

Equity and Premarital Sex

Elaine Walster, G. W. Walster, and Jane Traupmann
Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin—Madison

Supposedly, Equity is a general theory which applies to all human relations. Yet, the theory has never been tested in deeply intimate settings. This study was designed to determine whether formal Equity theory can give us insight into dating couples' intimate romantic and sexual relationships. We proposed that if people feel they are getting less from a relationship than they deserve, they feel entitled to "call the shots" sexually. In light of the double standard, we expected underbenefited *men* to demand that their partners go fairly far, sexually. In contrast, we expected underbenefited *women* to insist that their partners wait until they are ready for sex—and that may be a long wait. (In brief, we expected the subject's sex and the equity of a relationship [Is subject underbenefited? equitably treated? overbenefited?] to interact in determining how far a couple goes sexually.) Our hypotheses were not confirmed. Couples were most intimate in the *equitable* relationships.

Presumably, Equity is a general theory. Presumably, Equity principles steer all human interactions (see Berkowitz & Walster, 1976). Thus far, Equity theory has been applied to predict men's and women's reactions in such diverse interactions as employer/employee relations, exploiter/victim relations, philanthropist/recipient relations, and the like. (See Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, for a comprehensive review of this research.) Equity theory has proved to be surprisingly successful in predicting men's and women's reactions in such casual interactions. Is Equity theory equally successful in predicting people's reactions to deeply intimate interactions? Surprisingly, we do not know. It is only within the last year that researchers have begun to determine whether equity principles guide the interactions of sweethearts, married couples, and extramarital lovers (see Walster, Utne, & Traupmann, in press; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). The present study was de-

signed to determine whether formal Equity theory can provide insight into dating couples' intimate romantic and sexual relationships.

Theoretical Background

Equity theory (Walster et al., 1978) makes a clear prediction of the impact that equity/inequity should have on an intimate relationship:

Proposition III: When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals feel. (p. 6)

According to the theory, couples who are in equitable relationships should feel relatively comfortable about their relationships. Couples in inequitable relationships should not. Both the underbenefited (who are getting far less than they deserve out of their relationships) and their overbenefited partners (who are getting far more than they deserve) should feel distinctly uneasy when they contemplate their relationships. The underbenefited should feel resentment and anger about not getting all that they feel they deserve; their overbenefited mates should feel guilty or fearful of losing their favored position.

This research was supported in part by National Institute of Mental Health Grant MH 26681. We would like to thank Michael Baker and Sue Sprecher for their help in this research.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Elaine Walster, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, 1180 Observatory, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.

Walster et al. (1978) continue,

Proposition IV: Individuals who discover they are in an inequitable relationship attempt to eliminate their distress by restoring equity. The greater the inequity that exists, the more distress they feel, and the harder they try to restore equity. (p. 6)

According to the theory, then, when men and women recognize that their relationship is grossly inequitable, they should do *something* to try to "set things right": They should try to (a) restore actual equity and/or (b) restore psychological equity to their relationship. Of course, they might simply decide to terminate their relationship.

Restoration of Actual Equity

One way a dating couple can set things right is by inaugurating real changes in their relationship. The underbenefited partner—who is getting far less than he or she has coming—may well demand better treatment from his or her partner. The overbenefited partner may well reluctantly agree to cede such rewards.

Examples of restoration of equity follow.¹

Physical appearance: The underbenefited partner may feel entitled to show up for dates in whatever he happens to be wearing at the moment. *Self-sacrifice:* The underbenefited partner may well be reluctant to make any sacrifices for his partner's benefit. When an argument arises as to whether they go to see The Who or the Utah Repertory Dance Theater, whether he should take her to Luchow's or to McDonald's, he should be inclined to take a stronger stand than usual. *Sex:* The underbenefited person may well feel entitled to have things *his* way sexually. He might feel that his partner should be as warm or aloof as *he* prefers; that they should have sex when *he* feels like it, and abstain when he doesn't; that she should be willing to explore the sexual practices that *he* prefers.

Of course, his overbenefited partner's reactions should be complementary to his own. Since she feels she's already getting much more than she deserves, she might be especially eager to set things right by agreeing to his demands.

There are a variety of ways, then, that a mismatched couple can restore *actual* equity

to their relationship. (See Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, for a review of evidence that couples do use a variety of techniques to restore equity to their marital relationships.)

