

The Impact of Fairness on Passionate vs. Companionate Love

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Abstract

This project was designed to examine what impact, if any, Equity considerations have on passionate vs. companionate love. Theoretically, both positive and negative experiences may fuel passionate love. (See Hatfield and Walster, 1981) Thus, we were unable to predict what relationship we would secure between Equity and passionate love. Companionate love, on the other hand, is believed to be intensified by positive experiences; extinguished by negative ones. (See Berscheid and Walster (Hatfield), 1978) Thus, it was expected that companionate love feelings would be experienced most by individuals who felt equitably treated; and least by individuals who felt underbenefited. Using three separate samples of persons interviewed about their intimate relationship (dating couples, newlyweds, and long-marrieds), we failed to secure a significant Equity x Type of love effect. For both passionate love and companionate love, overbenefitted and equitably treated men and women reported more intense feelings for their partner than did underbenefitted men and women. However, among dating and newlywed women, there was a suggestion that passionate love might be associated with distress.

The Impact of Fairness on Passionate vs. Companionate Love¹

Recently, social psychologists have debated about whether or not considerations of "fairness" (or equity) are important in love relations. In a recent review of research in this area, Hatfield et al. (inpress) present evidence indicating that equity concerns are critically important in intimate relationships. A closer look at this research indicates that none of this research actually deals with the question of how equity may affect intimates' love for one another. Instead, the research examines the impact of equity considerations on such aspects of the couples' relationships as contentment/distress or perceived and actual stability.

Why has love been ignored by equity theorists? Well, as Maslow (1954) once observed, love is an extraordinarily difficult topic to investigate. And when faced with an extraordinarily difficult problem, scientists often pause for a moment and work around it. Theorists have paused...but now it is time to confront directly this question of how equity may affect love. In this study, we began such an effort by examining what impact fairness has on passionate vs. companionate love.

Theoretical Background

The first problem in speculating about the relationship between equity and love is that ~~it~~ is not immediately obvious how the two ought to be linked.

1. A definition of Passionate vs. Companionate Love. Theorists have distinguished between two kinds of love---passionate love and companionate love. Passionate love has often been described as an intensely emotional state, with tender and sexual feelings. It is characterized by complete absorption in the other. A person passionately in love becomes completely preoccupied

with the loved one and desires to give everything to the relationship. (Tennov, 1979). According to such theorists as Hatfield and Walster (1981), passionate love may also have a negative side. There may be pain and anxiety, for example, if the loved one does not reciprocate with an equal amount of love. Hatfield and Walster (1981) define passionate love in the following way:

Passionate Love: A state of intense longing for union with another.

Reciprocated love (union with the other) is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy. Unrequited love (separation) with emptiness; with anxiety or despair. A state of profound physiological arousal. (p. 9)

Companionate love, on the other hand, is a low-key emotion with feelings of friendly affection and deep attachment. It has been described as involving friendship, understanding, and a concern for the welfare of the other (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977). Hatfield and Walster (1981) define companionate love in the following way:

The affection we feel for those with whom our lives are deeply intertwined. (p. 9)

2. Definition of Equity. The basic principle of equity theory is that individuals assess their relative contributions and outcomes in a relationship to determine the fairness of the relationship. (See Walster (Hatfield) et al., 1978). Theoretically, equity exists in a relationship when the person evaluating the relationship concludes that all participants' relative gains are equal. Inequity can occur if one participant's ratio of outcomes to inputs is either larger or smaller than his/her partners. According to equity theory, individuals who find themselves in inequitable relationships will become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress the individual will feel. The overbenefited will feel guilty about their favorable state of affairs, while the underbenefited will feel anger or resentment. According to the theory,

as a result of experiencing distress over an inequitable state, the participants will be motivated to restore equity to the relationship.

3. The Relationship between Equity and Passionate Love.

Theorists argue that both cognitive and physiological factors are critically important in determining how passionately a person loves another. In order to experience an emotion (such as passionate desire), the individual must:

1) Become physiologically aroused; and 2) Cognitively label the arousal as an emotion. (See Walster (Hatfield), 1971 or Hatfield and Walster, 1981).

Let us now discuss how passionate love relates to each of these components:

First, all emotions have the indispensable component of intense physiological arousal. There are many delightful experiences in an intimate relation that are physiologically arousing---for example, making love, or simply talking with someone who loves and understands you. (See Fisher and Byrne, 1978; Griffitt et al., 1974; and Schmidt et al., 1973). But in relationships there also may be painful experiences---such as fear, jealousy, anger, rejection, or total confusion---that are physiologically arousing. (See Barclay, 1969; Dutton and Aron, 1974; Gebhard, 1976; Hoon et al., 1977; and Shuttleworth, 1959). Thus either delight or pain---or a combination of the two---have the potential for fueling a passionate experience.

Second, before passionate love can be experienced, the individual must label his/her physiological arousal as such. People's conscious and semiconscious assumptions about what they should be feeling in a given situation have a profound impact on how they label their arousals (see Firestone, 1970; Lee, 1977). These assumptions people hold about love are influenced by the images of passionate love that society offers. For most people, love is a very pleasurable state. Love is associated with the joy of loving and being loved,

with the pleasure of having someone finally understand them, with sexual fulfillment, with having fun, and so on (See Hobart, 1958; Kanin et al., 1970; Kephart, 1967). For other people, however, love is a fairly unsettling state. Love is associated with anxiety, with emotional and sexual longing, and with uncertainty, confusion, and pain. (See Hatfield and Walster, 1981).

