than in more distant encounters? (Brosnan, et al, 2005.)

B. Equity: Cultural Considerations

Imagination . . . creates beauty, justice, and happiness, which are everything in this world.
—Blaise Pascal—

Cross-cultural theorists have long been interested in the impact of culture on perceptions of social justice. They contend that culture exerts a profound impact on how fairness is defined, how concerned men and women are with fairness and equity in their intimate affairs, and how equitable love relationships are likely to be.

Cultural critics point out that until very recently, social psychology was primarily "Made in America" (Markus, 2004). Theories conceived by Western psychologists were tested in the West with Western participants and disseminated in Western scientific publications. (The Western bias was so pervasive that, as the old joke goes, "even the rats were white.") Such ethnocentrism is a mistake, culture theorists argue, as culture exerts a profound impact on the ways in which people conceptualize the world around them, the meaning they ascribe to common life events, and the manner in which they react to those events (see Adams, et al., 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Marsella, 1998; Nisbett, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2003; Triandis & Suh, 2002).

Not surprisingly then, cross-cultural researchers have asked: "Is equity theory applicable to all people in all cultures and in all historical eras?" (Amir & Sharon, 1987; Aumer-Ryan, et al, 2006; Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2002). Many would say "No." Triandis and his colleagues (1990), for example, argued that in individualistic cultures (such as the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, and the countries of northern and western Europe) people tend to focus on personal goals. No surprise, then, that in such societies, people are concerned with how rewarding (or punishing) their relationships are and how fairly (unfairly) they are treated. Collectivist cultures (such as China, many African and Latin American nations, Greece, southern Italy, and the Pacific Islands), on the other hand, insist that their members subordinate personal goals to those of the group: the family, the clan, or the tribe. It is tradition, duty, and deference to elders that matters. Rosenblatt and Cunningham (1976)

claimed that equity is of less importance in collectivist societies: "[regardless of] who has the better life, a man or a woman, they [people of non-U.S. cultures] might argue . . . that the lives of men and women are different and not comparable" (cited in Buunk & VanYperen, 1989, p. 82).

Do cultures differ in how much importance they attach to dating and marital fairness and equity? In a series of studies, Aumer-Ryan and her colleagues (2006) attempted to find out. They interviewed a large sample of Japanese-American, West Indian, and multi-cultural internet users. They sought to answer three questions: (1) do people in different cultures differ in how much they value equity in dating and marital relationships? (2) do they differ in how equitable they perceive their own relationships to be? and (3) are they more satisfied in equitable relationships? Most distressed in under-benefited ones? (Again: see Figure 1 for the Western model.)

Aumer-Ryan and her colleagues (2006) found that, in all cultures, people insisted that equity was the gold standard. Both Westerners and their non-Western counterparts insisted it was "important" to "very important" that a courtship relationship or marriage be equitable.

The authors did observe some fascinating cultural differences, however. People around the world may aspire to social justice, but few are lucky enough to achieve that goal. People in the various cultures differed markedly in how fair and equitable they considered their relationships to be. Men and women from the United States claimed to be the most equitably treated. Men and women (especially women) from Jamaica, in the West Indies, felt the least equitably treated (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Jamaican women often complained about men treating women as "second class citizens" and about men's lack of commitment to relationships. In describing men's attitudes, one woman quoted a classic Calypso song by Lord Kitchener, and the repeated lyric: "You can always find another wife/but you can never get another mother in your life" (Kitchener, 1963, track 12.) Such attitudes, the women claimed, make it very difficult for them to find a relationship that is rewarding, fair, and fulfilling.

In all cultures, men and women reacted much the same way when they felt equitably versus inequitably treated. All felt most satisfied when receiving exactly what they felt they deserved from their relationships—no more (perhaps) but certainly no less (See Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Cultural research allows us to see if there are societal differences in the meaning of fairness and equity, in men and women's traditional gender roles (and how that impacts perceptions of fairness), in how fair life seems to men and women, and how people deal with inequities in male dominated versus egalitarian societies. Such research may indeed yield new and exciting theoretical and empirical perspectives.

