

EFFECT OF TIME ON TENDENCY TO COMPENSATE A VICTIM¹

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Summary.—Previous research has shown that individuals may reduce the distress they feel on harming another by making reparation to their victim, by justifying their harm-doing or by seeking punishment for the act. Prediction of which distress-reduction technique or which combination will be used has been facilitated by extending theoretical equity formulations to the harm-doing situation. The present experiment, a quasi-replication of Berscheid and Walster (1967), tested and supported the hypothesis that prediction of harm-doer response based on harm-doer motivation to restore equity to his relationship with the victim will be successful primarily when there is a time interval between commitment of the harmful act and a decision to perform a distress-reduction act. When such time is not available to the harm-doer, saliency of distress-reduction opportunity may be a better predictor.

Research exploring the ways in which an individual who has harmed another will subsequently react toward his victim indicates that there are three major ways by which a harm-doer may reduce the distress he feels following commitment of a harmful act. Under a wide variety of conditions, harm-doers have been observed to: (1) make *reparation* to their victims, (2) *justify* their harm-doing by various means, including derogation of the victim and denial of responsibility for the act, (3) seek *punishment* for commitment of the act.

While demonstrations are plentiful that these reactions may follow harm-doing (cf. Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, in press) only recently have attempts been made to specify the conditions under which a harm-doer will choose one mode of response rather than another. In such an attempt Walster, Berscheid, and Walster have elaborated and extended the theoretical equity formulations of Homans (1961) and of Adams (1965) to the harm-doing situation. Following the lines of argument in this extension of the equity formulation, Berscheid and Walster (1967) explored some of the conditions under which a harm-doer would compensate his victim. They proposed, and found, that a harm-doer would be much more likely to perform a specific compensatory act if it would *exactly* restore equity to the harm-doer-victim relationship than if performance of the act either would be insufficient to make up for the harm done or would confer excessive benefit upon the victim relative to the harm done. Under con-

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ditions of inadequate or excessive compensation it was found that the harm-doer would prefer not to make any compensation at all rather than to compensate a little or too much.

While this experiment and others (e.g., Berscheid, Boye, & Walster, 1968) suggest that an equity approach might be theoretically useful in predicting how a harm-doer will respond, it seems likely that the success of such predictions will be dependent upon the amount of *time* the harm-doer has between the commitment of the act and the point at which he must decide whether or not to reduce his distress in a particular way. If time is available, the harm-doer has an opportunity to consider both the extent to which his act has disturbed the equity of his relationship with the victim and the extent to which each of his distress-reduction opportunities will restore equity and maintain the previous outcome level in the relationship.

What will determine reaction when such time is not available? It seems reasonable to suppose that when an individual is caught up in a harm-doing situation, the distress he feels after committing the harmful act is foremost in his mind. If a distress-reduction opportunity appears immediately after commitment of the act and if the harm-doer must quickly decide whether to take advantage of the opportunity or let it slip away, we might expect that the harm-doer will choose to take advantage of the salient opportunity even if that act will not exactly produce or even closely approximate equity restoration, and, further, even if that act may reduce the level of outcomes previously enjoyed in the relationship.

A necessary condition for the accuracy of predictions based on an equity formulation, then, may be a time delay between the point of commitment of the harmful act and the point of decision whether or not to perform a distress-reduction act.

The following experiment is a quasi-replication of the Berscheid and Walster experiment. It was designed to test the hypothesis that adequacy of compensation to restore equity will be a more important determinant of whether or not a harm-doer will choose to compensate when the harm-doer is given time to think about the implications of making the compensatory act than when he is not. When the harm-doer is given little time to consider the extent to which he has violated equity in his relationship with the victim and the ramifications of performing particular compensatory acts, we expect Ss to display a stronger tendency (than was demonstrated by Berscheid and Walster) to compensate under *insufficient* and *excessive* compensation conditions. When harm-doers were given very little time to consider their decision to perform a compensatory act or not, most Ss, feeling distress, would grab the opportunity to perform the act. Only with time would the motivation to restore equity to the relationship reveal itself in a reluctance to perform inadequate and excessive compensatory acts and a willingness to perform adequate compensatory acts.

METHOD

Overview

All *Ss* inflicted harm on another person, and, in all instances, the amount of harm done to the victim remained constant. Specifically, each *S* prevented the victim from winning a prize of two books of S&H Green Stamps in a cooperative game.