If the two-component model of passionate love is correct, it makes it difficult (if not impossible) to predict what relationship the fairness of a relationship should have to passionate love. Theoretically, equitable relationships are more pleasant and less distressing than inequitable relationships. Such "delight", then, may fuel passionate love. However, passionate love can also be intensified by distress. The overbenefited, who feel guilty about giving so little and getting so much, may well choose to interpret their feelings as "love". The underbenefited, who give so much and get so little, and feel so angry, may well interpret their tumultuous feelings as love. It is impossible, then, to systematically predict how passionate love and fairness should be related. (See Figure 1)

Insert Figure 1 about here

4. The Relationship between Equity and Companionate Love.

Theoretically, the relationship between equity and companionate love is clearer. Most theorists who have tried to predict who will like whom, and how much, have worked within a reinforcement paradigm. (See Baron and Byrne, 1977; Berscheid and Walster (Hatfield), 1978; Lott and Lott, 1974; Thibaut and Kelly, 1965). Essentially, they predict that people like those who reward them and dislike people who don't.

According to Equity theory (a dyadic reinforcement theory), companionate

feelings should be experienced most by those individuals who feel equitably treated and least by those individuals who feel underbenefitted. According to Proposition III of Equity theory, couples in equitable relationships should be relatively content, while couples in inequitable relationships should be relatively distressed. There is considerable evidence to support the contention that couples in equitable relationships are more content/less distressed, less angry or guilty, and more satisfied with their marriages and their lives, than are men and women who feel either overbenefitted or underbenefitted. As one might expect, the overbenefitted (who are profiting from the inequity) are distressed, but they are less distressed than the underbenefitted (who are losing in every way from the inequity). (See Walster (Hatfield), et al., (1978) and Hatfield and Walster (1984) for a review of this evidence.) Generally, researchers find a relationship between equity and contentment/distress as displayed in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

We would expect to secure the same relationship between equity and companionate love. (Again, see Figure 1).

We tested the hypothesis that equity is related to passionate and companionate love, as indicated in Figure 1, in the following trio of studies.

Method

The Samples:

1. Dating couples:

As part of a larger study (see Traupman et al. 1983), 70 men and 119 women who were enrolled in an introductory Human Sexuality class were surveyed about their intimate relationships. The average student was 20 years old.

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Sixty-seven percent of the men and 78% of the women were dating steadily; 29% of the men and 20% of the women were dating casually; and 4% of the men and 2% of the women were living with their sexual partners.

Men and women were asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire. The survey covered a variety of topics, including the status of the relationship, perceived equity of the relationship, satisfaction with the relationship as a whole, the extent to which the couples loved one another, satisfaction with sex, and perceived stability of the relationship.

2. Newlywed Couples

We contacted 284 couples who had applied for marriage licenses from August to November, 1976: We tried to interview couples twice--shortly after their marriages (Year 1 sample) and then again a year later (Year 2 sample.). In Year 1, 118 couples agreed to participate in the project. By Year 2, 53 couples were still available. At the time of the initial interview, couples had been married 3-8 months. They ranged in age from 16 to 45. (The average bride was 24; the average groom was 26.) The newlyweds had a variety of occupations, including housepersons, accountants, teachers, farmers, construction workers, business persons; only a few were students.

Husbands and wives were interviewed separately. The interview covered a variety of topics, including the history of the relationship, perceived equity of the relationship, satisfaction with the marriage as a whole, the extent to which the couples loved one another, satisfaction with sex, and perceived stability of the marriage. (See Traupmann, 1978 and Utne, 1978 for a complete description of these procedures and measures).

3. Older Women:

In June 1978, as part of a multidisciplinary study of aging women, a

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random sample of 240 older women from different areas of Madison, Wisconsin were interviewed. The women ranged in age from 50 to 82, and were from a variety of social backgrounds and work statuses. About one-third of the women were working either part-time or full-time.

The 240 women were asked to describe the most important person in their lives. If the relationship they described was a sexual one, they received the intimacy questions. These are the questions on which the data below are based. One hundred and six of the 240 women reported an ongoing sexual relationship. For most of these women, it was with their husband; for a very few it was with a spouse equivalent.

Measures

1. Equity in the Relationship

For the samples reported above, Equity was measured in a variety of comparable ways--among them The Walster (1977) Global Measures, The Hatfield (1978) Global Measures, The Traupmann-Utne-Walster (1977) Scales, and The Traupmann-Utne-Hatfield (1978) Scales.³

On the basis of these measures, men and women were classified into three groups---the overbenefited (those who feel they are getting more than they deserve out of their relationships); the equitably treated (those who are getting just what they deserve--no more and no less); and the underbenefited (those who feel they are getting less than they deserve from their relationships).

2. Passionate and Companionate Love

In all three studies, love was assessed in the same way. Respondents were asked:

People seem to experience two different kinds of love; we call them

"passionate love" and "companionate love". Passionate love could be described as a wildly emotional state, with associated tender and sexual feelings, elation and pain, anxiety and relief. Companionate love involves more low-keyed emotion, with feelings of friendly affection and deep attachment. Using the response scale below, and thinking over the last six months or so, answer our questions about these feelings in your marriage.

