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Equity and the Innocent Bystander[1]

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This paper attempts to integrate equity theory and specialized theories and data concerning the reactions of bystanders and victims caught up in emergencies. The authors first examine three factors which determine the bystander's response to emergency situations: whether or not bystanders attend to an emergency; how aroused bystanders become by the emergency; how the bystander responds to the emergency—i.e., by helping, by denigrating the victim, or by running away. Finally, they examine factors which affect how the victim will respond to the bystander who either provides or denies him assistance.

> A certain man. . . fell among thieves. . . which. . . wounded him . . . leaving him half dead . . . there came down a certain priest . . . when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite . . . passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan . . . came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him . . . and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more . . . I will repay thee [Luke. 10:30–35].

This parable has been quoted now for nearly 20 centuries in an unfortunately vain attempt to induce the young to behave with altruism toward victims of misfortune. Why is it such a memorable story? Why does it strike each succeeding generation as depicting such remarkably unselfish behavior? And can we learn anything about helping behavior in general from it?

What are some characteristics of the Samaritan's act? First, it is nonnormative and nonconforming. Two community leaders

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have failed to help the fallen man. There are clearly no social pressures at work. Second, he has no moral obligation to help, as he would if he had been involved in what happened or if he were a friend or relation. Third, his act is costly. He incurs a debt of unknown size for an indefinite future period, and he also expends considerable personal effort and time in helping the wounded man. Fourth, his act receives no observable reward. As far as we can tell from the narrative as given, he leaves before the victim has even had the chance to meet and thank him.

One reason we admire the Samaritan's act is that it appears to be done out of pure unadulterated altruism. Altruistic behavior has always proved difficult for the social scientist to explain. Even the definition of it is difficult. Altruistic behavior is generally thought of as behavior that benefits another rather than the self—as something that is done "out of the goodness of one's heart." But such a definition flies in the face of most theory in psychology, which suggests that behavior that is not rewarding to the individual will not be performed. If we attempt to define helping as rewarding by postulating that individuals gain "inner satisfaction" from helping others, we are clearly engaging in circular reasoning such that prediction is no longer possible—reasoning of the "rats work for reinforcement" and "a reinforcement is what rats will work for" variety. Clearly, if we wish to understand altruistic behavior as being in the same universe with most other behavior and being under the control of rewards and punishments, we need to find some independent way of specifying in advance *what* rewards are present, so that we can predict altruistic behavior before it occurs.

In this paper we will bring together two interlocking lines of research and theorizing in order to provide a coherent theory of bystander response to emergencies and victim response to aid and, at the same time, to improve our understanding of equity theory (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, in press).

The discussion will be organized chronologically in the way an emergency unfolds. We will first discuss variables presumed to bear upon the likelihood that a bystander will attend to the emergency. Then we will discuss variables which should determine how aroused a bystander will become by the emergency. Next we will discuss the determinants of how the bystander responds to the emergency—by helping, derogating the victim, or fleeing. Finally, we will mention some possible responses of the victim to his victimization and to his helper. Within each of these sections, we will discuss—as good second-generation

Lewinians should—both situational and intrapersonal factors that may be relevant.

Overview of Equity Theory

Before we begin our discussion let us review equity theory. As systematized by Walster et al. (in press), equity theory is comprised of four basic propositions.

Proposition I: Individuals will try to maximize their outcomes (where outcomes equals rewards minus costs).

If everyone were unrestrained in his attempts to get what he wants, everyone would suffer. Every man would attempt to monopolize community resources; every man would be continually confronted by rivals bent on reclaiming these resources. Only by working out a compromise can the group avoid continual warfare and maximize collective reward. This fact is acknowledged in Proposition IIA.

Proposition IIA: Groups can maximize collective reward by evolving accepted systems for "equitably" apportioning rewards and costs among members. Thus groups will evolve such systems of equity and will attempt to induce members to accept and adhere to these systems.

Proposition IIB proposes that groups will insure the profitability of equitable behavior.

Proposition IIB: Groups will generally reward members who treat others equitably and generally punish (increase the costs for) individuals who treat others inequitably.