C. Social Psychological Perspectives

In the 30 years since *Equity Theory* was published, scholars have conducted a great deal of research designed to give us a greater understanding of the role of altruism, reward, and social justice in love relationships. This research makes it clear that: (1) although people are capable of altruism—willingly sacrificing themselves for others—they generally do care about how rewarding (or punishing) and how fair and equitable their intimate relationships are; and (2) the extent to which couples are concerned with fairness and equity depends on the *stage* of an intimate relationship. Let us briefly review a scattering of this research:[6]

1. Distribution Rules

In our introduction, we observed that societies have very different visions as to what constitutes social justice, fairness, and equity. They may focus on gender, need, investments and profits, and so forth. One

[6] Given space constraints, we will not review all the theoretical perspectives utilized by all the many social psychologists who have contributed to this dialogue. Here, we will simply discuss the implications of their findings for the issues we have raised. Also, for the exact procedures utilized in this research, readers should see the original papers, as we have necessarily had to simplify.

cause for confusion in love relationships is the fact that men and women may differ as to their perception of "the rules of the game."

One theorist who has studied dating and marital norms is Margaret Clark. Clark (1986) argued that people participate in two kinds of relationships—communal relationships and exchange relationships. She observes:

> In communal relationships, often exemplified by friendships and romantic relationships, people feel a special responsibility for one another's welfare. They give benefits in response to the other's needs or to please the other. In exchange relationships, often exemplified by acquaintances and business relationships, people feel no special responsibility for other's welfare. They give benefits with the expectation of receiving comparable benefits in return or in response to benefits previously received (p. 414).

In a series of studies, Clark (1986) studied behavior in communal versus exchange settings. In these prototypic studies, a *communal orientation* was manipulated by introducing college men to an attractive *single* woman who acted as if she were interested in friendship. An *exchange orientation* was manipulated by introducing college men to an attractive *married* woman, who claimed to possess all the friends she desired. Men and women were assigned to work on some puzzles. During the encounter, the young woman asked the young man to assist her with her puzzles, and he complied. She then offered (or did not offer) to reciprocate. Men's feelings for the woman when she immediately offered (did not offer) to assist *him* depended on his orientation. In the communal condition, men preferred women who accepted help without immediately offering to pay them back. In the exchange setting, men preferred the (married) woman who accepted his aid, then offered to reciprocate in kind.

Clark (1986) and Williamson and Clark (1989) concluded that in dating, marital, and family relationships, communal norms prevail: men and women wish to please their partners, to care for and nurture them, and reject such crass considerations as "score-keeping" or a concern with *quid pro quo.* Relationships are complex, however, and a more cynical interpretation of Clark's results is possible. Normally it takes

time for people to fall in love and commit themselves to an intimate relationship. In Clark's studies, men and women had just met. When "Prince Charming" assisted the "damsel in distress," there might have been two reasons why he preferred the attractive single women who did not insist on reciprocating in kind: (1) men might have possessed a communal orientation, as Clark believes; or (2) men may offer dinners, theatre tickets, and assistance to a beautiful woman, in hopes that she will willingly repay them with affection, gratitude, a date, or sex. The breathless "How can I ever repay you?" is a TV cliché. In their heart of hearts, men in Clark's (1986) study may have may have been hoping to participate in an exchange—albeit a complex one.

On the face of it, the Clark perspective seems diametrically opposed to our own. When one looks closer, however, the two often seem to merge. As they say, "the devil is in the details." Consider the following observations by Clark and her colleagues:

- Men and women prefer physically attractive mates, in part because the attractive are perceived to be more sensitive, kind, and capable of communal relationships than their peers (Clark, 1986)
- People who sacrifice on their partner's behalf, assume that their partners will be grateful, and become more loving and trusting than before, and thus more likely to "be there for *them* when the need arises" (Clark & Grote, 1998; Grote & Clark, 2004).
- Couples may prefer communal relationships, yet when desires and needs conflict, as they inevitably do, in the interests of fairness, men and women often decide to take turns in reaping benefits or suffering costs (Grote & Clark, 1998).
- People may differ in how communally oriented they are. A wife may assume her chivalrous husband is delighted to cater to her needs; her less communally oriented husband may resent what he considers to be her "exploitative" behavior (Mills, et al., 2004).
- Some people are cunning and devious. A young medical student may ask his wife to put him through graduate school, only to divorce her upon graduation. In such cases, his communally oriented wife would naturally feel resentful at the betrayal (Williamson & Clark, 1989).
- When people suspect their mate is not communally oriented—does not care about their desires and needs—they will begin to mistrust the other, to "keep records," and worry about whether or not they are being fairly treated (Grote & Clark, 1998).

