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Equity in Romantic Relationships:

An Analysis Across Self-Construal and Culture

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Abstract

Are people throughout the world equally concerned about social justice in their romantic and marital relationships? In a series of studies, we interviewed European-Americans, Asian-Americans, West Indians, and a multi-cultural WWW sample, in an attempt to find out.

Equity theory appeared to be surprisingly robust in its ability to predict men and women's reactions to equity/inequity. Both Westerners and their non-Western counterparts thought it was "important" to "very important" that a dating relationship or marriage be equitable. In addition, in all cultures, men and women reacted much the same way when fairly or unfairly treated. All felt most satisfied when receiving exactly what they deserved from their relationships—no more (perhaps) but certainly no less.

We did secure some fascinating cultural differences, however. People around the world may aspire to social justice, but not all are lucky enough to achieve that goal. People in various cultures differed markedly in how fair and equitable they perceived their relationships to be. Those from the United States felt most equitably treated (and as a consequence were most satisfied with their relationships.) Men and women (and especially women) from Jamaica, in the West Indies, felt most unjustly treated (and thus were least satisfied in their relationships).

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Equity in Romantic Relationships:
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Since William James inaugurated the first psychology laboratory at Harvard, social scientists have attempted to formulate "universal" laws of social cognition, emotion, and behavior. Cultural critics point out, however, that until very recently, social psychology has been "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 Westerncentric bias has been so pervasive that, as the old joke goes, "even the rats were white.") In the past, when criticized for their narrowness, scientists often argued that they were attempting to discover "basic" and "universal" principles, which transcend time and place. Ergo: it did not really matter whether their studies were run in, say, Normal, Illinois, or Katmandu. Cognition is cognition is cognition . . .

Recently, cultural and cross-cultural researchers have begun to criticize this cheerful assumption (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Marsella, 1998; Triandis, 1999.) They argue that cultural differences may have a profound impact on the way people conceptualize the world, the meaning they ascribe to events, and how they react to common life events. Recently, cultural researchers have amassed considerable evidence to document the validity of their critique (see Adams, et al, 2004; Cohen, 2001; Nisbett, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2003; Tsai & Levenson, 1997).

Cultural psychologists contend that what is needed is a new social psychology—one in which theorists from a variety of cultural and ethnic groups come together to formulate theories that are more multi-cultural and multi-layered than those existing

today. Naturally, these new, multicultural models would be tested in diverse cultural and ethnic settings, with participants from a wide array of backgrounds (Amir & Haron, 1987.). Cultural theorists also argue that psychologists must also critically examine "classic" theories, in order to determine how universal their findings really are.

In the long run, we would hope to participate in such an effort. In this study, however, we planned to start small. We selected a "classic" theory, Equity theory, which claims to be a universal theory—applicable to all people in all cultures in all historical eras. We then attempted to investigate the extent to which men and women from different cultural backgrounds responded or did not respond as Equity theory suggests they should.

Equity and Romantic Relationships

People everywhere 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 common plaints. In the 11th century, St. Anselm of Canterbury argued that the will possesses two competing inclinations: an affection for what is to the person's own advantage *and* an affection for justice; the first inclination is stronger, but the second matters, too. In accord, Equity theory (Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1976) posited that in personal relationships, two concerns stand out: (1) How rewarding are people's societal, family, romantic, and work relationships? (2) How fair and equitable are those relationships?

Historically, 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 time and energy you invest, the more you’re entitled to. (U.S. capitalism.)

• “Each according to his need.” (Communism)

• “Winner take all.” (Dog-eat-dog capitalism.)

Nonetheless, in all societies (or so Equity theory claims) fairness and equity are deemed important.

In the United States, couples consider social justice to be so crucial, that considerations of equity have been found to determine who falls in love with whom, whom men and women select as mates, whether or not couples get sexually involved on a date, how sexually satisfying couples’ relationships are, how committed couples are to one another, how contented *versus* distressed or guilty men and women feel when contemplating their dating and marital relationships, how willing married couples are to risk extramarital affairs, and how long dating and marital relationships last. (For a review of this research, see Hatfield, et al, 1978, and Hatfield, et al, 2006.)

Since the 1970s, scientists have devoted a great deal of time and effort to studying Equity theory and romantic relationships—yet, amazingly, in all of those dozens (if not hundreds) of studies, there are few that cannot be branded with the stamp of “Made in the U.S.A.” Although equity has been found to be important in social interactions among middle class, European-American college students—and even crows, dogs, and capuchin monkeys (see Brosnan & deWaal, 2003,) it has rarely (if ever) been tested in samples of men and women from a variety of cultural and ethnic groups! In this study, we plan to study (1) the extent to which men and women from various cultures and ethnic groups consider equity to be important in romantic

relationships, (2) how equitable they perceive their own relationships to be, and (3) the extent to which considerations of fairness and equity effect romantic and marital satisfaction.