- 1) What is the level of passionate love that you feel for your partner?
- 2) What is the level of passionate love that your partner feels for you?
- 3) What is the level of companionate love that you feel for your partner?
- 4) What is the level of companionate love that your partner feels for you?

Respondents indicated their feelings on the following scale:

1. None at all
2. Very little
3. Some
4. A great deal
5. A tremendous amount

(For information on the reliability and validity of these scales, see Greenwell, 1983 and Sprecher, in preparation.)

Results and Discussion

Let us begin by attempting to determine if we can detect any patterns in our data. There appear to be two worth noting:

1. The Equity Main Effects. We expected results similar to those depicted in Figure 1. An analysis of Tables 1-4 and Figures 3-6 makes it clear that we did not secure this pattern of results, however.

[The Equity x Type of love interactions = 3.15, (2 and 189 d.f.) $p < .05$ but not in the predicted direction for daters; $F_s = 1.56$ and $.21$ (2 and 236 d.f.), both n.s., for newlyweds (Time 1), $F = 1.29$ (2 and 106 d.f.), n.s., for newlyweds (Time 2), and $F_s = .00$ and $.54$ (2 and 97 d.f.) n.s., for older women and older women's estimates of their husbands' feelings, respectively.]

It appears that, in general, both Overbenefitted and Equitably treated men and women feel a great deal of love for their partners. The Underbenefitted (with **some** notable exceptions which we will discuss in the next section) feel far less passionate and companionate love for their partners. [In some cases, the Equity Main Effect is significant (Dating Couples: $F(1,183)$ Equity = 6.00, $p < .01$; Newlyweds Time 1: $F(1,230)$ Equity = .05, n.s.; Newlyweds Time 2: $F(1,100)$ Equity = 6.17, $p < .01$; Older Women, Own Feelings: $F(1,96)$ Equity = .70, n.s., Estimates of partners' feelings: F Equity = .79, n.s.)] As we observed earlier, however, inspection makes it clear that this "curvilinear" effect is really a step function.

2. The Impact of Equity on Passionate vs. Companionate Love. An analysis of Figures 3-6 reveals a fascinating pattern: When we look at couples' feelings of companionate Love, the pattern of results we secure has a certain logic. Persons who are fairly treated or overbenefitted feel more companionate Love for their partners than do people who are underbenefitted. This is not, however, a particularly surprising finding. Rewarding experiences probably generally fuel love (see Byrne, 1971). Alternatively, love may make one's experiences more rewarding. Probably both processes are operating to produce the love-benefit relationship.

When we look at the sex x equity effect for passionate love, however, a peculiar finding emerges. In Dating couples and newlyweds, (Year 1), we find that underbenefitted women tend to feel unusually passionate about their partners. (Is it because they love their partners that they allow themselves to be badly

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treated? Or are Hatfield and Walster (1981) right--does pain sometimes intensify passionate love? If so, our results suggest that women confuse love and pain only when they are relatively inexperienced. By Year 2 of a marriage... and certainly by the time women have been married several decades, the link is no longer there. A glance at Figures 3 and 4 vs. 5 and 6 reveals that after the passage of time, Underbenefitted women love least, not most.

What can account for this change, if in fact it exists? Perhaps in the early stages of a relationship-- when one has a great deal of hope that things will ~~w~~ork out somehow--deprivation does in fact intensify passion. Perhaps that is why the underbenefitted women love so passionately. Once one is "older and wiser," hope may disappear. The underbenefitted's tumultuous feelings may be interpreted, not as passionate love, but as anger or hatred. (see Hatfield and Walster, 1981 for an elaboration of this point.)

Let us emphasize that these are only speculations. Even in the Dating and Newlywed Time 1 samples, the Sex x Equity x Type of Love Effects are not significant. Dating Couples: $F(1,183) = .40$. Newlyweds: Time 1, $F(1,183) = 1.40$. And, since these are separate studies, it is not possible to see if the "changes" we have described are real ones. These results are intriguing, however, and should be followed up with subsequent research.

TABLE 1

Relationship Between Equity and Passionate Companionate Love: Daters

<u>Equity Condition:</u> <u>The Hatfield (1978)</u> <u>Global Measure</u>	N	<u>Passionate Love</u>		<u>Companionate Love</u>	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Overbenefitted	(28)	3.53	3.38	4.13	4.38
Equitably treated	(99)	3.88	4.06	4.12	4.35
Underbenefitted	<u>(62)</u> (189)	3.73	4.48	3.82	3.85
S.D.		(.75)	(.96)	(.82)	(.87)

F - Tests

Sex	.18
Equity	6.00**
Sex x Equity	.97
Types of Love	23.26***
Sex Type	1.84
Equity x Type	3.15*
Sex x Equity x Type	.40

¹The higher the number, the more men and women love their partners

*p < .05
 **p < .01
 ***p < .001

Table 2

The Relationship Between Equity and Love for Newlyweds (Time 1)

<u>Equity Condition</u>	(N)	<u>Walster (1977) Global Measures</u>		<u>T-U-W (1977) Global Measures</u>		<u>Companionate Love</u>	
		<u>Passionate Love</u> Men	<u>Passionate Love</u> Women	<u>Passionate Love</u> Men	<u>Passionate Love</u> Women	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Overbenefitted	(89)	4.02	4.02	3.92	3.90	4.46	4.55
Equitably Treated	(123)	3.95	3.83	4.16	3.92	4.50	4.76
Underbenefitted	(24)	3.64	4.10	3.53	3.96	4.41	4.48
S.D.	<u>(236)</u>	(.81)	(.73)	(.81)	(.73)	(.69)	(.55)