Restoration of Psychological Equity

Of course, men and women sometimes find it harder to change their behavior than to change their minds. Sometimes couples, threatened by the discovery that their relationship is an unbalanced one, prefer to close their eyes and reassure themselves that "really, everything is in perfect order." Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) document the variety of techniques that couples use to convince themselves that an inequitable relationship is, in fact, perfectly fair.

Terminating the Relationship

If all else fails, the couple might choose to simply give up and abandon their relationship.

Equity and the Double Standard

We have said that the person who feels he's getting less from a relationship than he deserves feels entitled to call the shots sexually. But what does that mean?

In the past, a double standard existed. Men were allowed—if not encouraged—to get sex whenever and wherever they could. Women were supposed to save themselves for marriage. Today, remnants of the double standard still exist. (See Baker, 1974; Ehrmann, 1959; Kaats & Davis, 1970; Reiss, 1967; Schofield, 1965; and Sorenson, 1973.)

In light of the double standard, we would expect men or women—who feel they should have things their way sexually—to feel entitled to demand quite different things. We would expect underbenefited men to feel that they are in a position to demand intimate sexual behavior from their mates. In contrast, we would expect underbenefited women to

¹ In the following examples, the underbenefited person is always labeled *he* and his overbenefited partner *she*. This should help the reader keep things straight. The pronouns could, of course, be reversed.

expect their partners to wait until they are ready for sex—and that may be a long wait.

There is some sparse anecdotal evidence for these conclusions. For example, Blau (1967) observes that men who have the “upper hand” in a relationship often use their powerful position to gain sexual favors. He reports that women who have the upper hand behave quite differently: They assert their right to be only as intimate as they desire.

Ehrmann (1959) also cites evidence in support of Blau’s contention. Ehrmann found that when men and women had sexual relations with someone from a social class other than their own, men tended to have sex with women from a *lower* social class than their own, whereas women tended to have sex with men from a *higher* social class than their own.

In part, then, the present study was designed to test the following hypotheses: We predicted that a *person’s sex* and the *equity/inequity of his/her relationship* (i.e., is he underbenefited? equitably treated? overbenefited?) should interact in determining how sexual a relationship is. Specifically, we expected a Sex \times Underbenefit/Equitable Treatment/Overbenefit interaction in (a) how far the man (or woman) pressures (or allows) his (her) partner to go sexually, (b) how early in their relationship they have sexual intercourse, (c) how many dates they go on before they have sexual intercourse, and (d) what percentage of their dates is devoted to sex.

We also thought that—for those couples who do have sexual intercourse—Sex \times Underbenefit/Equitable Treatment/Overbenefit might be reflected in the *reasons* men and women give for having intercourse. (Did they do it to please themselves? to please their partner? for their mutual pleasure?)

Method

Subjects

Subjects were obtained from all men and women enrolled in an introductory course in human sexuality. Of all students in the course, 1% had never dated anyone; 30% considered themselves to be casual daters; 58%, to be steady daters; and 11% were “living with” someone or were married. Only the 227 men and 310 women who were casual or steady daters were interviewed for this study.

Assessing the Equity/Inequity of a Dating Relationship

During the second week of the semester (Time 1), we asked men and women to complete an anonymous questionnaire. We began with the following explanation:

Recently, psychologists have become interested in “dating” and “marriage contracts.” At one time, Americans’ marriage contracts were fairly standard. Couples promised to “love, honor, and cherish”—and that was often all they thought about it. Recently, however, young people have started to become a bit more thoughtful about the kinds of relationships they want. They’ve started to think in very concrete ways about the kinds of things they’re willing to put into their relationships—and the kinds of things they expect in return.

We mentioned that, recently, two Wisconsin sociologists had interviewed young couples about what they thought they (and their partners) *contributed* to their marriages—and what they both *got out* of their marriages.

These young couples mentioned a variety of things—good and bad—that they thought a person could contribute (or fail to contribute) to a marriage. They cited such *personal contributions* as being a physically attractive person, being intelligent, and being sociable; such *emotional contributions* as being a loving person and an understanding person; and such *day-to-day contributions* as taking care of the home, contributing to the family, and helping to make decisions. The couples also cited failure to make these contributions.

Couples also mentioned a variety of things—good and bad—that they thought a person could get out of a relationship. They listed *personal* rewards and frustrations, *emotional* rewards and frustrations, and *day-to-day* rewards and frustrations people could derive from their marriages.