Cultural and Ethnic Differences

Recently scientists have begun to ask: "Is Equity theory applicable to all people in all cultures and all historical eras?" Cross-cultural researchers would say "No." They argue that men and women in individualistic cultures (such as North America, Western and Northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand) are far more concerned with social justice in close relationships than are people in collectivist cultures (such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America). Cultural theorists may talk about "globalization *versus* tribalization," "affluence or poverty," "traditionalism or modernism", or "the possession of independent or interdependent self-construals," but the argument is the same: culture matters (Hatfield & Rapson, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991.) Almost universally, cultural theorists argue that cultural values will have a profound impact on: (1) people's definitions of "social justice" (2) how important they consider fairness and equity to be, (3) what *type* of allocations are seen to be fair—i.e., should they be based on merit? Need? Equality? Proportionality? (4) how fair they consider their own close relationships to be, and (5) how they react to perceived inequity in close relationships (Triandis & Suh, 2002). There is some sparse support for the contention that Westerners care more about Equity than do others (Ohbuchi, et al., 1999; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997; Yum & Canary, 2003).

Self-Construals

Cultural theorists have argued that self-construals are important in mediating the impact of cultural individualism and collectivism. Generally, according to the theory, interdependent self-construals are tightly linked to collectivism, while independent self-construals are linked to individualism . . . but they may vary independently (Markus & Kitayama, 1994a and b; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Triandis & Suh, 2002). An interdependent self-construal, as defined by Markus and Kitayama (1991), is as follows:

> "[It] entails seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship" (p. 227).

In contrast, independent self-construals:

> " . . . require construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others" (p. 226).

In theory, those who possess independent self-construals should be far more concerned with equity than are their interdependent peers.

On the basis of the conventional theorizing, we posed the following hypotheses:

H1: Culture and self-cultural will predict the *importance* people place on equity in love relationships. Specifically:

A. Those with higher independent self-construals will place *more* importance on equity in their love relationships than do their peers. Those with

higher interdependent self-construals will place *less* importance on equity than do their peers.

B. Those from more individualistic societies will place *more* importance on equity in their love relationships than will those from more collectivist societies.

H2: Culture and self-construal will predict how equitable men and women consider their romantic and marital relationships to be. Specifically:

A. Those with higher independent self-construals will report more equitable love relationships than do those with higher interdependent self-construals. (The interdependents will be more likely to report being in either under-benefited or over-benefited relationships.)

B. People from more individualistic societies will report more equitable love relationships than will those from more collectivistic societies.

H3: We will find the expected curvilinear relationship between equity and satisfaction in individualistic cultures, but a more linear relationship in collectivistic cultures. Specifically, people from individualistic societies should find over-benefit and under-benefit more distressing than do those from more collectivist societies.

We conducted three studies to test these hypotheses. Study 1 tested our hypotheses in an ethnically and culturally diverse sample of North American college students from the University of Hawai'i (UH). Study 2 tested these hypotheses by comparing this sample with a sample from a different cultural milieu—the University of the West Indies (UWI), in Jamaica, the West Indies. Finally, Study 3 tested these

hypotheses by comparing the UH and UWI samples with a worldwide sample of men and women recruited via the Internet.

Study 1

Participants and Procedure

Students at the University of Hawai'i (125 women and 46 men) were recruited to participate in a survey on equity and love relationships. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 44 (M = 21.29, SD = 4.05). As is characteristic of Hawai'i, the sample was ethnically diverse: Japanese (32%), European-American (23%), Filipino (10%), Chinese (8%), mixed race (6%), Native Hawaiian (6%), Korean (4%), other (4%), other Pacific Islander (3%), Mixed Asian (2%), African-American (1%), and Hispanic (1%). The majority of participants (82%) were born in the US. Most were involved in either a long-term (53%) or a committed relationship (4% were engaged, 10% married, 8% cohabiting). The remaining 25% of participants were in short-term relationships.

Measures

Culture and Self -Construal. Although cross-cultural researchers use the term "culture" in a variety of ways, in this study, "culture" will be used to demarcate our national samples—so that those people surveyed at the University of Hawai'i, the University of West Indies, and via the Internet will be considered to be of different cultures. These groups are separated by geography, race, and customs.

Singelis' (1994) Self Construal Measure (SCS) was used to assess self-construal. The SCS is comprised of 30 Likert-type items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) assessing various aspects of maintaining group harmony, self-sacrifice, and familial loyalty and identification—all of which measure the construal of

independence and/or interdependence of the self. The SCS has shown satisfactory validity and reliability for both independent (α = .75) and interdependent self-construal (α = .73) (Singelis, 1994; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995.) In this study, we will be treating "self-construal" as an individual difference variable that is related to culture, but is not identical with it.

Importance of Equity. In order to assess how important people from various ethnic groups and self construals consider fairness and equity to be, a single question was asked: "How important is it for you that your current romantic relationship is fair, that is, both of you contribute equally?" Five options were given with 1 being "Not important at all" to 5 being "Very important."

Equity. Hatfield's (1978) Global Measure of Equity was used to assess perceptions of relationship equity. The measure asks: "Considering what you put into your relationship, 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 relationship 'stack up?'"

+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.

Participants who rated their relationships as +1, +2, or +3 were categorized as over-benefited; those who rated them as -1, -2, and -3 were categorized as under-benefited, and a those who rated them as 0 were categorized as participating in equitable relationships.