Every culture must institutionalize a system for "equitably" apportioning resources among its members. We must recognize, however, that the perception of what is equitable varies enormously between cultures. In spite of this fact, we have found a single general principle to be useful in characterizing these widely diverse conceptions of equity. We define "equitable relationship" as existing when the person scrutinizing the relationship (namely, the scrutineer—who could be Participant A, Participant B, or an outside observer) perceives that all participants are receiving equal relative outcomes from the relationship. That is:

$$\frac{\text{Outcomes}_A - \text{Inputs}_A}{|\ \text{Inputs}_A\ |} = \frac{\text{Outcomes}_B - \text{Inputs}_B}{|\ \text{Inputs}_B\ |}$$

In the formula, "outcomes" designates a scrutineer's perception of outcomes for A and B, "inputs" designates his perception of

inputs for A and B, and |Inputs| designates the *absolute value* of inputs (i.e., the perceived value, disregarding sign). A participant's relative outcomes will be positive if outcomes > inputs, and negative if outcomes < inputs. Thus the sign and the magnitude of this measure indicate how "profitable" the relationship is for each of the participants.

Outcomes (O) are defined as the positive and negative consequences that a scrutineer perceives a participant has incurred as a consequence of his relationship with another. Following Homans (1961) we shall refer to positive outcomes as "rewards" and negative outcomes as "costs." The participant's total outcomes in a relationship are equal to the rewards he obtains from the relationship minus the costs he incurs.

Inputs (I) are defined as the participant's contributions to the exchange which are seen by the scrutineer as entitling him to rewards or costs. The inputs that a participant contributes to a relationship can either be assets, entitling him to reward, or liabilities, which entitle him to punishment (i.e., costs).

From the preceding formulation it is evident that equity is in the eye of the beholder. An individual's perception of how fair a relationship is depends upon *his* assessment of the value and relevance of the various participants' inputs and outcomes. If different scrutineers calculate inputs and outcomes differently—and it is inevitable that they will—they will differ in their evaluations of the equitableness of a given relationship.

As a consequence of the socialization experiences described in Proposition II, we propose:

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

Experimental evidence supports the contention that individuals participating in inequitable relationships do feel distress regardless of whether they are the victims or the beneficiaries of the inequity.

Proposition IV: Individuals who discover they are in inequitable relationships 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.

Now that we have briefly reviewed equity theory, we can begin the promised discussion of the relevance of equity theory for understanding the reactions of the innocent bystander and the victim.

On Establishing the Relationship

One of the major questions for equity theory is: Under what circumstances will individuals perceive they are in a relationship with another? Equity theory, after all, deals only with the behavior of individuals enmeshed in inequitable relationships. Unless a bystander and a victim contrast their lots, equity considerations are irrelevant to understanding their reactions.

Past theorists (e.g., Merton, 1957; Homans, 1961; Festinger, 1954) who have written about this problem have not been too helpful. The only suggestions that stem from these writers are that a person compares himself with those who are in an actual relationship with him at the time, are perceived as similar to him along some salient dimension, or are attractive, looked up to, or admired in some way. There is the further suggestion that the less structured the situation, the broader will be the spectrum of individuals with whom it is possible to make a comparison.

In natural settings, then, it is difficult to foresee whether or not a given bystander and a given victim will perceive themselves to be in a relationship. Theoretically this puts us in a difficult position. Unless the bystander and the victim perceive themselves to be in a relationship, equity theory is inapplicable—and we are incapable of predicting how they will respond to the emergency.

In practice, however, our inability to calculate easily who will perceive themselves to be in a relationship and who will not may not be a debilitating problem. The assumption that equity theory can predict the reactions of individuals only if they perceive themselves to be in a relationship has never been tested. This restriction may be an unnecessary one. In fact, some research suggests that individuals react to others in much the same way whether they are in a "relationship" or not. Participants and observers seem to respond to injustice in much the same way—with one qualification: Participants seem to react more intensely to inequity than do observers.

The discovery that participants' fiery reactions are palely reflected by bystanders should not be too surprising to us. Human beings possess the ability to empathize with others. When others are caught in tragic or inequitable circumstances, it is probably particularly easy to empathize with them. The observer who empathizes with a harm-doer might be expected to share the harm-doer's embarrassment and rationalizations. The observer who em-

pathizes with his victim would be expected to share much of the victim's anger and indignation (Chaikin & Darley, 1971). Since the feelings one empathizes with are likely to be less intense than the feelings one experiences, it is understandable that an observer would have similar, but less intense, reactions to inequity than would an actual participant.