We asked students to think about the things that they (and their partners) contributed to *their* relationships—and the things they (and their partners) got out of their relationships:

What we’d like to do now is find out a little about how—considering what you’re putting into it and what you’re getting out of it—your relationship “stacks up.” What we’d like you to do is think of your relationship *before you got sexually involved*.

Then we asked students to complete the Walster et al. (1977) Global Measures of Participants’ Inputs, Outcomes, and Equity/Inequity (reported in Walster et al., 1978). We asked the subjects the following four questions about the contributions and outcomes of their relationships:

1. All things considered, how would you describe *your* contributions to your relationship?

2. All things considered, how would you describe *your partner's* contributions to your relationship?
3. All things considered, how would you describe *your* outcomes from your relationship?
4. All things considered, how would you describe *your partner's* outcomes from your relationship?

For each question, subjects circled the correct response on an 8-point scale. The answer scale, which follows, was the same for each question.

- +4. Extremely positive.
- +3. Very positive.
- +2. Moderately positive.
- +1. Slightly positive.
- 1. Slightly negative.
- 2. Moderately negative.
- 3. Very negative.
- 4. Extremely negative.

These estimates enabled us to calculate whether the students were underbenefited, equitably treated, or overbenefited.

According to Walster et al. (1978, p. 8),

An equitable relationship exists if a person *scrutinizing* the relationship concludes that all participants are receiving equal *relative gains* from the relationship; i.e., where:

$$\frac{(O_A - I_A)}{(|I_A|)^{k_A}} = \frac{(O_B - I_B)}{(|I_B|)^{k_B}}$$

In the above formula, $|I_A|$ and $|I_B|$ represent a scrutineer's perception of Person A's and Person B's inputs. I_A and I_B are the absolute values of their inputs. The scrutineer's perception of Person A's and Person B's outcomes are designated as O_A and O_B . Exponents k_A and k_B take on the value +1 or -1, according to the sign of A's and B's inputs and gains (outputs - inputs).

Students' relationships were classified as follows:

Greatly underbenefited men and women were those whose outcomes were far less than they deserved; that is, $(O_A - \hat{O}_A)/|I_A| = 31.00$ to -51 , where \hat{O}_A = the outcomes the person *should* have received, had the relationship been equitable. \hat{O}_A is obtained by solving definitional equations for O_A , given I_A , I_B , and O_B ; see Walster (1975).

Slightly underbenefited men and women were those whose outcomes were slightly less than they deserved; that is, $(O_A - \hat{O}_A)/|I_A| = -.50$ to -10 .

Equitably treated men and women were those who were receiving exactly what they deserved from their relationships; that is, $(O_A - \hat{O}_A)/|I_A| = .00$.

Slightly overbenefited men and women were those whose outcomes were slightly greater than they deserved; that is, $(O_A - \hat{O}_A)/|I_A| = +.10$ to $+.50$.

Greatly overbenefited men and women were those whose outcomes were greater than they deserved; that is, $(O_A - \hat{O}_A)/|I_A| = +.51$ to $+31.00$.

Assessing Men's and Women's Contentment/Distress

Students were asked to complete the Austin Measure of Contentment/Distress (reported in Walster et al., 1978): "When you think about your relationship—what you put into it and what you get out of it—and what your partner puts into it, and what s/he gets out of it—how does that make you feel?"

They then indicated how "content," how "happy," and how "angry" and "guilty" they felt. (Possible answers ranged from 1 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Very much.")

Austin's Total Mood Index is calculated by summing the respondents' content and happy scores minus their angry and guilty scores. The higher the score, the more content (and the less distressed) they are. There was a main effect of subject's sex: at Time 1, $F(1, 335) = 43.14$; at Time 2 (3½ months after original testing), $F(1, 158) = 13.33$, both $ps < .0001$.

Assessing Whether a Double Standard Still Exists

During the first week of the semester, students were asked to indicate whether they thought a double standard exists at the University of Wisconsin. Sixty-one percent of the men and 64% of the women indicated that it does.

(Our data provide some additional evidence that remnants of the double standard still exist. We asked men and women *why* they became sexually involved with their partners: "Because they wanted to?" "Because their partner wanted to?" Men, either through chivalry or honesty, were far more likely to report that it was *they*, not their partners, who wanted to have intercourse.)

Assessing How Sexual a Relationship Is

How much sexual intimacy men and women demanded from (or permitted) their partners was assessed *via* the following scale:

How Intimate Is Your Relationship?