Despite its brevity, this widely used equity measure has been found to possess reasonable reliability and validity (see Canary & Stafford, 1992; Sprecher, 1986, 1988; Traupmann, 1978; Traupmann et al., 1981; VanYperen & Buunk, 1990). In a longer version of the Equity measure, Traupmann, et al. (1981) demonstrated that the measure possessed reasonable reliability and validity (Chronbach's α for total inputs = .87; for total outputs scales = .90). The Global measure (which we chose) and the longer version of the Equity measure have been found to be highly correlated (Sprecher, 1986).

Satisfaction. To assess satisfaction in the romantic relationship, Hendrick's (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was selected. Hendrick's RAS is composed of seven Likert-type items (ranging from 1 to 5) assessing general satisfaction, loving one's partner, meeting original expectations, problems in the relationship, comparing the relationship to others, and frequency of regret for staying in the relationship. Hendrick's RAS possesses good reliability (Chronbach's α = .86) and is able to reasonably predict the separation of couples.

Results

H1A: Predicting importance of equity in relationship from self-construals

Independent and interdependent self-construal scores were used in a multiple regression equation to predict how important people considered equity to be in their love relationships. Since most people considered equity to be extremely important in their love relationships (M = 4.47, SD = .79) the distribution was negatively skewed (*Skewness* = -1.72, SE = .19). Since regression assumes normality, we transformed our importance of equity score by reflecting the score and taking the $\log^{10}$ of the now

positively skewed importance of equity variable and used this transformed value in our multiple regression equation (Siegel & Morgan, 1996). The low *F* statistic ($F(2, 163) = 2.40$, p = ns) suggested that independent and interdependent self-construal scores were *not* good predictors of how important equity was seen to be in people's love relationships.

H1B: Predicting importance of equity in relationship from race

Race was used again as a proxy for culture using the Asian-American and European-American subpopulations; we used a t-test to predict the transformed importance of equity scores. Although (surprisingly) Asian-Americans scored *higher* in how much importance they placed on equity in their love relationships ($M = 96.05$, $SD = 34.16$) compared to European-Americans ($M = 91.45$, $SD = 42.83$), this difference was not statistically significant ($t(130) = -1.05$, p = ns).

H2A: Predicting equity in relationship from self-construal

Independent and interdependent self-construal scores were used in a multinomial logistic regression model to predict the odds of belonging into one of the various equity groups: under-benefited, equitably treated, and over-benefited. Multinomial logistic regression works exceptionally well when the dependent variable (in this case equity groups) is not homoscedastic (equal variances across groups) and errors are not randomly distributed (Menard, 1995); multinomial logistic regression overcomes the more strict requirements of multivariate discriminant analysis (Klecka, 1980). In general, the final model according to the -2 Log Likelihood (-2LL) at 276.81 indicated poor model fit as well as the non-significant χ^2 (4, $N = 171$) $= 4.28$, p = ns,

suggesting that self-construal was not a good predictor of membership in one of the various equity groups.

H2B: Predicting Equity in relationship from race

Participants' race was used as a proxy for culture. The two largest subpopulations, Asian-American (*n* = 93) and European-American (*n* = 40), were used to predict membership in one of the equity groups using a chi-square analysis. A non-significant χ^2 (2, *N* = 133) = 2.929, *p* = ns, suggested that race was not a good predictor of membership in one of the equity groups.[1]

H3: Predicting relationship satisfaction from equity in relationship and race

In the West, previous studies have found that the equity (or inequity) of a relationship has a profound impact on couples' relationship satisfaction. (The equitably treated are expected to be the most satisfied in their relationships, the over-benefited slightly less satisfied, and the under-benefited the most dissatisfied of all.) In Table 1, we can see that it appears to matter little whether we are interviewing a European-American or an Asian-American sample: Equity and relationship satisfaction are related in much the same way as in previous research. In fact, if anything, the European-American sample appears to be *less* upset by inequity than the Asian-American sample![1]

Insert Table 1 about here

A one-way ANOVA using race to predict relationship satisfaction (similarly transformed as our importance of equity measure) was conducted. As can be seen in

[1] We also predicted that the equitably treated would be significantly more satisfied than the over-benefited. In both races, however, these differences turned out to be non-significant.

Table 1, both European-American and Asian-American groups were most satisfied in equitable relationships. Using Games-Howell post-hoc multiple comparisons demonstrated that the difference between over-benefited and equitably treated groups was not statistically significant. However, for both European-American and Asian-American samples, differences between the under-benefited and equitably treated groups and the under-benefited and over-benefited groups were statistically significant. These results suggest that, across both groups, a less curvilinear and a more linear relationship between equity group membership and relationship satisfaction exists than we expected.