No matter how good a relationship, then, even in Clark's paradigm, it appears that now and then people ask themselves "Am I loved?"; "Is my dating relationship or marriage rewarding?"; "Is it fair and equitable?" The answers people come up with have a profound impact on their feelings about their relationships. In the next section, we will discuss this research. (To avoid mind-numbing comparisons and confusions, we will discuss Clark's research in *our* terms rather than her own.)

2. The Stage of the Relationship

Psychologists have long been aware that relationships develop over time. In his ABCDE model of relationship development, George Levinger (1983) traced five phases in personal relationships. 1. **A**cquaintance. 2. **B**uild-up of an ongoing relationship. (Couples assess the pleasures and problems of connecting with each other.) 3. **C**ontinuation. (Couples commit themselves to a long-term relationship and continue to consolidate their lives.) 4. **D**eterioration or decline of the interconnections. 5. **E**nding of the relationship, through death or separation. In *Intimate Relationships,* Daniel Perlman and Steve Duck (1986) argued that relationships go through five stages. They charted the initiation, maintenance, problems, repair and termination of relationships.

In the following section, we will argue that: (1) dating is a "marriage marketplace," in which considerations of reward, fairness, and equity loom large; (2) once couples have committed themselves to a close, intimate relationship, they will become less concerned about immediate rewards and short-term equity than before; they may also find it more difficult to calculate fairness and equity than before; (3) once a relationship begins to deteriorate, people may once again begin to worry about "What's in in for me?" and ask: "Do I deserve better?" We are proposing, then, that the degree to which couples worry about reward and fairness and equity will vary during the course of a love relationship. Let us review the research leading to these conclusions.

(a) The Beginnings.

True, most people yearn for an ideal mate. In fairy tales, Prince Charming often falls in love with the scullery maid. In real life, dating couples generally search for a "suitable" partner. As Goffman (1952) observed:

> A proposal of marriage in our society tends to be a way in which a man sums up his social attributes and suggests that hers are not so much better as to preclude a merger (p. 456).

In dating, one critically important social attribute is physical attractiveness. There is considerable evidence that couples do indeed tend to pair up with those similar to themselves in attractiveness. In an early study, Hatfield and her colleagues (1966) invited college men and women to participate in a computer-matching project. Couples (who were actually randomly matched) met their partners at an Orientation Week dance, where they were given a chance to get acquainted. As predicted, attractive men and women assumed a suitable match would be more socially desirable than did their less attractive peers. Whether or not couples continued dating was assessed in a four- to six-month follow up. As predicted, couples who were suitably matched in attractiveness were the most likely to still be dating after several months.

In a series of follow-up studies, Silverman (1971) observed couples in a variety of natural settings—in movie theater lines, in singles bars, and at assorted social events. Most couples were found to be remarkably similar on the attractiveness dimension. A beautiful woman was most likely to be standing with a handsome man. A homely man was most likely to be spotted buying a drink for a homely woman. Furthermore, similarity did seem to "breed content." The more alike the couple was in physical appeal, the more delighted they seemed to be with each other, if intimate touching was any indication of their feelings. Sixty percent of the couples comparable in attractiveness were engaged in some type of fondling, while only 22 percent of mismatched couples were touching.

Since the 1970s, scientists have conducted a flood of research documenting that people tend to pair up with people similar to themselves in attractiveness (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, for a review of this research.) Of course, in the dating and mating "marketplace,"

physical appearance is not the only thing people have to offer. Couples can be well- or ill-matched in a variety of ways. For example, Olympic skier Ivana Trump (and model Marla Maples, and model Rowanne Brewer) all chose "the Donald," who is not particularly handsome but is unusually rich. Others may care about personality, fame, socio-economic status, or kindness. (See Appendix I for an overview of all the assets that may be involved in an exchange.)