1. How far have you gone with your partner? (Check all that you have engaged in.)

_____ 1. Necking: kissing and hugging.

_____ 2. French or deep kissing.

_____ 3. Petting:

IF A MAN: "I touched her covered breasts."

IF A WOMAN: "He touched my covered breasts."

_____ 4. Petting:

IF A MAN: "I touched her naked breasts."

IF A WOMAN: "He touched my naked breasts."

_____ 5. Genital play: Female

IF A MAN: "I touched her clitoris or vagina."

IF A WOMAN: "He touched my clitoris or vagina."

___ 6. Genital play: Male

IF A MAN: "She touched my penis."

IF A WOMAN: "I touched his penis."

- ___ 7. Genital apposition: The man lies prone on female, petting without penetration of her vagina.
- ___ 8. Sexual intercourse
- ___ 9. Cunnilingus: oral contact with woman's clitoris or vagina.
- ___ 10. Fellatio: oral contact with man's penis.

In addition, we asked students three other questions designed to tap how quickly their relationships had become intimate and to tap whether their relationships were predominantly sexual in nature.

1. How long did you *know* each other before you had sexual intercourse?

- ___ 8. Less than 1 week.
- ___ 7. More than a week, but less than a month.
- ___ 6. 1-2 months.
- ___ 5. 3-5 months.
- ___ 4. 6-10 months.
- ___ 3. 11-15 months.
- ___ 2. 16-24 months.
- ___ 1. More than 2 years.
- ___ 0. Never had sexual intercourse.

2. How many times did you go out with your partner before you had sexual intercourse?

- ___ 8. We had sexual intercourse on our first date.
- ___ 7. We had sexual intercourse on our second date.
- ___ 6. We had 2-5 dates before we had sexual intercourse.
- ___ 5. 6-12 dates.
- ___ 4. 13-20 dates.
- ___ 3. 21-30 dates.
- ___ 2. 31-40 dates.
- ___ 1. More than 40 dates.
- ___ 0. Never had sexual intercourse.

3. On what percent of your dates do you have intercourse?

- ___ 6. We have sexual intercourse on all of our dates.
- ___ 5. We have sexual intercourse on almost all of our dates.
- ___ 4. We have sexual intercourse on over half of our dates.
- ___ 3. We have sexual intercourse on less than half of our dates.
- ___ 2. We have sexual intercourse on very few of our dates.
- ___ 1. We have had sexual intercourse only once.
- ___ 0. We have never had sexual intercourse.

In addition, we asked those men and women *who had had sexual intercourse*,

Reasons for Entering a Sexual Relationship

People enter sexual relations for different reasons. Following are 14 possible reasons for becoming sexually involved with someone. Check all of the reasons why you became sexually involved with your partner.

- ___ 1. I was curious, wanted experience.
- ___ 2. Partner wanted/needed it.
- ___ 3. Mutual curiosity.
- ___ 4. I wanted/needed it.
- ___ 5. Partner wanted me to prove love.
- ___ 6. We were/are in love.
- ___ 7. To prove I am a man/woman.
- ___ 8. I wanted to prove love.
- ___ 9. We like/liked each other.
- ___ 10. My friends think it is appropriate.
- ___ 11. Partner convinced me it was appropriate.
- ___ 12. Mutual physical desire, enjoyment.
- ___ 13. I enjoyed it, it felt good.
- ___ 14. Partner enjoyed it.

In a survey of Wisconsin students, John DeLamater (personal communication) found that students generally cited one of the preceding reasons when explaining why they engaged in intercourse. We categorized these reasons as follows:

I wanted to. Sometimes students gave essentially self-centered reasons for having had intercourse (i.e., "I was curious, wanted experience").

My partner wanted to. Sometimes students gave partner-centered reasons for having had intercourse (i.e., "Partner wanted/needed it").

We both wanted it. Sometimes students indicated they *both* wanted it (i.e., "Mutual curiosity"; "We are/were in love"; "We like/liked each other"; "Mutual physical desire, enjoyment").

We scored students' responses in two ways: (a) *I wanted to-Partner wanted to.* We counted the number of self-centered reasons a man or woman gave for having intercourse *minus* the partner-centered reasons he or she gave. (b) *Mutual reasons.* We recorded the number of mutual reasons a man or woman gave for having intercourse.