Conclusions

We proposed that people in different cultures or people possessing different self-construals might differ in (1) how important they considered equity to be, (2) how equitable they judged their own relationships to be, and (3) how satisfied they were in equitable or inequitable relationships. We found no evidence for the first two contentions. We did find some cultural differences in how content people were in equitable or inequitable relationships. Although (to our surprise) neither the European-American nor the Asian-American groups reported feeling distressed when over-benefited,[2] both groups were far more satisfied in equitable than in under-benefited

[2] In retrospect, the fact that the over-benefit and the equitably treated did not differ in relationship satisfaction is not surprising. In all of the classic studies, satisfaction was measured by items asking how "content, happy, guilty, and angry" couples felt when contemplating their relationship. The over-benefited scored high on guilt, the equitably treated scored high on contented and happy, and the under-benefited scored high on anger. The Hendrick (1988) measure—while a more popular measure than the one traditionally used—does not access guilt or shame. In the interest of consistency, we chose to stick with the Hendrick measure in our three studies. Thus, *in these studies*, we would not really expect to secure a strong difference

relationships. Contrary to expectations, if anything, in this University of Hawai'i sample, the Asian-Americans seemed more distressed by under-benefiting than did their European-American peers.

Alas, this study possessed two limitations: the sample of European-Americans was small and we were forced to use race as a proxy of culture. In Study #2 we attempted to address these problems by (1) interviewing additional UH students (to increase our sample), and (2) interviewing men and women from the UWI, a college in the West Indies—a culture very different from the U. S. milieu (Hodge, 2002).

Study 2

Participants, Procedure, and Measures

In Study #2, the U.S. sample consisted of 297 students (205 women and 92 men) from the University of Hawaii. This group was comprised of the UH students interviewed in Study 1 *plus* an additional 126 UH students. (These participants completed the survey online, using a survey written in Perl by the first author and hosted on local servers.) The demographic characteristics of UH students recruited at Time 1 and Time 2 were virtually identical—they were young and came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and were involved in love affairs of varying intensities (see Study 1: Participants).

At the University of the West Indies, 116 students (103 women and 13 men) volunteered to take the online survey. UWI students were slightly older than UH

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between the over-benefited and the equitably treated in satisfaction. We are currently conducting another series of studies with European-Americans and Japanese nationals, however, which use the traditional measures of satisfaction (see Fuller, Hayashi, and Hatfield, in preparation.) *There* we would expect substantial differences in the satisfaction of the over-benefited and equitably treated—and our preliminary results suggest that we do in fact secure the usual differences in satisfaction.

students, ranging in age from 18-52 (*M* = 25.78, *SD* = 8.36.) The vast majority were of African descent (90%); a small minority did not identify with any racial background (9%), and 1% identified themselves as Asian-American. Participants took the same online survey as UH students, except that the question concerning relationship status was changed to fit with current Jamaican love relation customs (Hodge, 2002). The specific relationship breakdown was as follows: long-term (62%), married (13%), common-law (7%), engaged (4%), and visiting (4%). This is consistent with current customs in love-relations in Jamaica (Hodge, 2002, p. 476). "Common-law" is a union that is not legally sanctioned, while a "visiting relationship" is a non-residential, often permanent relationship in which couples do not live together.

The same measures were employed in Study 1 and Study 2.

Results

Before hypothesis testing, a t-test was conducted to compare independent and interdependent self-construal scores between the UH and UWI samples. It was predicted *a priori* that UWI would be the more collectivist culture and hence be higher on interdependent self-construal (and lower on independent self-construal). Jamaica is known to score lower than the US on individualism (Hofstede, 1980). Surprisingly, the UWI sample had a *higher* mean score for independent self-construal (*M* = 3.69, *SD* = .47) than did the UH sample (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = .45). This difference was statistically significant ($t(406) = -4.087$, $p<.001$). Similarly, the UWI sample had a lower mean score for interdependent self-construal (*M* = 3.31, *SD* = .48) than the UH sample (*M* = 3.5, *SD* = .38); this difference was also statistically significant ($t(399) = 4.15$, $p<.001$). To try to explain these unexpected findings, we conducted a one-way ANOVA using race (Asian-

American and European-American) from the UH and (African) from the UWI sample, predicting self-construal scores. Race turned out to be a predictor of independent self-construal ($F(2, 302) = 14.552$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$) and interdependent self-construal ($F(2,295) = 12.175$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$). Games-Howell post-hoc tests revealed that Asian-Americans (from the UH sample) on average scored lower on independent self-construal ($M = 3.375$, $SD = .04$) than either European-Americans (mean difference = -.248, $SD = .07$) or Africans from UWI, sample (mean difference = -.293, $SD = .06$) and higher on interdependent self-construal ($M = 3.579$, $SD = .03$) than either European-Americans (mean difference = .224, $SD = .05$) or Africans (mean difference =.226, $SD = .06$). There was no statistically significant difference between the African and European-American self-construal scores. Due to these findings, we will once again be considering race as a cultural proxy when testing cultural differences.

H1A: Predicting importance of equity in relationship from self-construal

We used self-construal scores to predict the transformed importance of equity scores for each sample. For UH ($F(2,291) = 3.22$, $p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$) and for UWI ($F(2,96) = 5.243$, $p = .007$, adjusted $R^2 = .08$), self-construal was a decent predictor of how important people considered equity to be in their relationships. Specifically, the higher people scored on interdependent self-construal, the more likely they were to report equity was “Very important” in their relationship (UH: b = .12, $t(290) = 1.992$, $p = .05$; UWI: b = .21, $t(96) = 2.043$, $p = .04$).