Attractive men and women—be they gay, lesbian, or heterosexual—assume that a "suitable partner" will be more socially desirable—more attractive, intelligent, personable, rich, well adjusted, and kind— than do their less attractive peers. Couples are more likely to fall in love and to get sexually involved with those similar to themselves in overall social desirability (Buunk & van Yperen, 1989; Martin, 1985; Schreurs & Buunk, 1996; van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Market considerations have been found to affect gay and straight men's romantic and sexual choices, the amount prostitutes charge for "risky" sex, and the sexual bargains men and women craft in prison (Dubner & Levitt, 2005). They have documented the importance of perceived equity in sparking passionate love, sexual attraction, and sexual activity (Byers & Wang, 2004; Sprecher, 1998; Winn, et al., 1991); in promoting dating satisfaction and stability (Davidson, 1984; Sprecher, 2001; van Yperen & Buunk, 1990).

Evolutionary theorists contend that in the dating marketplace, men are willing to pay a price for good looks, virginity, fidelity, and chastity, while women willingly pay for status, support, and kindness (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004).

In conclusion: Research seems to indicate that in the early stages of a dating relationship, considerations of the marketplace prevail. Men and women will attempt to draw a socially attractive partner and will be profoundly concerned with how rewarding, fair, and equitable their budding relationships are.

(b) Flowerings.

In *Equity: Theory and Research,* Hatfield and her colleagues (1978) pointed out that casual relationships differ in a number of ways from intimate connections. Specifically, they differ in:

1. Intensity of liking and loving.
2. Depth and breadth of information exchange.
3. Length of relationship.
4. Value of resources exchanged.
5. Variety of resources exchanged.
6. Interchangeability of resources.
7. The unit of analysis: from "you" and "me" to "we" (p. 183).

In this sense, Clark (1986) is right: casual relationships and loving, intimate relationships *are* different. Different things matter to lovers and workmates. (Lovers may consider love and commitment to be crucial inputs; workmates may focus on salary and productivity). Married couples, who assume they will be together for a lifetime, are likely to be sanguine about momentary injustices, confident that "it will all work out in the end." Workmates may feel that "it's now or never." Given the complexity of love relationships, it may be difficult for couples to calculate whether or not relationships are fair. (They may settle for a rough and ready definition of fair outcomes ["Yeah, all-in-all, things seem pretty fair to me."]) Employer and employee can make precise calculations involving time cards, salaries, bonuses, and withholdings. Love might also affect how people caught up in inequitable relationships go about trying to set things right. Even so, people in intimate relationships do seem to care about equity.

Clark and Grote (1998) point out that one factor that shapes how couples respond to marital sacrifices pertains to the attributions they make for their existence.

- *Attributions.* According to Clark and Grote (1998) as well as many other authors, the degree of consternation caused by injustice and inequity depends on their cause. Men and women will be most upset by *intentional* injustices. If, for example, a man expects his wife to work, maintain the house, and take care of the children, while he sits on the couch watching TV, she is likely to be intensely upset by the situation. If, on the other hand, this same husband is old, ill, or dying, the woman may feel little resentment over the fact that life is not always fair (Clark & Grote, 1998). Clark and Grote argue that in communal relationships, one welcomes the chance to behave admirably, follow communal norms, please one's mate, and demonstrate a sincere concern for his or her

welfare. The chance to grant favors (say, to search for your mate's car keys or tend them in a serious illness), they contend, may well *enhance* relationship quality and stability.

We think the story is more complex and thus richer. Surely there are situations in which love, sacrifice, and marital satisfaction are inexorably linked (say, when a man is given the opportunity to sacrifice for a well-beloved wife in her last days). Generally, however, most people assume that good deeds will eventually be rewarded. (Their partners will be grateful. They will love them more. They will wish to reciprocate.) When people are forced to suffer too much, for too long, with no hope of return, they will begin to resent life's unfairness. The man who is always late to work gets tired of searching for his wife's car keys. The wife of the Alzheimer's patient may begin to ask "Why me?" and to wish she could be released from her terrible burden (Clark & Grote, 1998; Hatfield, et al, 1978; Markman, 1981).