For purposes of this paper, then, let us test the limits of equity theory. Let us see how well the theory can handle the reactions of bystanders and victims, *regardless of whether or not these participants in an emergency are in a relationship.*

Sources of Distress

In this section we will enumerate five variables which equity theory and Piliavin and Piliavin (1971; also Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969) believe intensify the arousal experienced by bystanders to an emergency.

Equity theory and the Piliavins' model have much in common. In equity theory inequitable settings produce distress in harmdoers and victims. This distress motivates them to restore equity. The first assumption of the Piliavin and Piliavin (1971) model is that "the observation of an emergency situation elicits a state of physiological arousal in the bystander." This arousal motivates him to respond to the victim's plight. "Distress" and "arousal" sound like virtually identical constructs—both terms describe the same unpleasant subjective state accompanied by physiological activation.

Piliavin and Piliavin (1971) suggest that three aspects of the victim-bystander situation will determine the degree of the bystander's arousal: severity of the emergency, physical distance, and perceived similarity or emotional attachment to victim.

Severity of the Emergency

Piliavin et al. (1969) propose that arousal increases as the perceived severity of the emergency increases, i.e., as the danger or potential danger to life or limb increases. The louder and more numerous the screams, the more the blood, the higher the flames, the greater will be the arousal in the bystander.[2]

[2] Whether being exposed to the imminent loss of someone else's property is arousing in this same way is a question that the Piliavins have not wrestled with in print. An example in which an observer sees a gorgeous Cadillac rolling down a hill toward a dock by the sea pretty much sums up the

An extension of the Piliavin et al. (1969) subway study provides some support for this contention. In this replication (Piliavin & Piliavin, 1972) all the "victims" carried a cane. On half of the trials, the victim simply collapsed in the moving subway car; on the other half of the trials, he produced a thin trickle of very real-looking fake blood from the corner of his mouth as he fell. Observers reported panicky behavior on the part of the bystanders on several of the "blood" trials, and in one case, quite emotional behavior. Such panicky behavior did not occur when the emergency was less severe. Other evidence (Lazarus, Opton, Nomikos, & Rankin, 1965) indicates that the heart rate of observers of a film depicting several industrial accidents accelerates more to the sight of a man being impaled by a flying board and dying than to a man losing a finger.

If we wished to translate "severity of the emergency" into equity theory terms, we would equate severity with the size of the disparity between the relative outcomes of the participants. Thus a factory worker who learns that a co-worker doing comparable work makes 50% less than he does should experience more distress than one who discovers a 10% differential. Evidence exists to support the contention that the greater the inequity that exists, the more distress participants will feel (Leventhal, Allen, & Kemelgor, 1969; Leventhal & Bergman, 1969).

Physical Distance

The Piliavins also expect degree of arousal to be a function of the physical distance of the bystander from the emergency. Other things being equal, distress cues emanating from the man on the next bench will have more impact than those coming from another room. In part these authors are suggesting the obvious; if one does not perceive cues, he cannot be aroused by them. In part, however, their suggestion is not obvious. That is, they are suggesting that, given the same distress cues, the

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complexities. If it is not clear whether or not the car is occupied and whether or not there is anyone in its path (e.g., it is night), the effect should come if at all from the bystander's *imagining* the effects on an individual, either the owner or a darting child. The arousal response should be slower and less intense, depending as it does on symbolic representation of potential harm to others rather than on the direct observation of their distress. It should also be more affected by personality and attitudinal characteristics of the bystander (e.g., his attitude towards private property) than is the case for the observation of actual victims.

knowledge that a victim is near rather than far away will intensify an observer's arousal.

Several studies have pointed out that there is a positive relationship between subjective distance and emotional involvement (Ekman & Bratfisch, 1965; Dornic, 1967). Indirect support for this contention appears in a study done by Piliavin and Piliavin (1969), at the University of Pennsylvania. In this experiment they examined the effect of physical distance on a bystander's tendency to help a victim. A graduate student in social work described an emergency to an introductory psychology class. A written message informed the students:

> Public assistance has been denied women with illegitimate children by the Welfare officials of Lancaster County, (State name). The matter is now being appealed to the federal authorities, but the final disposition will not be made for several months. In the meanwhile the families involved (about 550) are in desperate need of funds for food and shelter.