F-Tests

Sex	1.89	1.94
Equity	.05	3.44*
Sex x Equity	.44	.93
Type of Love	58.10***	80.80***
Sex x Type	.00	.31
Equity x Type	1.56	.21
Sex x Equity x Type	1.40	2.78

1. The higher the number, the more the couples love their partners.

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

Table 3

The Relationship Between Equity and Love for Newlyweds (Time 2)

Equity Condition: Hatfield (1978) Global Measures	(N)	Passionate Love		Companionate Love	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
<u>Newlyweds</u>					
Overbenefited	(37)	3.93	3.89	4.21	4.56
Equitably treated	(38)	3.87	3.74	4.40	4.65
Underbenefited	(31)	3.20	3.33	3.80	4.48
S.D.	(106)	(.89)	(.77)	(.71)	(.57)

F-Tests

Sex	2.96
Equity	6.17**
Sex x Equity	.74
Type of Love	50.32***
Type x Sex	4.99*
Type x Equity	1.29
Type x Sex x Equity	.07

1. The higher the number, the more the subjects love their partners

*p < .05
 **p < .01
 ***p < .001

Table 4

The Relationship Between Equity and Passionate and Companionate Love: Older Women

Equity Condition: Hatfield (1978) Global Measures	(N)	Passionate Love		Companionate Love	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Overbenefited	(14)	3.43	3.07	4.00	4.07
Equitably treated	(79)	3.25	3.15	4.12	4.14
Underbenefited	(4)	2.75	2.75	3.75	3.75
S.D.	(97)	(.96)	(.94)	(.75)	(.71)