H1B: Predicting importance of equity in relationship from culture and race

Using a 2 (culture) x 3 (race) ANOVA, neither culture ($F(1, 306) = .62$, p = ns) nor race ($F(1, 306) = .74$, p = ns) was found to predict importance of equity in the love relationship.

H2A: Predicting equity in relationship from self-construal

A multinomial logistic regression model was used to test Q1A. As in Study 1, the final model according to the -2 Log Likelihood (-2LL) at 696.43 indicated poor model fit as well as the non-significant χ^2 (4, N = 415) = 8.471, p = .08, suggesting that self-construal was not a good predictor of membership in one of the various equity groups.

H2B: Predicting equity in relationship from culture and race

Two chi-square analyses were conducted using culture and race as predictors for equity group membership. As stated previously, race predicted self-construal scores, but did not predict equity group membership: χ^2 (4, N = 308) = 6.360, p = ns. Culture (or the source of the sample) was found to be a good indicator of the type of relationship; a third (33%) of those from UWI reported being in an under-benefiting relationship, 46% in an equitable relationship, and 21% in an over-benefiting relationship. This is contrasted by UH students whose majority (58%) found themselves in equitable relationships, 22% in under-benefited relationships, and 20% in over-benefiting relationships. UWI students more likely to consider their relationships to be unfair than did UH students. This difference was statistically significant: χ^2 (2, N = 413) = 6.894, p = .03.

Previous studies have shown that while men tend to feel over-benefited, women tend to feel under-benefited in their love relationships (Buunk & Van Yperen, 1989; Hatfield et al., 1984; Sprecher, 1988). Thus we conducted *post hoc* analyses to determine if this was true for our US and Jamaican samples. Using the full sample, we

confirmed previous studies; women, were more likely to report being under-benefited and men being over-benefited (χ^2 (2, N = 411) = 10.342, p = .006). However, this gender difference was not of our primary concern. In order to ensure that what we were seeing was a cultural difference in equity and not just a gender difference, we partitioned out only the women in both the UH and UWI samples and conducted an additional chi-square analysis to see if being from Jamaica would really increase the likelihood of being in an under-benefiting relationship. The chi-square analysis confirmed our hypothesis: female students from UH were more likely to report being in equitable relationships (61%) than UWI women (43%). Only 24% of women at UH reported being in an under-benefiting love relationship compared to 37% of women at UWI (χ^2 (2, N = 306) = 8.826, p = .012).

H3: Predicting relationship satisfaction from equity in relationship and culture

A 2 (UH versus UWI) by 3 (under-benefited, equitably treated, and over-benefited) ANOVA was conducted to predict transformed satisfaction scores. The interaction was not significant. Both samples showed a general linear relationship between equity and relationship satisfaction (see Figure 1). The main effects of culture (F(1, 406) = 75.23, p <.001, η_p^2 = .21) and equity group membership (F(1, 406) = 22.36, p <.001, η_p^2 = .14) were statistically significant. But more importantly, the interaction between culture and equity was statistically significant: (F(2, 406) = 4.34, p <.01, η_p^2 = .03). Therefore, satisfaction in a relationship is dependent upon both the culture of the person and how much equity is in the current love relationship. Separate one-way ANOVAs were conducted on each sample (UH and UWI) and for the UH sample (F(2, 295) = 16.74, p<.001, η_p^2 = .17), the most satisfied couples were those in equitable

relationships (*M* = 4.27, *SD* = .57), followed by those in the over-benefited group (*M* = 4.26, *SD* = .78) and the unhappiest group was the under-benefited (*M* = 3.50, *SD* = .83). Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons showed that the under-benefited group differed significantly from both the equitably treated and the over-benefited groups, but there was no difference between the equitably treated and over-benefited groups.

UWI students demonstrated a more pronounced linear relationship between equity and satisfaction than did UH students ($F(2, 106) = 10.93$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$): the most satisfied couples were those in the over-benefited groups (*M* = 3.62, *SD* = .35), followed by those in the equitably treated group (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = .43) and the unhappiest group was the under-benefited group (*M* = 3.13, *SD* = .45). Similarly, the Games-Howell comparisons showed that the under-benefited group differed significantly from both the equitably treated and over-benefited groups, but there was no difference between the equitably treated and over-benefited groups (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Conclusions

We proposed that people in different cultures or people possessing different self-construals (independent or interdependent) might differ in (1)how important they considered equity to be, (2) how equitable they judged their own relationships to be, and (3) how satisfied they were in equitable or inequitable relationships. In Study #2, contrary to prediction, independent self-construal scores were *not* a predictor of how important equity in relationship was seen to be. Instead (and surprisingly), the best predictor (albeit a weak one) for the importance of equity in the relationship was interdependent self-construal. The more interdependent people's self-construal, the

more important they believed equity was in their relationship. Culture was not a predictor of importance of equity.