- *Reward and Punishment versus Equitable Exchange.* In close, intimate relationships, people care about both reward (and costs) and how fair and equitable their relationships are. Of the two, it appears that reward is more important to couples than fairness is (Cate, et al., 1985, 1988; Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Rusbult, et al., 1986).

- *The Importance of Fairness and Equity.* Yet, in the end, fairness and equity matter. Scientists have found this to be the case for most couples—single, living together, or married; affluent or poor; dating for a few weeks or married for 20 years. In all of these groups, the degree of reward, fairness, and equity are linked to sexual satisfaction, marital happiness, contentment, satisfaction, and marital stability (Aumer-Ryan, et al., 2006; Buunk & van Yperen, 1989; Byers & Wang, 2004; Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Martin, 1985; Schreurs & Buunk, 1996; van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Couples in fair and equitable relationships are less likely to risk extramarital affairs than are their peers. They are also more confident that their marriages will last, and in fact their relationships *are* longer lasting than those of their peers (Byers & Wang, 2004; Hatfield, et al., 1978; van Ypern & Buunk, 1990).

Traupmann and Hatfield (1983), for example, interviewed a random sample of men and women in Madison, Wisconsin. Respondents ranged in age from 18-92 and had been married between one and 53 years. The

authors found that throughout the lifespan, people felt more loving, happy, and content, and satisfied when they felt equitably treated than when they did not.

- *Fairness and Equity in Housework and Childcare.* In recent years, social scientists have begun to explore the perceptions of couples concerning who does the most household work (such as preparing meals, shopping for groceries, cleaning the house, caring for children, and caring for needy or elderly relatives). They have also investigated the impact of "fair" or "unfair" divisions of labor on marital satisfaction and stability (Mikula, 1998; Mikula, et al., 1998). Grote and Clark (1998) point out that although most agree that married couples *should* adhere to communal norms, in real life women (even in dual-earner households) spend far more time and effort on housework and childcare than do their mates. Current estimates of the relative size of men's contributions to the household vary between 20% and 35%. Men are more likely to view this distribution as fair than are their mates (Mikula, 1998.) Grote and Clark (1998) point out that women who feel unfairly treated may be tempted to abandon communal ideals and begin to insist on a fair and equitable division of household tasks. In any case, Mikula (1998) summarizes a number of studies indicating that for many couples, perceived fairness (in the division of housework) has a positive impact on psychological well-being, marital happiness, marital satisfaction, a lack of marital conflict, and marital stability. When there is perceived unfairness, the opposite is (of course) true.

(c) Endings.

Hatfield and colleagues (1978) argued that men and women who are unfairly treated for a prolonged period will begin to wonder: "Does my partner love me? If so, why would he (she) treat me so unfairly?" They begin to ask: "What's in it for me?" and "Am I getting all I deserve in this relationship?" All would agree that when men and women are at the point of divorce, they sometimes become consumed with issues of fairness and equity.

Scholars agree that misery and unfairness are linked. They disagree, however, as to the nature of the causal relationship: Does perceived injustice cause dissatisfaction or is the causal order reversed? Clark (1986) takes the latter view: she argues that in communal

relationships, couples do not "keep score"; they simply do not think in terms of reward and justice. Thus, if couples *are* concerned with such issues, it is a sure sign that their marriages are in trouble. Misery, then, is the *cause,* not the consequence of perceived injustice (Grote & Clark, 1998).

In a year-long longitudinal study, van Yperen and Buunk (1990) set out to answer this question. The authors interviewed couples who had been married for various lengths of time. They found that people in inequitable marriages became less satisfied over time. There was no evidence for the converse. It is possible, of course, that in failing marriages *both* processes are operating. In any case, it is clear that when marriages end, people often become preoccupied with the pain and marital injustices they have endured.

In sum: In recent times, scientists have continued to explore the impact of perceived fairness on men and women's marital happiness and stability. It appears that although the concern with fairness may wax and wane during the course of a marriage, such concerns always remain there, sometimes just beneath the surface, guiding people's perceptions, happiness, and marital choices. Love is not blind.