F-Tests Women's Estimates of Husbands' Feelings

Equity	.79
Type of Love	16.38***
Type x Equity	.54

1. The higher the number, the more they love their partners.

*p < .05
 **p < .01
 ***p < .001

Figure 1

The Predicted Relationship Between Equity
and Passionate and Companionate Love

FIGURE I. THE HYPOTHIZED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EQUITY AND PASSIONATE AND COMPANIONATE LOVE

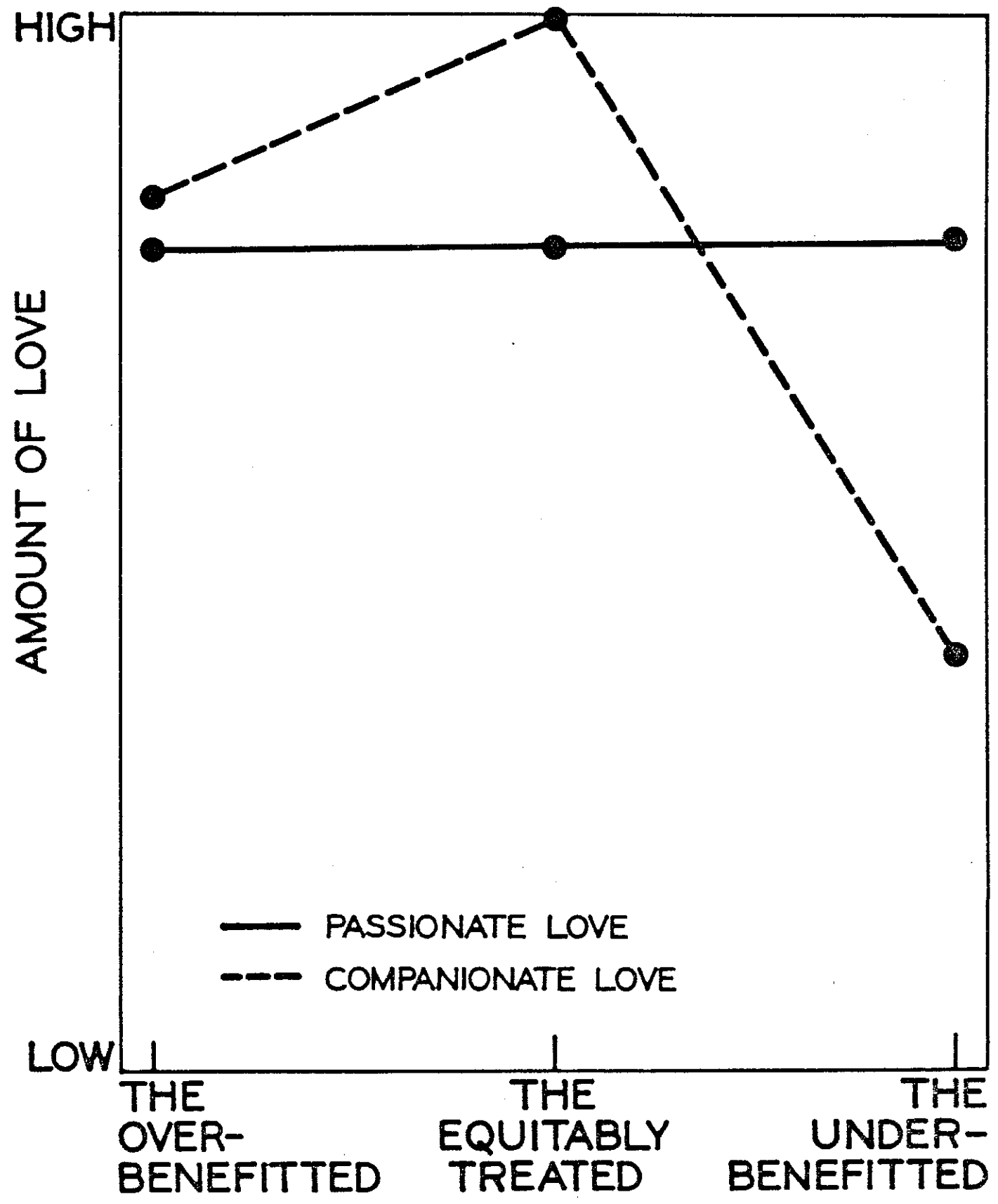


Figure 2

The Predicted Relationship Between
Equity and Contentment/Distress

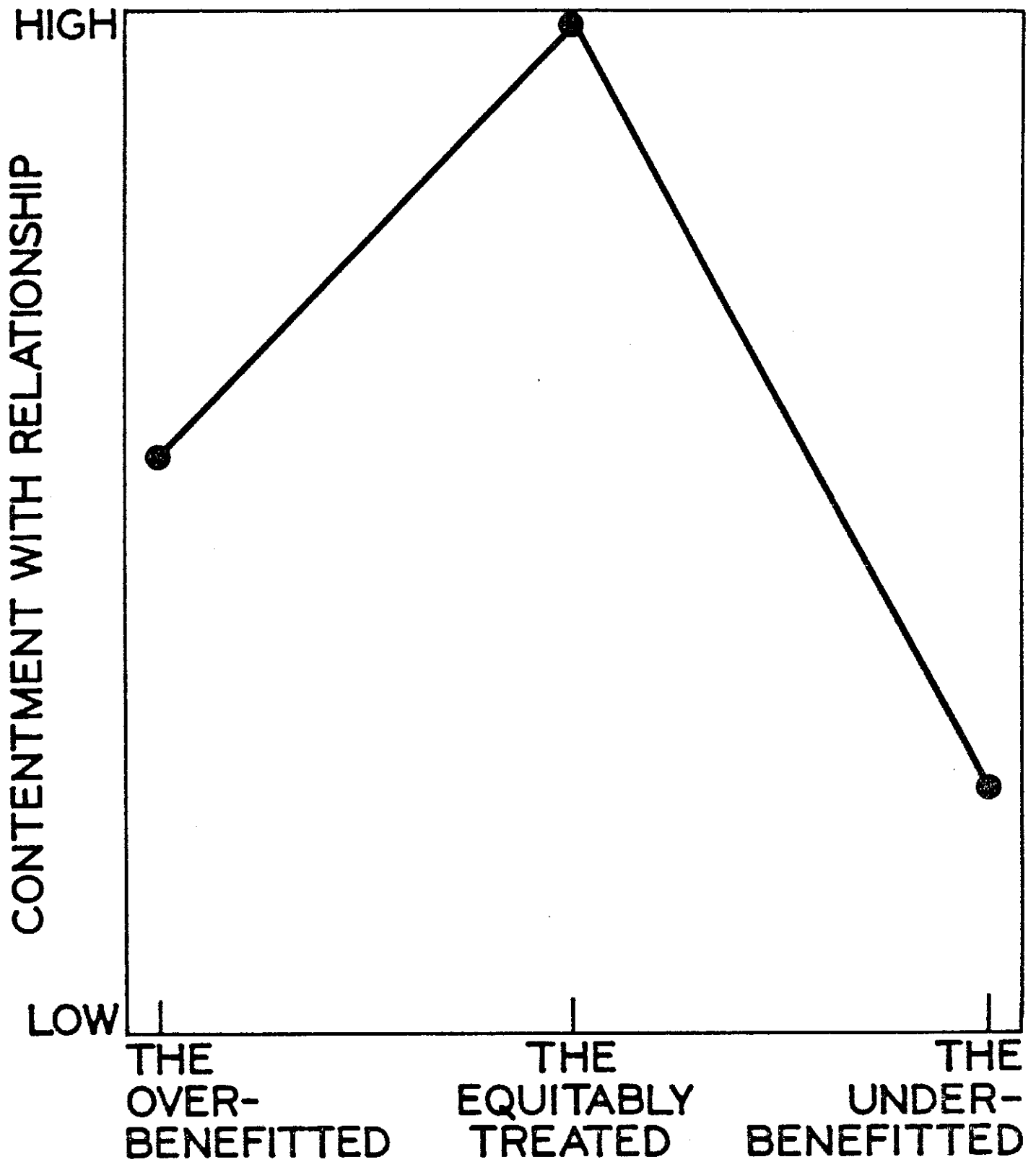


Figure 3

The Relationship Between Equity (as Measured by the Hatfield (1978) Global Measure) and Passionate and Companionate Love in Dating Couples.