Confirming our second hypothesis, we found cultural differences in how fair men and women in the US and Jamaica considered their relationships to be—US men and women judged their relationships to be fairer than did their Jamaican counterparts (who more often complained of under-benefit.) However, race, self-construal, and gender were not predictors of any equity differences.

Turning to our third hypothesis, we found strong support: satisfaction in love relationships are dependent upon *both* culture and equity. UWI students did demonstrate a linear relationship between equity and satisfaction, with over-benefited and equitably treated participants equally satisfied in their relationships and under-benefited participants the least satisfied. However, contrary to our predictions, UH students *also* demonstrated this trend (again see Figure 1).

Both Studies #1 and #2 interviewed university students. One might argue that we might secure different results with a more global, cosmopolitan sample. In Study #3 we attempted to address this possible drawback.

Study 3

Participants, Procedure, and Measures

From around the world, 358 people (270 women and 86 men) were recruited for a WWW based study. Most were from western countries: US (74%), UK (6%), Canada (5%), and Australia (3%). The other 12% of participants came from various countries (e.g., Philippines, China, Malaysia, Germany, and Sweden). A large age range of people participated (18-62), but the average age was about the same as the UWI

sample (*M* = 25.04, *SD*, 8.59). This Internet sample was ethnically diverse: European-American (65%), Asian-American (13%), African-American (7%), Hispanic (3%), and all others (12%). The average participant reported being in a relationship for five months (*SD* = 6.63 months), however many saw their relationship as long term (41%). The rest saw their relationships as follows: short term (22%), married (19%), and engaged (18%).

All the measures employed in Studies #1 and #2 were used in Study #3.

Study #3 was a web based design. The same online survey employed in Study 2 was used in Study 3, but advertised online through various community based websites: http://www.craigslist.org, http://www.yahoo.com, and http://www.youthink.com and more psychology oriented websites like the Social Psychology Network (http://www.socialpsychology.org) and Psychological Research on the Net (http://psych.hanover.edu/research/exponnet.html). Incentive to participate included receiving a summary of one's scores at the end of the survey. All participants' answers were non-identifiable and were treated in accordance with APA ethical standards.

Results

H1A: Predicting importance of equity in relationship from self-construal

For the Internet sample, self-construal scores were not a good predictor of the transformed importance of equity scores ($F(2, 321) = 2.24$, $p = .11$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$).

H1B: Predicting importance of equity in relationship from culture

Culture (or source of sample) was not significant in predicting how important equity was seen to be in the love relationship ($F(2, 768) = 1.50$, $p = .22$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$).

H2A: Predicting equity in relationship from self-construal

As in Studies 1 and 2, the final model according to the -2 Log Likelihood (-2LL) at 631.159 indicated poor model fit as well as the non-significant χ^2 (4, *N* = 324) = 2.375, *p* = ns, suggesting that for the Internet sample, self-construal was not a good predictor of membership into one of the various equity groups for the Internet sample.

H2B: Predicting equity in relationship from culture

Two chi-square analyses were conducted, using culture (or sample source) to predict equity group membership. Neither the Internet and UWI samples (χ^2 (2, *N* = 471) = 1.970, *p* = ns) nor the Internet and UH samples (χ^2 (2, *N* = 656) = 3.461, *p* = ns) differed significantly in terms of the types of relationship equity they reported.

H3: Predicting relationship satisfaction from culture and equity

A 3 (UH, UWI, and the Internet) by 3 (under-benefited, equitably treated, and over-benefited) ANOVA was conducted to predict relationship satisfaction. As in Study 2, the interaction between culture and equity group membership was significant (*F*(2, 295) = 5.11, *p*<.001, η_p^2 = .04). Therefore the main effects of culture (*F*(2, 295) = 77.26, *p*<.001, η_p^2 = .22) and equity group membership (*F*(2, 295) = 44.16, *p*<.001, η_p^2 = .14) will not be discussed. A separate one-way ANOVA was conducted for the Internet sample, demonstrating that a general linear trend existed between equity group membership and relationship satisfaction (*F*(2, 295) = 22.74, *p*<.001, η_p^2 = .14). Those in the equitable relationships were most satisfied (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = .36), followed by the over-benefited (*M* = 3.59, *SD* = .46), and the least happy being under-benefited (*M* = 3.25, *SD* = .54). However, as in Studies 1 and 2, Games-Howell comparisons demonstrated that those in over-benefited and equitable relationships did not

significantly differ from each other in terms of relationship satisfaction. Only comparisons between under-benefited and equitably treated, and under-benefited and over-benefited participants showed a statistically significant difference in relationship satisfaction (see Figure 2.)

Insert Figure 2 about here

General Conclusions

In this series of studies, we discovered that, overall; Equity theory is surprisingly robust in its ability to predict men and women's attitudes and reactions to equity/inequity.

In all samples, on average, men and women—be they of different cultures, races, or personal self-construals—insisted that possessing an equitable relationship is "important" to "very important." Such unanimity came as a surprise. Social psychologists have long assumed that in traditional cultures men and women care far less about fairness and equity than they do in modern, industrialized nations. Rosenblatt and Cunningham (1976), for example, claim that equity is of less importance for such peoples: "[regardless of] who has the better life, a man or a woman, they [people of non-U.S. cultures] might argue that the woman has the better life, or they might argue that the lives of men and women are different and not comparable" (from Buunk & VanYperen, 1989, p. 82).