Assessing How Stable a Relationship Is

Finally, we tried to assess how stable the men and women perceived their relationships to be. We asked,

1. Are you still going with your partner? (1 = no; 2 = yes.)
2. How certain are you that the two of you will be together 1 year from now?
3. How certain are you that the two of you will be together 5 years from now? (Possible answers ranged from 5 = "Completely certain" to 1 = "Certain we won't be together.")

Three and one-half months later (Time 2), we contacted students once again and asked them to fill out an abbreviated version of the original question-

Table 1
Relationship Between Equity/Inequity of a Romantic Relationship and Mood^a

How equitable is the subject's romantic relationship?	<i>n</i>	How content do you feel?	How happy do you feel?	How angry do you feel?	How guilty do you feel?	Total Mood Index
Greatly underbenefited	64	2.70	2.98	1.98	1.39	2.31
Slightly underbenefited	84	3.26	3.42	1.75	1.44	3.49
Equitably treated	220	3.51	3.61	1.36	1.31	4.46
Slightly overbenefited	89	3.51	3.69	1.36	1.51	4.33
Greatly overbenefited	80	2.91	3.06	1.54	1.83	2.61
Pooled within-cell <i>SD</i>	537	.71	.68	.65	.71	1.89
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> values				
Subject's sex (A)	1	2.19	6.56	1.13	.23	.88
Linear trend for equity (B)	1	4.34	2.37	24.65	14.99	2.56
Quadratic trend for B	1	87.08	66.51	33.46	15.72	99.56
A × B, linear trend	1	.08	1.63	2.21	.47	.67
All other trends ^b	5	1.04	2.21	3.65	1.39	2.40
Within cells	527					

^a The higher the number, the more content, happy, angry, and guilty a subject feels.

^b That is, cubic B, quartic B, A × Quadratic B, A × Cubic B, and A × Quartic B.

naire.² As before, we asked students to estimate how intimate their relationships were. As before, we asked students if they were still going together. Finally, we asked, "If you and your partner are still together, how long have you been going together? ("If you've already broken up, how long did you go together before you broke up?") Possible answers ranged from 1 = "Less than 1 month" to 9 = "Over 3 years."

Results and Discussion

The Relationship Between Equity/Inequity and Contentment/Distress

According to equity theory (Walster et al., 1978),

Proposition III: When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relations, they become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals feel. (p. 6)

Our first prediction, then, was that men and women who feel either greatly underbenefited or greatly overbenefited should be somewhat uneasy about the balance of their relationship.

As we can see from Table 1, the data provide firm support for this hypothesis: Men and women involved in relatively equitable relationships—that is, men and women who see themselves as *slightly* underbenefited,

equitably treated, or *slightly* overbenefited—are far more content and happy than are their *greatly* underbenefited or *greatly* overbenefited peers. (*F*s for the relevant quadratic trends = 87.08 and 66.51, respectively; *df*s = 1, 527 for both.) As you might expect, the *greatly* underbenefited feel most angry about their position (linear *F* = 24.65), and the *greatly* overbenefited feel most guilty about theirs (linear *F* = 14.99).

When we examine Austin's Total Mood Index, we see that persons in fairly equitable relationships are more content than are persons in greatly inequitable ones; for the quadratic trend, $F(1, 527) = 99.56$, $p < .001$. Equity theorists also predict that "persons who are overbenefited will be less distressed than persons who are underbenefited" (Walster et al., 1978, p. 43). When we examine the Total Mood Index, we find no support for this hypothesis. Greatly underbenefited respondents are more distressed than greatly overbenefited ones, but this difference is not

² Unfortunately, our scheduled visit fell on one of the coldest days of 1976, and only 101 men and 161 women came to class in spite of the -20° F. temperature. Thus, our sample at Time 2 is far smaller than expected.

Table 2
Relationship Between Equity/Inequity of a Romantic Relationship and Sexuality