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Appendix I

A Multi-Factor Measure of Equity

Areas Involved in the Dating/Marital Give and Take

Personal Concerns

Social Grace

1. Social Grace: Some people are sociable, friendly, relaxed in social settings. Others are not.

Intellect

2. Intelligence: Some people are intelligent and informed.

Appearance

3. Physical Attractiveness: Some people are physically attractive.

4. Concern for Physical Appearance and Health: Some people take care of their physical appearance and conditioning, through attention to such things as their clothing, cleanliness, exercise, and good eating habits.

Emotional Concerns

Liking and Loving

5. Liking: Some people like their partners and show it. Others do not.

6. Love: Some people feel and express love for their partners.

Understanding and Concern

7. Understanding and Concern: Some people know their partner's personal concerns and emotional needs and respond to them.

Acceptance

8. Accepting and Encouraging Role Flexibility: Some people let their partners try out different roles occasionally, for example, letting their partner be a "baby" sometimes, a "mother," a colleague or a friend, an aggressive as well as a passive lover, and so on.

Appreciation

9. Expressions of Appreciation: Some people openly show appreciation for their partner's contributions to the relationship—they don't take their partner for granted.

Physical Affection:

10. Showing Affection: Some people are openly affectionate—touching, hugging, kissing.

Sex

11. Sexual Pleasure: Some people participate in the sexual aspect of a relationship, working to make it mutually satisfying and fulfilling.

12. Sexual Fidelity: Some people live up to (are "faithful" to) their agreements about extra-marital relations.

Security/Freedom

13. Commitment: Some people commit themselves to their partners and to the future of their relationship together.

14. Respecting Partner's Need to be a Free and Independent Person: Some people allow their partners to develop as an individual in the way that they choose: for example, they allow their partners freedom to go to school or not; to work at the kind of job or career they like; to pursue outside interests; to do things by themselves or with friends; to simply be alone sometimes.

Plans and Goals for the Future

15. Plans and Goals for the Future: Some people plan for and dream about their future together.

Day-to-Day Concerns

Day-to-Day Maintenance

16. Day-to-Day Maintenance: Some people contribute time and effort to household responsibilities such as grocery shopping, making dinner, cleaning, and car maintenance. Others do not.

Finances:

17. Finances: Some people contribute income to the couple's "joint account."

Sociability

18. Easy-to-Live-With: Some people are easy to live with on a day-to-day basis; that is, they have a sense of humor, aren't too moody, don't get drunk too often, and so on.

19. Companionship: Some people are good companions, who suggest interesting activities for both of them to do together, as well as going along with their partner's ideas about what they might do for fun.

20. Conversation: Some people tell partners about their day's events and what's on their mind . . . and are also interested in hearing about their partners' concerns and daily activities.

21. Fitting in: Some people are compatible with their partner's friends and relatives; they like the friends and relatives, and the friends and relatives like them.

Decision Making:

22. Decision-Making: Some people take their fair share of the responsibility for making and carrying out of decisions that affect both partners.

Remembering Special Occasions

23. Remembering Special Occasions: Some people are thoughtful about sentimental things, such as remembering birthdays, your anniversary, and other special occasions.

Opportunities Gained and Lost

Opportunities Gained

24. Chance to be Dating or Married: Dating and marriage give many people the opportunity to partake of the many life experiences that depend upon dating or being married; for example, the chance to become a parent and even a grandparent, the chance to be included in "married couple" social events, and finally, having someone to count on in old age.

Opportunities Foregone

25. Opportunities Foregone: Dating and marriage necessarily requires people to give up certain opportunities . . . in order to be in this relationship. The opportunities could have been other possible mates, a career, travel, etc.

Hatfield, et al. (1978), p. 237-241.

Table Caption List

Table 1: The Relationship Between Perceived Equity and Relationship Satisfaction in Three Cultures.[7]

Table 1

Table 1. The Relationship Between Perceived Equity and Relationship Satisfaction in Three Cultures.