These three studies tend to refute that claim. People thought not to care very much about equity turn out to care very much indeed. One interesting cultural difference in values: in both our combined UH sample and our Jamaican samples, women who possessed an interdependent self-construal were *more* concerned with

fairness and justice than were their peers. This finding came as a surprise. We, like other cross-cultural theorists, had assumed that it would be independent men and women (not the interdependent) who would be most concerned with "what's in it for me." Once again we see that cultural theory does not always match reality. There could be many reasons for this result.

In addition, we found that in all three cultures, men and women reacted much the same way to existing equities/inequities. All felt most satisfied when receiving exactly what they deserved from their relationships—no more (perhaps) but certainly no less. Most importantly, this satisfaction is dependent upon *both* equity within the relationship and the culture of the person. Thus it is important when gauging the satisfaction in a romantic relationship that one take into consideration not only the equity reported, but also the cultural background of the individual. A person from a collectivistic culture like our Jamaican sample may demonstrate a more linear relationship between equity and satisfaction while one from a more cosmopolitan or western independent culture may demonstrate the more common curvilinear relationship between equity and satisfaction.

We see that there is indeed merit in cross-cultural psychologists' contention that scientists must be sensitive to cultural considerations in designing theory and research. In these studies, we secured some fascinating cultural differences—both in how fair men and women judged their dating and marital relationships to be and (as a consequence) how satisfied they were with those relationships.

People around the world may aspire to social justice, but not all are able to achieve that goal. Men and women from different cultures differed markedly in how fair and equitable they considered their relationships to be. (This was true whether we

considered culture, racial groups, or self-construals.) People from the United States felt most equitably treated (and as a consequence were the most satisfied with their relationships.) Men and women (and especially women) from Jamaica, in the West Indies, felt least equitably treated (and thus were the least satisfied with their relationships.)

In all cultures men and women reacted much the same way when they felt fairly or unfairly treated. (This was true whether we considered culture, racial groups, or self-construals.) In all cultures, men and women felt most satisfied when they felt they were receiving all the reward they deserved (when they felt over-benefited or equitably treated.) When they perceived they were being taken advantage of (i.e., when they felt under-benefited) they felt markedly dissatisfied.

What about the over-benefited versus the equitably treated? In the classic studies, scientists have found that the over-benefited feel more guilty and less satisfied in their love relationships than do the fairly treated. Did we replicate this consistent finding? Alas, at this point we are hesitant to answer “Yes” or “No.” Certainly, in this series of studies we found no evidence that the over-benefited felt the slightest bit of guilt or anxiety about their privileged position. Alas, as we indicated, these three studies were plagued by a methodological problem. In measuring “satisfaction,” we switched from the traditional Austin and Hatfield (1974) measure of satisfaction, which had been used in all previous equity studies, to one we thought would be a better measure. Alas, we failed to realize that in adopting the Hendrick (1988) scale, we were precluding the possibility of people indicating they felt guilty and ashamed when realizing how little they gave (or how little their partners received) in their love relationships.

Currently, then, there are three reasons why in Studies 1-3 we might have failed to find that the over-benefited felt uneasy about their privileged position:

- The world has changed. People no longer feel concerned about reaping more benefits than they deserve.
- The American demographics have changed. Twenty-five years ago, when most of the original Equity theory studies were run, the samples were almost entirely European-American. Today, Hawai'i, like the rest of the US, is indeed multicultural.
- We used a flawed measure of Relationship Satisfaction. In future, if we wish to determine whether guilt and shame do in fact poison relationships, we must utilize a measure of relationship satisfaction that in fact assesses those constructs.

At present, we are predisposed to the last explanation for our failure to replicate all previous studies.

This series of studies impresses us yet again with the importance of cross-cultural research; such research may indeed yield new and exciting theoretical and empirical findings. We end with the traditional, but true, observation that more cross-cultural research needs to be done.

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Table 1

Table 1. Relationship Between Equity in Love Relationship and Relationship Satisfaction for European American and Asian American Participants

Race	(*n*)	Mean Relationship Satisfaction	*df*	*F* value	η_p^2
European American			2	21.06*	0.28
Overbenefited	8	4.34			
Equitable	28	4.32			
Underbenefited	4	3.15			
Asian American			2	15.51*	0.19
Overbenefited	15	4.27			
Equitable	57	4.32			
Underbenefited	21	3.49			
Pooled within-cell SD		.71			

*$p < .01$

**$p < .001$

Note. Non-transformed average scores are showed (1= very unsatisfied, 5= very satisfied). F-values were obtained using transformed scores.