The student-experimenter claimed that The National Association of Graduate Students in Social Welfare was trying to raise these funds and asked students to indicate how much money they would be willing to pledge for these needy families of Lancaster County. The location of "Lancaster County" was systematically varied. Sometimes the victims were said to reside in Pennsylvania (the state in which the university was located). Sometimes they were said to live in places increasingly far away—Ohio, Wisconsin, Kansas, and California. As predicted, the authors found that students were most likely to pledge money to help victims in Pennsylvania, next most likely in the Midwest states, and least likely in California. The Piliavins assume that students were more likely to pledge money to victims from their home state because the suffering of these victims was especially emotionally involving. Two questionnaire studies done recently provide minimal support for this suggestion in that more questionnaires were returned to the home state or city than to some other area (Johnson, 1971; Doob, 1972).

Similarity and Emotional Attachment

The Piliavins also argue that arousal is a function of perceived similarity and/or emotional attachment to the victim of the emergency. Support for this conclusion comes from Stotland's (1969) physiological data on empathy. Although these data are not completely consistent they do provide some support for the hypothesis that when another is observed to be undergoing an unpleasant

experience, the more similar he is to us the more aroused we will become.

It seems hardly necessary to document the statement that when the bystander is emotionally attached to a victim, he will be more aroused by his suffering than he would be otherwise. Any reader who has had a sick or injured parent, spouse, lover, or child can attest to this. And the incidence of strangers running into burning buildings to rescue children is clearly lower than that of parents doing the same thing.

One's Responsibility for the Emergency

Equity theorists (Walster et al., in press) have proposed that a fourth variable should affect how distressed a bystander becomes by an emergency, namely, one's responsibility for the emergency. A harm-doer who feels responsible for creating an inequity should experience more distress than he would had he accidentally injured the other, or had he merely observed the victim's suffering. This conclusion is consistent with equity theory's Conclusion III: *When the inequity is intentionally produced, participants in an inequitable relationship will experience more distress and will have stronger desires to restore equity to the relationship than if the inequity occurs inadvertently.* No data exist to support this rather plausible contention that a person feels more guilty about the suffering he intentionally causes than the suffering he produces accidentally.

There is one outstanding analysis of the role of intention, and that is to be found in Heider (1958, pp. 100–124). Although he does not deal directly with the distress and guilt experienced by participants as a function of the intentionality of harm done, Heider does deal with attribution of responsibility. It is clear that as individuals and as a society in our legal system, we believe that intentional harm-doers are to be held more responsible than are unintentional harm-doers, and that intentional harm-doers should receive more severe punishment. There are two studies supporting this contention (Shaw & Sulzer, 1964; Cuthbert, 1965). Both found greater attribution of responsibility to an intentional harm-doer, and Cuthbert found that far more severe punishments were meted out to an intentional harm-doer, particularly when the crime had severe consequences. To the extent that the harm-doer shares the moral values of his society then, we would expect him to feel worse when his harmdoing has been intentional.

Of course an individual sometimes intentionally hurts an-

other without feeling he is provoking an inequity. Often such a harm-doer feels he is righting previous wrongs. Thus his hostile acts do not arouse distress, but rather satisfaction.

Personality Factors

In addition to these situational variables, at least three personality factors should have a strong impact upon how disturbed a participant becomes when he confronts an inequity.

First, some critics of equity theory have denied that the unjustly overpaid or advantaged individual will feel any twinges at all upon discovering that he has been receiving undeserved benefits. They certainly scoff at the suggestion that an over-benefited person will be willing to surrender material benefits in order to restore equity. (No one seems to question that the disadvantaged participant will be distressed and try to equalize things.) These critics insist that people will take everything that they can get if they know they will not be caught and punished. This might well be so in the extreme case. The point, however, is that all of us have learned . . . albeit painfully . . . that if we take far more than our fair share, we *will* get caught and we *will* be punished—by guilt or by society. We all learn that it is generally more profitable, materially and psychologically, to be fair than to be "selfish."