Ss were then divided into three compensation groups. In an Insufficient compensation group, *Ss* were given an opportunity to make a compensation which was, in terms of the amount of benefit it would give the victim, inadequate to amend the amount of harm done him. Specifically, harm-doers were given an opportunity to award a bonus of a few green stamps to their victim. In an Adequate compensation group, *Ss* were given an opportunity to compensate the victim exactly with two books of green stamps. Finally, in an Excessive compensation group, the only available compensation was one which would benefit the victim over and above the amount of harm done, five books of stamps.

Each of the three compensation groups were then subdivided, thus yielding a 3×2 design. Half of the *Ss* in each compensation condition (the Delay *Ss*) were given an opportunity to think about the implications of taking advantage of the compensation opportunity. The remaining *Ss* in each compensation condition (the Immediate *Ss*) were asked to make a decision as to whether or not they would compensate almost immediately after performance of the harmful act.

It was predicted that the tendency to compensate in the Delay condition would parallel the results obtained by Berscheid and Walster (1967), since *Ss* in that experiment were also given time to consider the implications of making the compensatory act, i.e., *Ss* in the Inadequate and Excessive conditions would compensate less often than *Ss* in the Adequate condition. It was predicted that Immediate *Ss*, however, would show a fairly similar tendency to perform the compensatory act under all conditions of compensation, i.e., the adequacy of the compensatory act would not be as strong a determinant of whether or not the act would be performed.

Subjects

Ss were women who belonged to various church auxiliary groups in the Minneapolis area. These women had volunteered to participate in a psychological experiment, which was previously described to the head of each church organization, in return for a donation to the church's treasury. The 108 *Ss* participating in this experiment were run in groups ranging in size from 2 to 4.

Procedure

With only a few exceptions, which shall be noted below, the procedure of this experiment exactly paralleled that followed by Berscheid and Walster (1967) and reported in their article.

One exception to this procedure was, of course, in the presentation of the compensatory opportunity. As in the original experiment, all *Ss* made a "drawing" to determine the magnitude of the bonus they could award either to their partner (and victim) or to an orphan child (for whom they could win stamps which would be mailed to him²). The bonus consisted of a few stamps, two books, or five books, depending on whether *S* had been randomly assigned to the Insufficient, Adequate, or Excessive compensation condition. If *S* had been randomly assigned to the Immediate condition, *E* handed *S* a green stamp "certificate," marked for 10 stamps, 2 books, or 5 books, immediately after the drawing. Immediate *Ss* were then informed by *E* that: "I have to go next door and get the test from your partner. She has been filling it out while we have been talking. When I bring it back, please grade it quickly as your partner has to leave early, and, of course, fill out the stamp certificate." *E* then left the room, waited 10 sec., returned with the test, left again, and reappeared 1 min. later. At this time almost all women had filled out the certificate and graded the test. Those who had not, required only a few more seconds to complete the simple task. Thus, *Ss* in the Immediate condition were given a little over 1 min. to fill out the certificate.

If *S* had been assigned to the Delay condition, *Ss* were again instructed after the drawing as to the nature of the compensatory opportunity open to them (the number of stamps which could be awarded either to the victim or to the child) but were not given the certificate to fill out. *E* informed *S* that her partner was taking the test and he would bring it in along with the stamp certificate when it was completed. He then excused himself, and after a delay of 5 min. reappeared with the test and the certificate and the instruction to grade it quickly as the partner had to leave early. Presumably, *Ss* in this condition had somewhat over 5 min. to think about the compensatory opportunity before being confronted with the necessity of filling out the certificate.

It was made clear to all *Ss* before they filled out their stamp certificates that they would not have a chance to compensate their victim privately since she was planning to leave before *S* and, of course, her identity was not known to *S*. *Ss* also believed that their victim would not be told that they were responsible for any stamps she received or did not receive. They were instructed that the recipient would be told that the stamps came from the company sponsoring the research.