How equitable is the subject's romantic relationship?	<i>n</i>	How sexual is the relationship? ^a				Total Sexuality Index
		How far have you gone?	How long known before sex?	How many dates before sex?	How often intercourse?	
Time 1						
Greatly underbenefited	64	7.05	2.39	2.63	2.14	14.20
Slightly underbenefited	84	7.42	2.50	1.98	2.04	13.93
Equitably treated	220	7.93	2.89	2.11	2.40	15.33
Slightly overbenefited	89	8.16	3.63	2.42	2.58	16.79
Greatly overbenefited	80	7.24	3.05	2.61	2.19	15.09
Pooled within-cell <i>SD</i>	537	2.58	2.69	2.44	2.02	8.43
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> values				
Subject's sex (A)	1	1.82	.44	3.60	.51	.03
Linear trend for equity (B)	1	1.58	6.15	.20	1.01	2.39
Quadratic trend for B	1	7.83	.74	2.89	1.08	.79
A × B, linear trend	1	.02	.46	.19	.75	.34
All other trends	5	.85	1.50	.43	.60	.60
Within cells	527					
Time 2						
Greatly underbenefited	29	6.72	2.79	2.62	1.90	14.03
Slightly underbenefited	43	8.35	2.09	1.98	1.98	14.40
Equitably treated	115	8.37	2.92	2.11	2.48	15.88
Slightly overbenefited	44	8.61	3.46	2.23	2.48	16.77
Greatly overbenefited	31	7.26	3.03	2.42	2.42	15.13
Pooled within-cell <i>SD</i>	262	2.37	2.57	2.35	1.95	7.86
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> values				
Subject's sex (A)	1	.15	.03	.02	.14	.01
Linear trend for equity (B)	1	.94	2.49	.00	2.34	1.40
Quadratic trend for B	1	14.50	.00	1.26	.87	1.09
A × B, linear trend	1	.53	.00	.06	.09	.05
All other trends ^b	5	.49	1.64	.59	.48	.53
Within cells	252					

^a The higher the number, the more intimate the couple has been, the earlier they had intercourse, the fewer the dates they had before having intercourse, and the more frequently they have intercourse.

^b That is, cubic B, quartic B, A × Quadratic B, A × Cubic B, and A × Quartic B.

significant, $F(1, 527) < 1$. These results are consistent with considerable data (see Austin & Walster, 1974a 1974b) which support the contention that relatively equitable relationships are comfortable relationships, while markedly inequitable ones are distressing—to both the underbenefited and the overbenefited.

Do Sex of Respondent and Degree of Inequity (Underbenefited, Equitably Treated, Overbenefited) Interact in Determining how Sexual a Relationship Is?

Do men who feel they should be able to "do better" at least demand that their partner "put out" sexually? Do their partners ac-

ceed? Do women who feel they should do better feel entitled to call the sexual shots—to delay sexual relations for as long as they wish, perhaps forever? In brief, do sex and equity interact as predicted? The answer appears to be no. The data provide no support for our hypothesis: the *F*s for the Sex \times Equity interactions were remarkably small, ranging from a low of $F = .00$ to a high of $F = .75$ (*ns*). See Table 2.

What *do* the data indicate? It appears that couples in fairly equitable relationships have the most sexual relationships. These couples (i.e., *slightly* underbenefited men/women, *equitably* treated couples, and *slightly* overbenefited men/women) go the furthest sexually.

At both Time 1 and Time 2, the average couple in a relatively equitable relationship is having intercourse. Both the greatly underbenefited and the greatly overbenefited tend to stop before "going all the way." At Time 1, quadratic trend $F(1, 527) = 7.83$, $p <$

.01; at Time 2, quadratic trend $F(1, 252) = 14.50$, $p < .001$.

We also asked our respondents who had had intercourse why they had engaged in intercourse. The participants in relatively equitable relationships are most likely to say they had intercourse because they *both* wanted to (i.e., to say that "Mutual curiosity," the fact that "We are/were in love," "We like/liked each other," or "Mutual physical desire, enjoyment" were their reasons for having intercourse). Those who feel extremely overbenefited or extremely underbenefited are less likely to say they had sex because they both wanted it. At Time 1, quadratic trend $F(1, 335) = 5.53$, $p < .02$; at Time 2, quadratic trend $F(1, 158) = 1.61$, *ns* (see Table 3).

The reader will recall that we asked respondents three questions designed to tap how quickly their relationship had become intimate and to tap whether their relationship was predominantly sexual in nature. These measures tell us little that is new.