Given that the tendency to behave equitably is a learned response, one personality dimension that is bound to be important in determining how a person responds to inequity is the extent to which he has been taught that his own rewards are dependent upon being sensitive and responsive to the needs of others. There may or may not exist some sort of "primitive passive sympathy" à la McDougall (1908), and it may or may not be determined by one's genes. We assume, however, that if it exists it can be largely influenced by experience. Aronfreed (1968) has provided a useful paradigm for understanding how children develop a willingness to relieve another's distress. Through a series of trials the child learns to associate the removal of pain cues in another with rewards; thus the incidence of his intervention to remove such cues increases. From these analyses we would expect to find a continuum of sensitivity to the distress of others, based upon the degree to which the individual as a child (and later) has associated reward with such sensitivity and punishment with ignoring such cues.

Second, according to equity theory, after injuring another a normal harm-doer experiences distress from two sources: (a)

he experiences self-concept distress, since his harmful act is inconsistent both with his own good opinion of himself and with his moral principles; and (b) he experiences fear of retaliation distress.

One interested in individual differences is led to the obvious conclusion that harm-doers who have high self-esteem (i.e., think of themselves as foresightful, kind people) and strongly internalized ethical principles should feel more self-concept distress after harming another than should individuals with low standards and low self-regard. High self-esteem individuals, then, would be expected to make unusual efforts to restore equity—actual or psychological—after harming others. There is some experimental evidence to support this derivation. In an experiment by Glass (1964), an individual's self-esteem was experimentally raised or lowered. After harming another, high self-esteem subjects justified their harm-doing—by derogating their victims—more than did low self-esteem subjects.

A third important personality dimension should be denial-repression vs. sensitization. In the study cited earlier by Lazarus et al. (1965), observers who had been encouraged to deny or intellectualize their emotional response to a film of industrial accidents showed depressed reactivity to the film. Lazarus and Alfert (1964) also found that two separate denial manipulations reduced responsivity to a film depicting genital operations in a primitive tribe. Certainly an individual who usually employs repression or denial to handle anxiety should respond more slowly to another's cues of distress than a person who does not.

These personality dimensions (and doubtless others) should combine with the situational factors discussed above to determine the degree to which an individual will become distressed when he discovers that, objectively, another human being is in a far less favorable situation than is he. Situational and personality factors should combine to determine how deeply distressed individuals become by inequity. At one extreme individuals will be only feebly affected, while at the other they will be profoundly affected by the suffering and inequity they see around them.

Responding to the Inequity

Once a participant discovers that his relationship with another is inequitable and he becomes distressed, equity theory makes specific predictions as to how the person will respond to injustice. He can restore *actual* equity to an unfair relationship or he can restore *psychological* equity.

Restoration of Actual Equity

The over-rewarded can restore actual equity in a straightforward way: They can compensate the cheated. For example, an uneasy boss may give his underpaid and overworked secretary a bonus, or encourage her to take Monday off. A variety of recent studies in Walster et al. (in press) verify the fact that unintentional harm-doers do commonly volunteer to compensate their victims.

There is also some evidence (Lerner & Simmons, 1966) that when bystanders are given the opportunity to reward the victim they almost unanimously do so. Our thesis (to be expanded below) is that whether or not a bystander acts to assist a victim of misfortune is under the control of the same variables which control whether or not a harm-doer compensates his victim. Bystander intervention in emergencies can be seen as examples of attempts to restore actual equity.

Victims naturally have a vested interest in insuring that they receive actual equity. They can also take an active part in attempts to restore it. For example, the grossly underpaid ghetto black can reestablish actual equity by demanding a raise or stealing from the company (thus raising his own outcomes). Leventhal and Bergman (1969) and Marwell, Schmitt, and Shotola (1971) demonstrate that a victim commonly responds to inequity by seeking restitution.

Restoration of Psychological Equity

A participant in an inequitable relationship can restore *psychological* equity by appropriately distorting his perception of his own or his partner's relative outcomes. A creative exploiter can often manage to convince himself that even a grossly inequitable relationship is, in fact, equitable. Researchers in harm-doing have been interested in documenting the varied techniques which harm-doers use to justify their exploitation of others. Some especially popular distortions are the following: derogation of the victim, minimization of his suffering, or denial of one's responsibility for the victim's suffering.