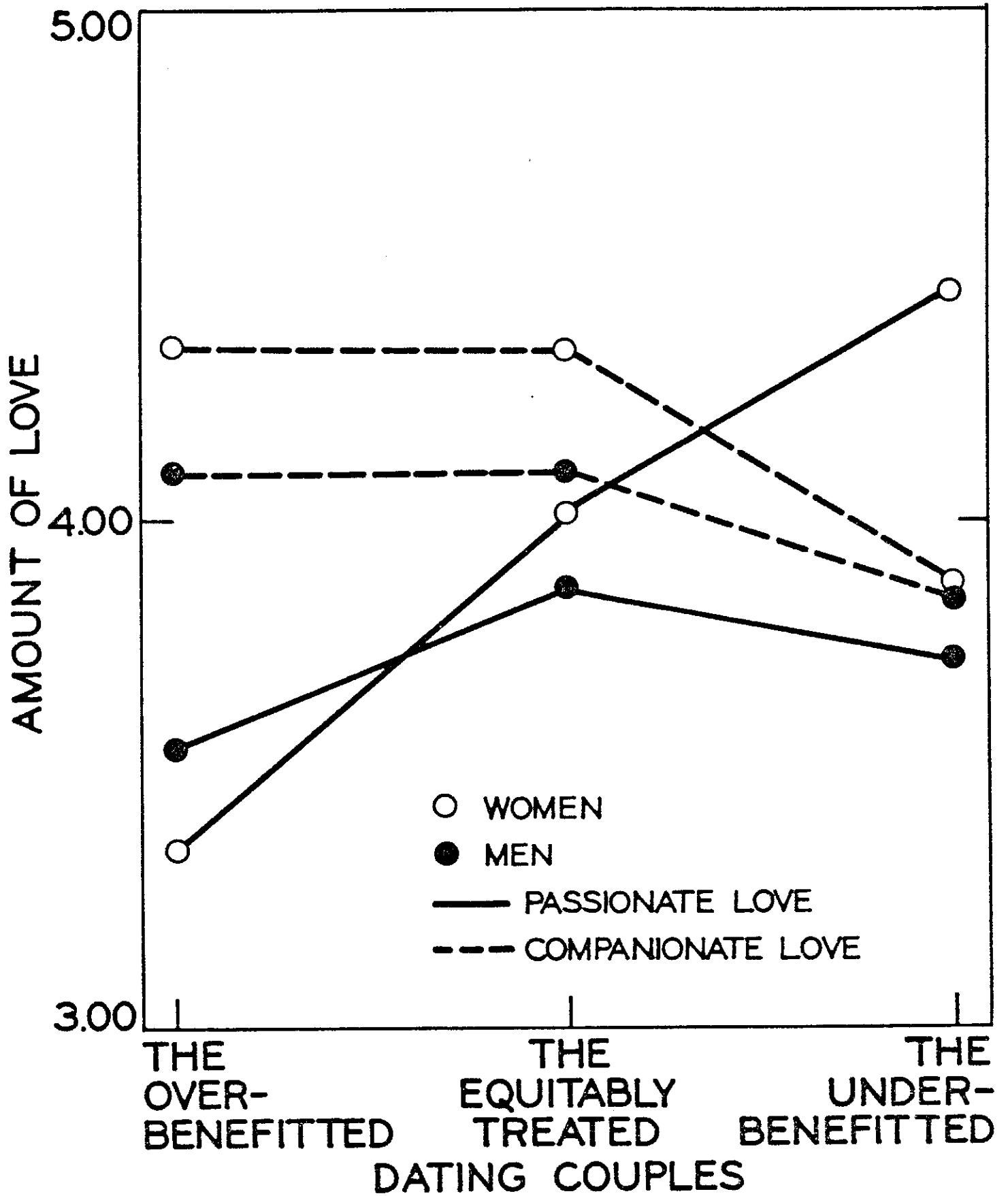


Figure 4

The Relationship Between Equity (As Measured by the Walster (1977) Global Measure) and Passionate and Companionate Love in Newlywed Couples (Year 1)