Table 3
Relationship Between Equity/Inequity and Subjects' Reasons for Having Intercourse

How equitable is the subject's romantic relationship?	Why did you have intercourse?					
	Time 1			Time 2		
	<i>n</i>	I wanted to-Partner wanted to ^a	We both wanted to ^b	<i>n</i>	I wanted to-Partner wanted to ^a	We both wanted to ^b
Greatly underbenefited	38	.42	2.00	17	.42	2.06
Slightly underbenefited	49	.16	2.08	24	.08	2.38
Equitably treated	148	.40	2.32	77	.38	2.40
Slightly overbenefited	64	.23	2.25	33	.30	2.61
Greatly overbenefited	46	.65	2.02	17	.78	2.35
Pooled within-cell <i>SD</i>	345	1.05	.95	168	.98	.91

Source	Time 1			Time 2		
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
Subject's sex (A)	1	43.14	.00	1	13.33	3.05
Linear trend for equity (B)	1	.01	.15	1	.61	1.24
Quadratic trend for B	1	.14	5.53	1	.53	1.61
A \times B, linear trend	1	1.81	.14	1	1.55	.30
All other trends ^c	5	2.86	.96	5	.85	2.01
Within cells	335			158		

^a The higher the number, the more a subject's selfish reasons for having intercourse exceeded his partner-centered reasons.

^b The higher the number, the more mutual reasons a subject gave for having intercourse.

^c That is, cubic B, quartic B, A \times Quadratic B, A \times Cubic B, and A \times Quartic B.

Table 4
Relationship Between the Equity/Inequity of a Romantic Relationship and Its Permanence

How equitable is subject's romantic relationship?	Relationship's permanence, ^a Time 1					Relationship's permanence, ^b Time 2		
	<i>n</i>	Are you still together?	In 1 year?	In 5 years?	Total Index	<i>n</i>	Are you still together?	How long have you been together?
Greatly underbenefited	64	1.41	1.33	1.03	3.77	29	1.31	3.93
Slightly underbenefited	84	1.57	1.90	1.39	4.86	43	1.44	5.40
Equitably treated	220	1.73	2.53	2.05	6.31	115	1.70	5.62
Slightly overbenefited	89	1.71	2.21	1.63	5.55	44	1.61	5.23
Greatly overbenefited	80	1.41	1.38	1.16	3.95	31	1.42	4.19
Pooled within-cell <i>SD</i>	537	.47	1.59	1.48	3.30	262	.48	2.21

Source	Time 1					Time 2		
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
Subject's sex (A)	1	6.71	13.50	6.80	10.93	1	.83	.87
Linear trend for equity (B)	1	.71	.60	.82	.81	1	2.62	.04
Quadratic trend for B	1	38.49	48.48	29.12	40.49	1	18.04	19.48
A × B, linear trend	1	.23	.43	1.88	.99	1	.11	1.46
All other trends	5	.64	.69	1.02	.80	5	.93	.29
Within cells ^c	527					252		

^a The higher the number, the more permanent a subject's relationship is, and the more permanent he or she expects it to be.

^b The higher the number, the more permanent a subject's relationship is.

^c That is, cubic B, quartic B, A × Quadratic B, A × Cubic B, and A × Quartic B.

Couples in equitable and inequitable relationships knew each other a fairly long time before they had sexual intercourse; they all had a considerable number of dates before they had intercourse, and even today, they only have sex "now and then." All of the quadratic trends on these measures were non-significant.

We did not expect the results we secured. We did *not* predict that equitable couples would be the most sexual couples, but in retrospect, the data do not seem so unreasonable. (Of course, in retrospect, nothing seems unreasonable.) Equity theorists have observed, and we also found, that it is in equitable love relationships that men and women feel most content and happy. Inequitable love relationships are volatile relationships—the underbenefited feel resentful, and the overbenefited feel guilty. Clinicians and family therapists (see Berne, 1970; Masters & Johnson, 1975; and Safilios-Rothschild, 1977) have observed that deep-seated resentment—or guilt—will corrode the best of sexual relations.

Equity and the Stability of Relationships

There is one bit of evidence that completes the picture. According to equity theorists, equitable relations are viable relationships, while inequitable relations are not (see Table 4). Our data provide considerable support for this contention. At Time 1, those men and women involved in fairly equitable relationships are generally in intact relationships—and they expect them to remain that way. Both the underbenefited, who have every reason to hope that something better will come along, and the overbenefited, who have every reason to wish that their relationship could last, are well aware that their relationships are tenuous ones. If their relationships are not already in disarray, they expect that they soon will be. [For the Time 1 *Total Stability Index*,³ quadratic trend $F(1, 527) = 40.49$, $p < .001$.]

By Time 2, the report is the same. The fairly equitable relations are likely to still be intact, and the inequitable relations are not: $F(1, 252) = 18.04$, $p < .001$. Finally, fairly equitable couples report they have been to-

gether longer than do inequitable couples: at Time 2, $F(1, 252) = 19.48$, $p < .001$.