After *Ss* had filled out their stamp certificates, *Ss* were requested to fill out a questionnaire in which some of their reactions to the harm-doing situation were tapped. This information was collected in an attempt to aid in the planning of future experimentation. After this questionnaire had been filled out, the experiment was terminated, the confederate-victim was introduced, the deception and

²As the reader will probably guess, the orphan child is simply a device designed to make it possible for *S* to decide not to compensate her partner. If *S* had simply been asked to decide whether to compensate her partner or not, choosing not to compensate would have been difficult.

the necessity for it were explained, and the ladies were thanked for their participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was proposed that individuals would be less likely to compensate their victims when the available compensation was insufficient or excessive than when it was adequate, and that sufficiency of compensation should be more important when individuals had adequate time to consider the ramifications of compensation than when they did not. With the passage of time, we expected Ss to display a decreased tendency to compensate in the insufficient and excessive conditions.

When we examine our data (see Table 1), we see that our prediction appears to be supported. As expected, the pattern of compensation observed in the Delay condition appears to replicate the results of the comparable condition in the Berscheid and Walster experiment: Women in the Adequate compensation condition are much more likely to compensate their victims (94% of the time) than women in the Inadequate (39%) and Excessive (67%) compensation conditions. For Ss in the Immediate condition, however, adequacy of compensation had no effect on their tendency to compensate. Most Immediate Ss appeared to give the compensation whether it was Insufficient (72%), Adequate (78%), or Excessive (83%).

The appropriate test of statistical significance for our prediction that sufficiency of compensation is an important determinant of tendency to compensate only when Ss are given time to consider the implications of performing a particular compensatory act is a quadratic interaction contrast of the form $\sum_1 = +1$ (Immediate, Insufficient) -2 (Immediate, Adequate) $+1$ (Immediate, Excessive) -1 (Delayed, Insufficient) $+2$ (Delayed, Adequate) -1 (Delayed, Excessive). We tested the hypothesis $H_0: \sum_1 = 0$ against the alternative $H_a: \sum_1 \neq 0$. [An explanation of this procedure may be found in Hays (1963).³ This contrast was significant at the .02 level of confidence ($F = 5.76, 1/102 df$).⁴

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS CONDITIONS CHOOSING TO
COMPENSATE THE VICTIM

Time of Compensation	Amount of Compensation Possible	N	% Compensating Victim
Immediate	Inadequate	(18)	72
Immediate	Adequate	(18)	78
Immediate	Excessive	(18)	83
Delayed	Inadequate	(18)	39
Delayed	Adequate	(18)	94
Delayed	Excessive	(18)	67

³Since we are utilizing 0—1 data, the reader might feel that a multiple contingency test is a more appropriate method of analysis (Sutcliffe, 1957). Both analyses give almost identical results. Recent research would indicate that with a reasonable sample size there

The results of this experiment, then, replicate those of Berscheid and Walster which demonstrate that adequacy of compensation is a determinant of tendency to compensate. They also, however, indicate that a limitation must be placed upon predictions of harm-doer response made on the basis of harm-doer motivation to restore equity to his relationship with the victim. Such predictions may be expected to be accurate only when the harm-doer is given ample opportunity to consider the extent to which his act has disturbed the equity of his relationship with another, as well as the extent to which the distress-reduction techniques available to him will restore equity, before being compelled to act upon any particular distress-reduction opportunity.

The results of the present experiment suggest, then, that the victim who wishes compensation, or society (which often finds it desirable for harm-doers to make compensation regardless of its adequacy), may engineer the voluntary performance of compensation through making salient a particular compensatory act which the harm-doer is capable of performing, immediately after the harm has been done and making clear that there is a time limit on the performance of the act. It is clear that if the harm-doer is given time to think about the implications of his act, he is less likely to make voluntary restitution when the only compensatory acts available to him are inadequate or excessive. In the delay period the harm-doer not only has an opportunity to consider how these acts are inadequate to restore equity but also to think of the other distress-reduction possibilities—justification and self-punishment—which, while they may restore equity to the relationship as perceived by the harm-doer, are likely to leave the victim uncompensated for the harm done him.

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is no appreciable difference between chi square or an *F* test on discrete data (Cochran, 1950).

⁴Since in some cases the percentage of subjects compensating is very small, while in others the percentage is relatively large, an arc sin transformation of the percentages may be appropriate. When such a transformation is made, the results we secure remain essentially the same: $p | 1 = 0 | \text{data} = .02, F = 5.61, 1 \text{ and } 102 \text{ df}$.