Derogation of the victim. If a harm-doer can convince himself that the victim deserves to suffer, he can persuade himself that his relationship with the victim is an equitable one. That harm-doers will often derogate their victims has been demonstrated by Sykes and Matza (1957), Davis and Jones (1960), Berkowitz (1962), Davidson (1964), Glass (1964), and Walster and Prestholdt

(1966). Sykes and Matza (1957) found that juvenile delinquents often defend their victimization of others by arguing that their victims are really homosexuals, bums, or the possessors of other traits that make them deserving of punishment. In tormenting these others, then, the delinquents can claim to be restorers of justice rather than harm-doers.

Lerner and his colleagues (Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Lerner & Matthews, 1967) have done a number of studies that appear to indicate that bystanders will derogate a suffering victim if they are unable to help him. There is some evidence that observers will not derogate victims if they think that the victim is *totally* innocent (Piliavin, Hardyck, & Vadum, 1967) or if they are told that the experimenter is studying their response to victims of a misfortune (Simons & Piliavin, 1972). Otherwise, observers do tend to derogate victims in such settings.

Minimization of the victim's suffering. If a harm-doer can deny that the victim was harmed, he can convince himself that his relationship with the victim is an equitable one. Sykes and Matza (1957) and Brock and Buss (1962) demonstrate that harm-doers consistently underestimate how much harm they have done to others. Brock and Buss, for example, found that college students who administered electric shock to other students soon came to markedly underestimate the painfulness of the shock they were delivering. In the Piliavin et al. (1967) study cited above, there was also some evidence that observers minimized the suffering of the "truly innocent" victim.

Denial of responsibility for the act. If the harm-doer can perceive that he was not responsible for the victim's suffering, then *his* relationship with the victim becomes an equitable one. (The person who is assigned responsibility for the victim's plight is then perceived as the harm-doer; it is his relationship with the victim that is perceived as inequitable.) That harm-doers will often deny their responsibility for harm-doing has been documented by Sykes and Matza (1957) and by Brock and Buss (1962, 1964). In daily life, denial of responsibility seems to be a favorite strategy of those who are made to feel quilty about exploiting others. War criminals are particularly noted for their vehement protest that they were "only following orders."

The preceding justification techniques help the individual to restore psychological equity, by altering the equity equation. Derogation decreases the victim's inputs. Minimization of his suffering increases his perceived outcomes. Denial of responsibility removes the necessity for the person to continue comparing his

outcomes with the other's.

Piliavin and Piliavin (1971) enumerate potential responses that interlock beautifully with the conceptual alternatives described by the equity paradigm. The harm-doer or bystander who helps or who attempts to get help for the victim is attempting to *compensate* him for his suffering. The harm-doer or bystander who refuses to help, and instead spends his energy "reevaluating the situation" and "explaining his behavior" is relying upon *justification* techniques to reduce his distress. Piliavin et al. (1969) also note that some individuals reduce their distress by leaving the scene. Avoidance responses may not eliminate inequity, but avoidance can reduce the salience of the disturbing realization that one has behaved inequitably. Equity theorists have also observed that such avoidance may occur when it is less costly to abandon a relationship than to restore equity to it.

The Decision Process

Equity theorists and students of bystander behavior seem to agree on the range of alternatives available to individuals. What determines which of these many potential responses an observer will make?