In conclusion, this study suggests that in the casual and steady dating period, equitable relationships are contented relationships. It is couples in equitable relationships who are most willing to chance intense premarital sexual relationships—perhaps because they expect their casual or steady dating relationships to evolve into permanent ones.

Possible Alternative Explanations for the Data

Our data are, of course, correlational. With correlational data, there is always the possibility that some unknown variable, x , is really accounting for the results. Variable x might be causing college men and women to (a) rate themselves as overbenefited, equitably treated, or underbenefited and (b) make them more or less enthusiastic about premarital sex. (The creative researcher can surely come up with a plethora of variables that might be accounting for our results.)

In addition, the causal sequence might be opposite to that we suggest. Men and women's sexual experiences might determine their perception of equity/inequity, rather than the other way around.

The only way to be absolutely sure about what is causing what is to run an experiment. In the area of human sexual behavior, however, that is still somewhat difficult.

³ The Total Stability Index is calculated by summing up the subject's scores on the three items which comprise the index.

References

- Austin, W., & Walster, E. Participants' reactions to "equity with the world." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 1974, 10, 528-548. (a)
- Austin, W., & Walster, E. Reactions to confirmations and disconfirmations of expectancies of equity and inequity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1974, 30, 208-216. (b)
- Baker, M. J. *The effects of inequity on heterosexual behavior: A test for compensation in inequitable dating relationships*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1974.
- Berkowitz, L., & Walster, E. (Eds.) Equity theory: Toward a general theory of social interaction. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 9). New York: Academic Press, 1976.

- Berne, E. *Sex in human loving*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970.
- Blau, P. M. *Exchange and power in social life*. New York: Wiley, 1967.
- Ehrmann, W. *Premarital dating behavior*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1959.
- Kaats, G. R., & Davis, K. E. The dynamics of sexual behavior of college students. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1970, 32, 390-399.
- Masters, W. H., & Johnson, V. F. *Human sexual response*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1975.
- Reiss, I. L. *The social context of premarital sexual permissiveness*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967.
- Schofield, M. *The sexual behavior of young people*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1965.
- Sorenson, R. C. *Adolescent sexuality in contemporary America*. New York: World Publishers, 1973.
- Safilios-Rothschild, C. *Love, sex, and sex roles*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1977.
- Traubmann, J. *Equity and intimate relations: A test of the theory in marital interaction*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1977.
- Walster, G. W. The Walster et al. (1973) equity formula: A correction. *Representative Research in Social Psychology*, 1975, 6, 65-67.
- Walster, E., Utne, M. K., & Traubmann, J. Equity and intimate relations. In R. L. Burgess & T. L. Huston (Eds.), *Social exchange in developing relationships*. N.Y.: Academic Press, in press.
- Walster, E., Utne, M. K., & Traubmann, J. Equitytheorie und intime Sozialbeziehungen. In G. Mikula & W. Stroebe (Eds.), *Freundschaft und Liebe*. Berne, Switzerland: Huber, 1977.
- Walster, E., Walster, G. W., & Berscheid, E. *Equity: Theory and research*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1978.

Received March 23, 1977 ■

Call for Submissions on Special Topics

Sections grouping articles on special topics are being planned for some future issues of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Submissions in the topic areas listed below are welcome in JPSP at any time, but they are particularly welcome for these announced special sections. Authors wishing to submit manuscripts for consideration for a special section should send them to the Editor (Anthony G. Greenwald, Ohio State University, 404C West 17th Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43210) before the announced deadline. Submit manuscripts in quadruplicate, with the usual supplementary information, as described on the inside front cover of recent issues of JPSP. In the cover letter accompanying the manuscript, please indicate interest in having the manuscript published in one of the announced special sections.

Manuscripts submitted for these announced sections will be reviewed and evaluated according to the same criteria applied to all manuscripts submitted to JPSP, as described in the editorial in the January 1976 issue (Vol. 33, pp. 1-7). Inquiries about the appropriateness of manuscripts for the announced special sections and suggestions of topics for possible future special sections should be addressed to the Editor.

<i>Topics of special sections</i>	<i>Manuscript submission deadline</i>	<i>Tentative issue date</i>
The state of theory in personality and social psychology	March 1, 1978	November 1978
Applications of personality and social psychology to criminal justice	April 1, 1978	December 1978