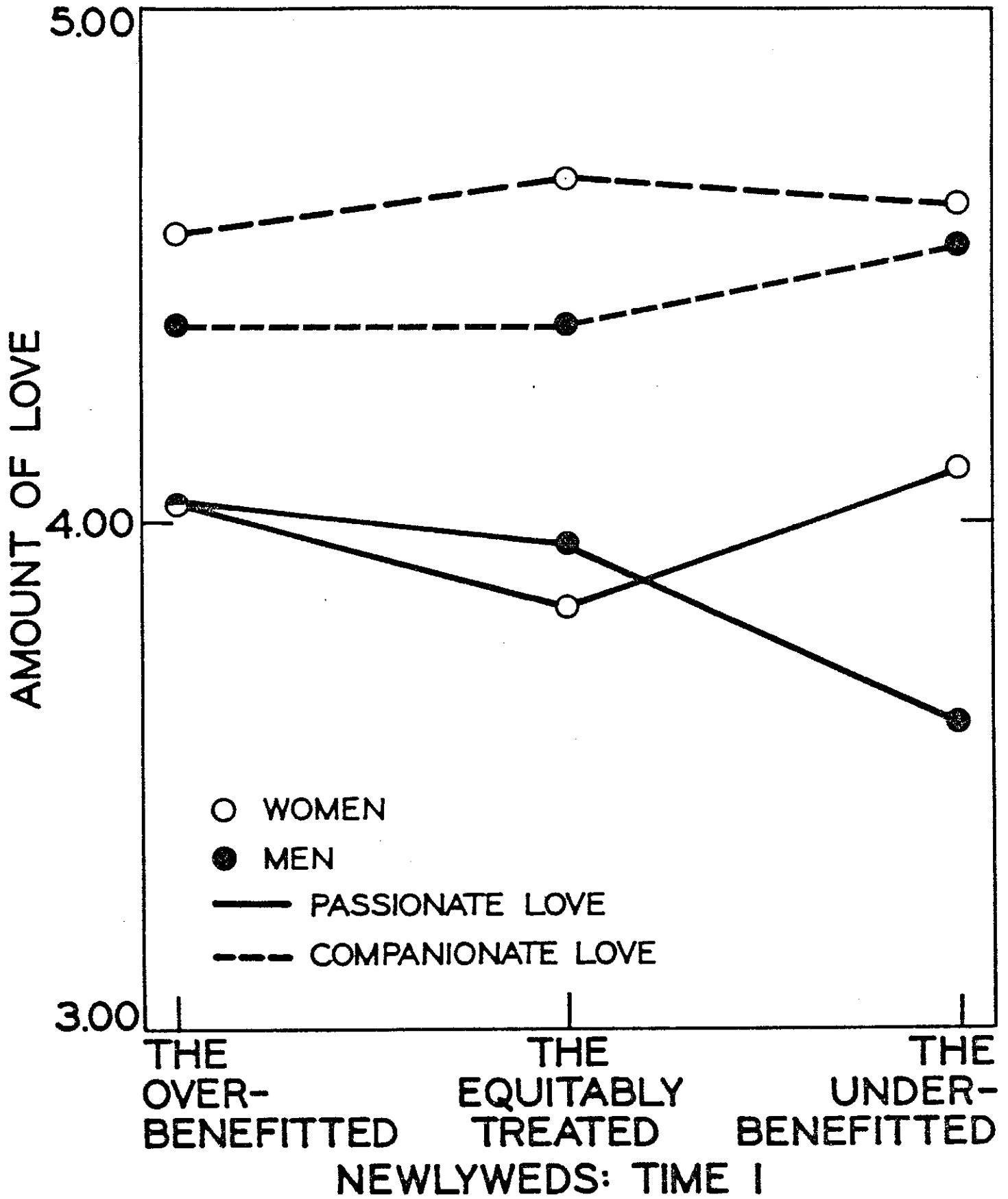


Figure 5

The Relationship Between Equity (as Measured by the Hatfield (1978) Global Measure and Passionate and Companionate Love in Newlyweds (Year 2)