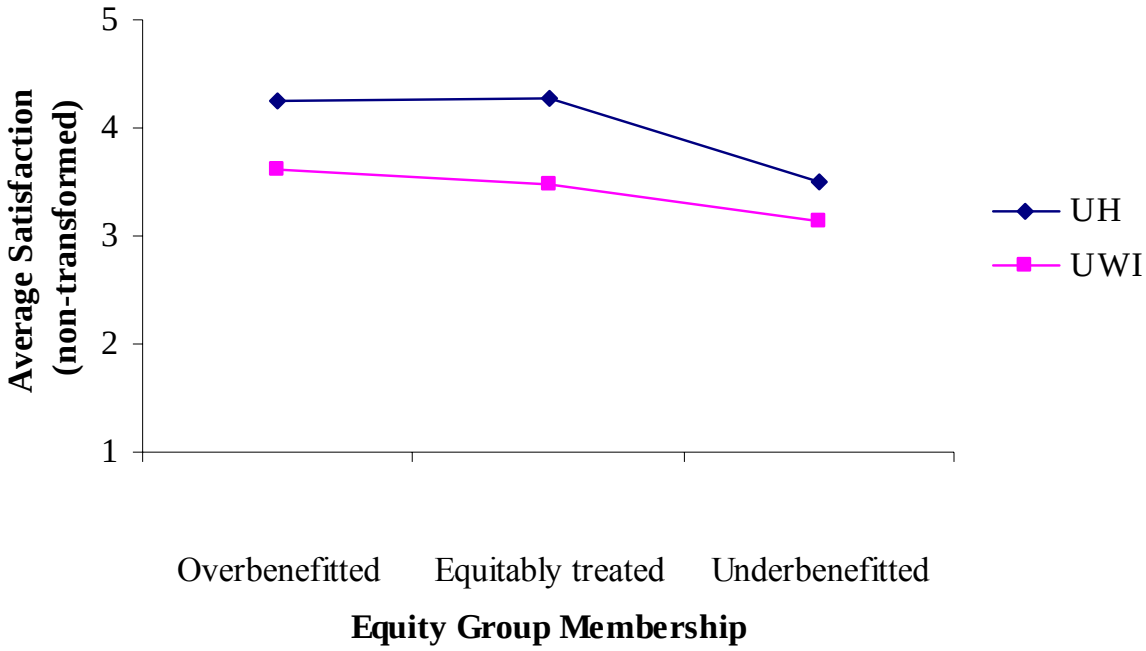
Figure Captions

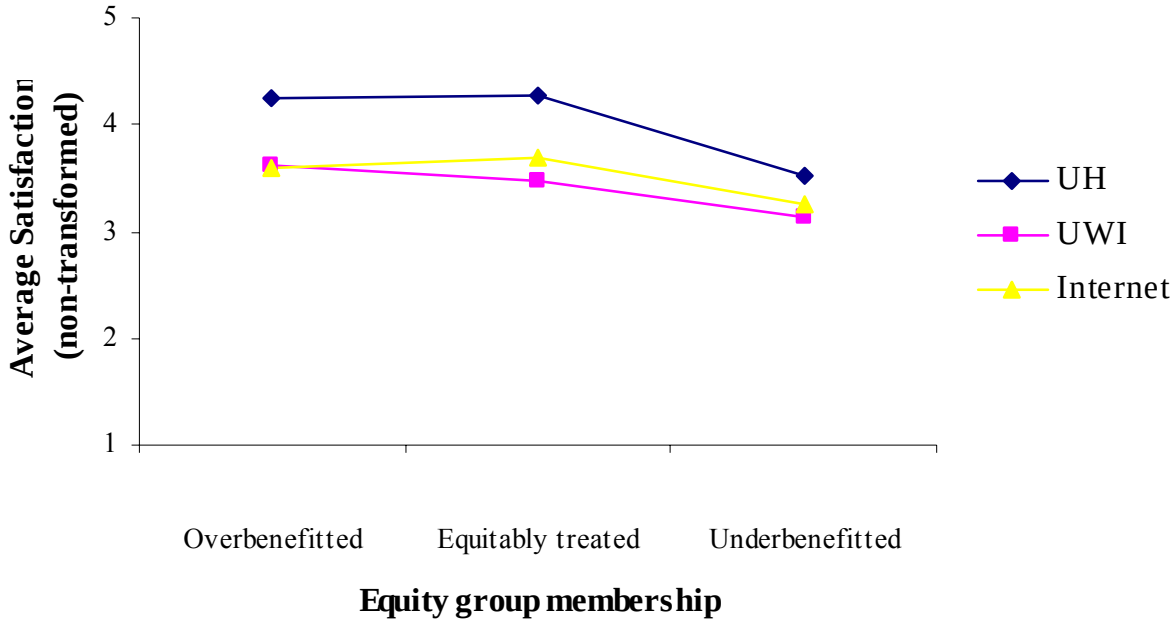
Figure 1

Average satisfaction in love relationship as a function of culture and reported Equity in UH and UWI students.

Figure 2

Average satisfaction in love relationship as a function of culture and reported Equity in UH, UWI, and Internet participants.


5
4
3
2
1
Average Satisfaction (non-transformed)
UH
UWI
Overbenefitted
Equitably treated
Underbenefitted
Equity Group Membership


5
4
3
2
1
Average Satisfaction
(non-transformed)
Overbenefitted
Equitably treated
Underbenefitted
Equity group membership
UH
UWI
Internet