Culture	Gender	(*n*)	Mean Equity	Mean Relationship Satisfaction	*df*	*F* value	η_p^2
US					4	3.24*	0.02
	Men	46	.12	4.16			
	Women	125	-.12	4.01			
Jamaica							
	Men	14	.14	3.65			
	Women	106	-.28	3.42			
International Internet							
	Men	73	-.23	3.52			
	Women	216	-.12	3.57			

*p = .01

Note. Non-transformed average scores are showed (1= very unsatisfied, 5= very satisfied). F-value was obtained using transformed scores. Only the F-value for the interaction between equity and culture in predicting satisfaction is reported.

[7] For the original data see Aumer-Ryan, et al., (2006).

Figure 1: The Relationship Between Perceived Equity and Contentment/Distress

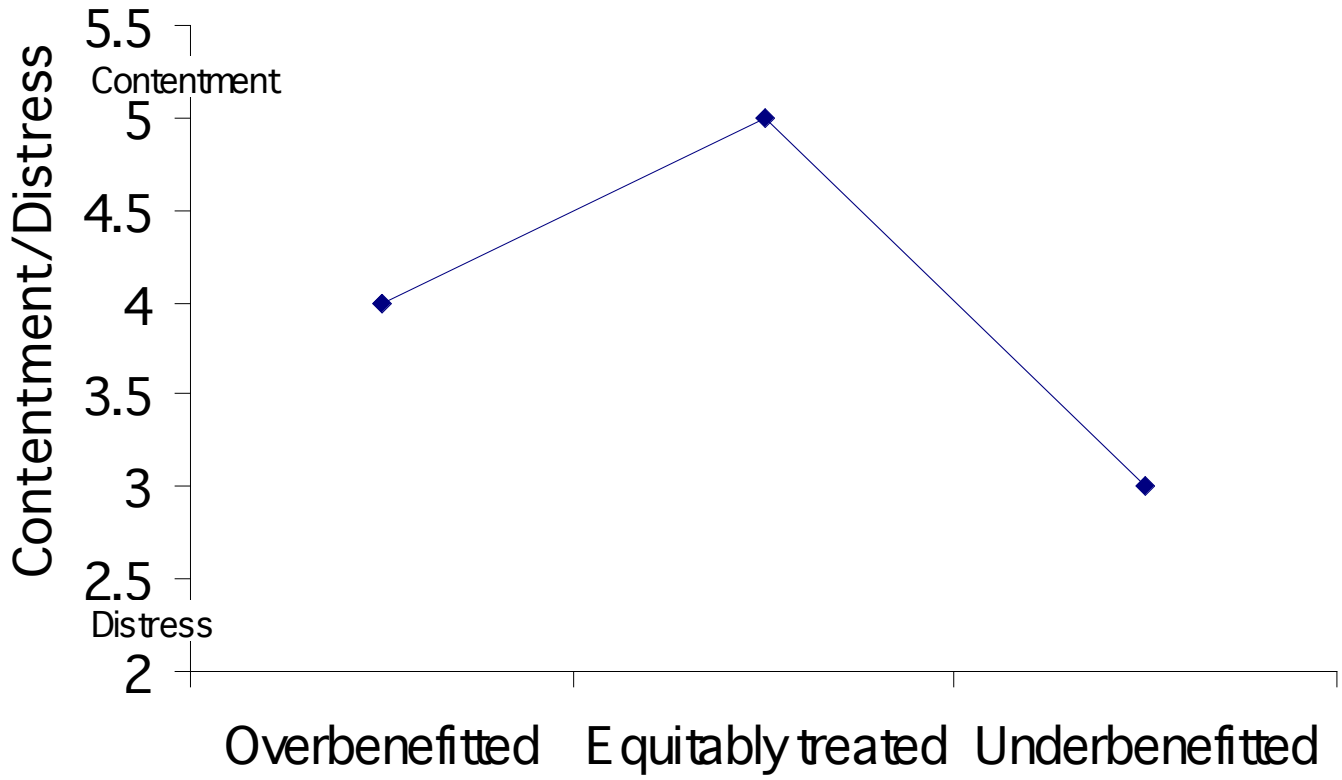

Figure 2: The Relationship Between Perceived Equity and Relationship Satisfaction in Three Cultures.