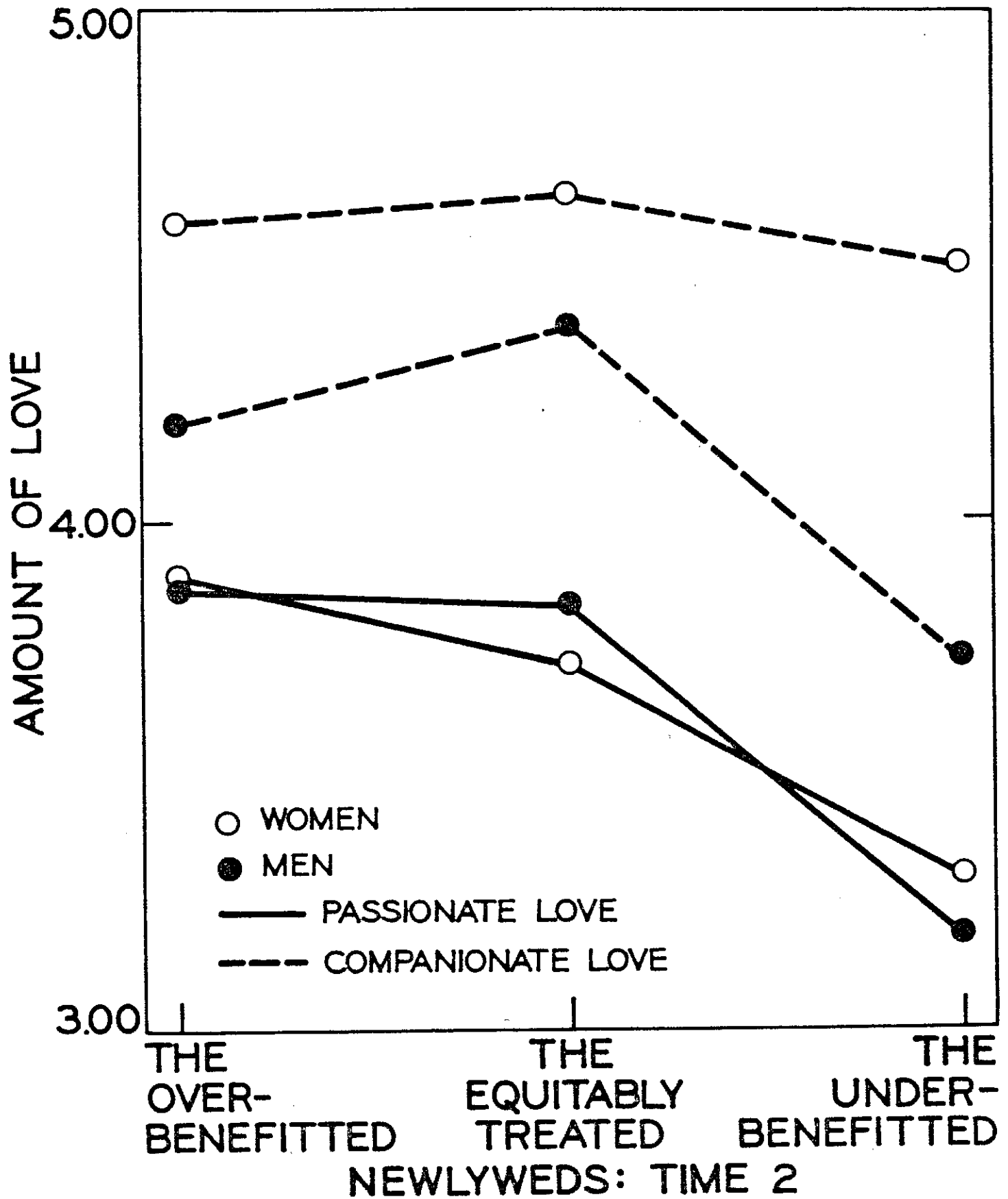
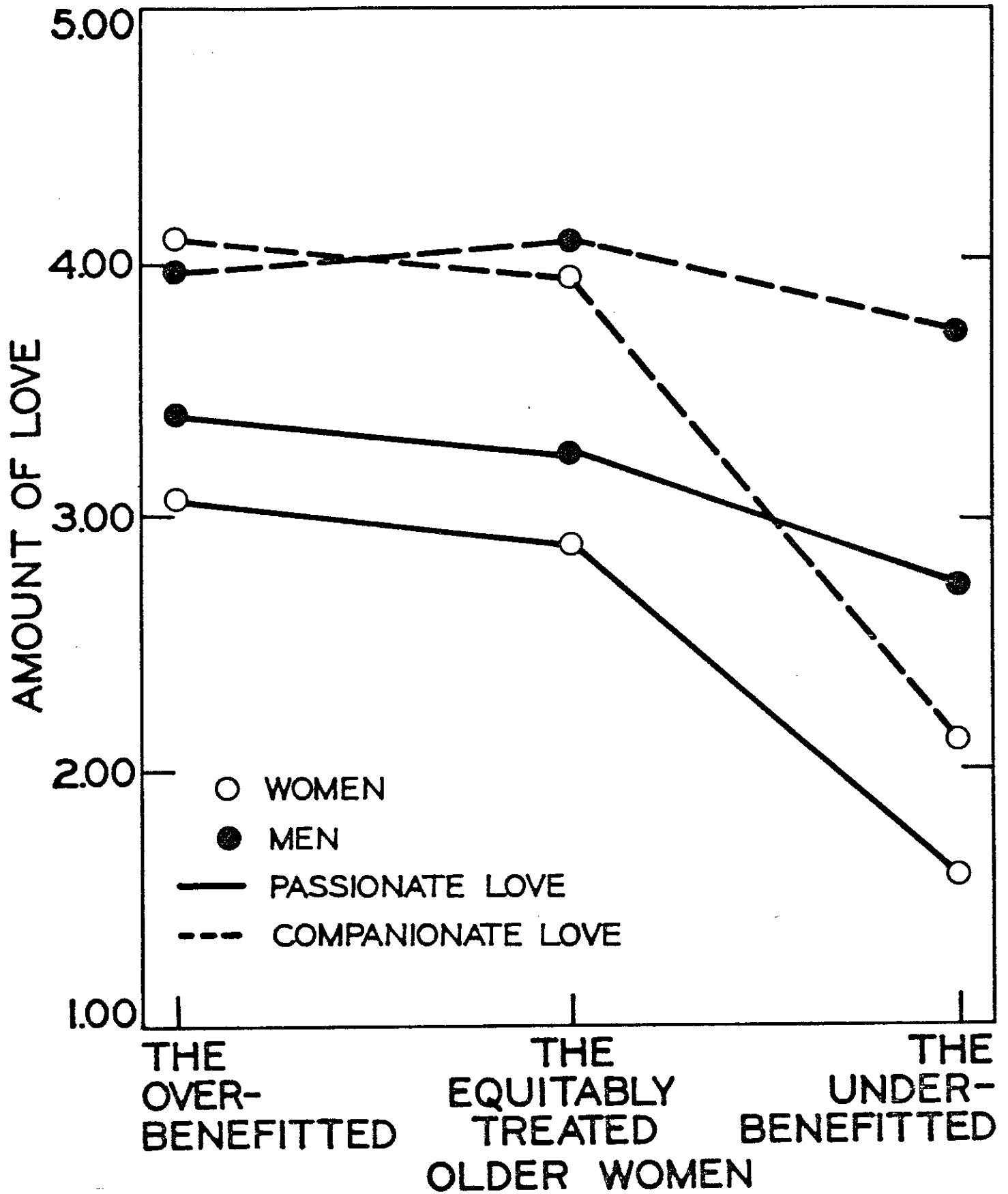


Figure 6

The Relationship Between Equity (As Measured by the Hatfield (1978) Global Measure) and Passionate and Companionate Love in Older Couples.



FOOTNOTES

1. This research was supported in part by a University of Wisconsin Research Committee Award for 1980-81.
2. For copies of these scales, contact Dr. Elaine Hatfield, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.
3. Readers may be interested in how respondents' scores on the various Equity measures intercorrelate. When we examine the Newlywed data for Year 2, we find the following intercorrelations:

	The Walster (1977) Global Measure	The Hatfield (1978) Global Measure	The Traupman-Utne-Walster (1977) Scale
The Walster (1977) Global Measure	--	--	--
The Hatfield (1978) Global Measure	.54*** (N=106)	--	--
The Traupman-Utne- Walster (1977) Scale	.38*** (N=106)	.55*** (N=106)	--

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