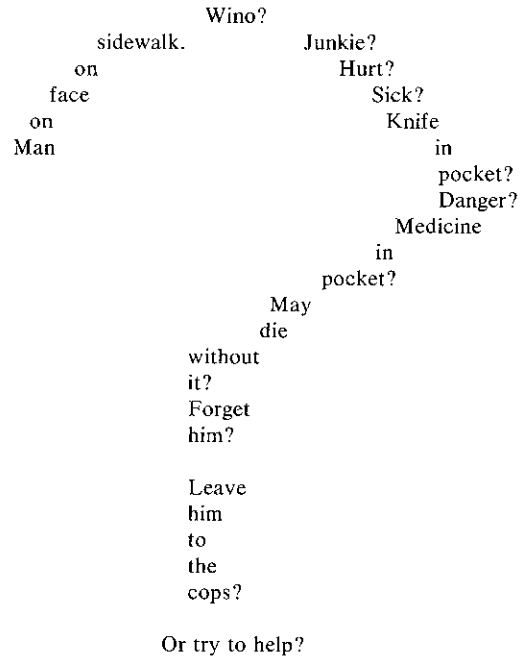
Equity theory proposes two major principles for predicting how a harm-doer will respond to a needy victim. Whether a harm-doer helps the victim, justifies his suffering, or terminates their relationship is said to depend upon the *cost* of the alternative techniques available for restoring equity and the *adequacy* of those techniques. Presumably a harm-doer will prefer an equity restoring technique which has little material or psychological cost over one which has greater cost, and will prefer a technique which completely restores equity over one which only partially restores it.

The Cost of Helping

Equity theory states (Corollary I.1): *Other things being equal, the more costly a harm-doer perceives an available equity restoring technique to be, the less likely he will be to use this technique to restore equity.* Piliavin and Piliavin (1971) make a similar proposal:

> An observer is motivated to reduce his arousal state as rapidly as possible, incurring in the course of his actions as few costs and as many rewards as possible. That is, his response will be determined by the outcome of a more or less rational decision process in which he weighs the costs and rewards attendant upon each of his possible courses of action [p. 6]

FIGURE 1
The City Question



Froman, R. "Street Poems." New York: McCall, 1971.

Figure 1 gives literary expression to this process.

What are the potential costs for helping in an emergency situation? They include the following: personal danger, effort expenditure, time lost, embarrassment, disgusting or sickening experiences (e.g., contact with blood or other body fluids, wounds, disfigurements, seizures), and feelings of inadequacy or failure if help is ineffective.

Potential rewards for helping include the feeling of competence, self-congratulations, thanks from the victim, praise and admiration from bystanders, money and fame.

Potential costs for not helping include: self-blame, public censure, and in some situations prosecution as a criminal. In this regard we should note that United States law provides fewer sanctions for the "Bad Samaritan" than does the law of any other

civilized nation. For example, in Eastern Europe a bystander who neglects to help another when he could do so with no harm to himself can often be prosecuted.

Rewards for not helping consist of all those rewards associated with the activities that would be interrupted were the individual to help. Basic to these are the rewards associated with personal freedom and lack of "involvement," conditions which have recently been conceptualized by Brehm as minimizing reactance (Brehm, 1966).

Keeping these potential costs in mind, the Piliavin and Piliavin paper (1971) specifies exactly how bystanders would respond in emergency settings. As arousal increases, the probability of the observer making some response to the emergency increases. Holding arousal constant, as costs for not helping increase, the probability of helping increases. Similarly, as costs for direct helping increase, the probability of direct intervention decreases and the likelihood of indirect help, justification for not helping, or flight increases. The simplified 2 × 2 matrix in Table 1 gives the most likely response, at a relatively high level of arousal, as a function of costs for helping and for not helping.

TABLE 1
MOST LIKELY RESPONSE AS A FUNCTION OF COST FACTORS

Costs for not directly helping	Costs for direct help: Low	Costs for direct help: High
High	Direct help	Indirect help Justification for not helping
Low	Wide variance—response largely a function of personality	Running away

Peripheral evidence that cost is an important determinant of whether or not bystanders will come to the aid of victims comes from Piliavin et al. (1969). These authors staged an emergency during a 7-1/2 minute express run on a New York subway. On each run a male confederate, playing the part either of a drunk or an invalid with a cane, collapsed. He remained supine looking at the ceiling until one of the passengers (or in the absence of such help, another confederate) came to his aid. It was assumed that passengers would anticipate that it might be far more costly

to help a drunk (who might embarrass you, insult or assault you, or vomit on your new suit) than to help a sober man with a physical handicap (who is unlikely to do any of these things). It was found that passengers helped the invalid more often and more rapidly than they helped the drunk. The alternative explanation that bystanders declined to help the drunk because he was perceived as either unworthy or unneedful of help is of course clearly possible.

In a partial replication of the first subway study, however, Piliavin and Piliavin (1972) studied the reaction of bystanders to invalid victims who were or were not bleeding from the mouth. On the basis that approaching someone bloody should be costly, although he is certainly not less worthy or less needy than an unbloody man, it was predicted and found that help was slower in coming and less frequent to the bloody victim. This effect was obtained in spite of the fact that the sight of the bloody victim was clearly much more arousing.

The Adequacy of Available Equity Restoring Techniques

The second factor which equity theory states will affect a harm-doer's choice of whether or not to help a victim is the *adequacy* of the alternative techniques available for restoring actual or psychological equity. This is expressed in the theory as Corollary IV.1: *Other things being equal, the more adequate a harm-doer perceives an available equity-restoring technique to be, the more likely he is to use this technique to restore equity.* Thus, given the choice between the ability to partially compensate or to totally derogate the victim, the latter course should be chosen.

An "adequate compensation" is defined as a compensation which exactly balances the harm that was done, a compensation which completely alleviates the suffering the victim has endured. Both insufficient compensations and excessive compensations would be defined as inadequate. An insufficient compensation is inadequate because it can only partially restore equity and thus only partially reduce the bystander's distress. An excessive compensation is inadequate because it eliminates one kind of inequity only to produce another; the harm-doer becomes the victim. An adequate justification is one which both adequately justifies the harm done and is plausible to the harm-doer, the victim, and others.

Berscheid and Walster (1967) provide evidence for the hypothesis that individuals will be more likely to compensate a victim when they can make an adequate compensation than when

they cannot. In this experiment women from various church groups were led to cheat fellow parishioners out of trading stamps (in a vain attempt to win additional stamps for themselves). When the women were subsequently given an opportunity to compensate the victim (at no cost to themselves), it was found that adequacy of compensation was of crucial importance as to whether the women were willing to compensate the victim. Women who could compensate with an adequate compensation—exactly restoring the number of books the partner had lost—were much more likely to make restitution than were women limited to insufficient compensation (a few stamps) or to excessive compensation (a great many stamp books). This finding was replicated by Berscheid, Walster, and Barclay (1969).

Those in need of aid often assume that if they can impress upon those others how much they have suffered they will elicit greater restitution than if they did not exaggerate their claims. It is natural to assume that the more severe one's plight, the more likely he is to be compensated. The preceding research, however, indicates that in some instances the victim would fare better if he minimized his suffering than if he exaggerated it. Emphasizing the amount of debt claimed might be an effective way of securing additional benefits so long as the potential benefactor is likely to make restitution of that magnitude. If, however, a victim exaggerates his suffering to such an extent that it exceeds the highest level of compensation available to the potential benefactor, the benefactor may recognize that any compensation he might make would be grossly inadequate and thus may be tempted to deny the victim any compensation, instead choosing to justify his suffering. It goes without saying that if the only available equity-restoring technique is less than fully adequate, it will nonetheless be used—half a loaf, and all that.

What is Good about the Good Samaritan?

In terms of the above model, it is easy to see why the Good Samaritan's decision to help the Levite has been so admired for so many centuries. It is clear that it was not situational pressures which prodded him into helping. First, the Good Samaritan's arousal should be low since he has no relationship with the victim and no responsibility for his suffering, he observes the suffering from a considerable distance since he is across the street, and he has only the slightest social similarity to the victim. Second, his costs for helping should be high. And third, his costs for not helping should be low—he can easily escape undetected and

unrepentant from the situation. It is evident, then, that something *in the Samaritan's personality and character* modified the decision process—he must have helped because he was a "good man."

Let us briefly suggest two additional personality characteristics (beyond such pure moral rectitude) which should affect the likelihood that a bystander will help a victim rather than justifying his suffering or running away.

1. One's self-esteem should have an important impact on how one evaluates his own costs relative to the costs of others. On one hand, the more highly a bystander values himself, the less willing he should be to sacrifice himself or a victim of unknown worth. On the other hand, the more highly a bystander rates his competence, the more he should minimize the possibility of his failing should he decide to help the victim. Thus, the high self-esteem person might tend to minimize the risk involved in helping others while exaggerating the waste involved in taking any risks.

2. The extent to which the bystander is able to anticipate the possible negative consequences of helping should affect how influenced he will be by situational pressures to assist others. A certain impulsiveness, perhaps even bordering on psychopathy, may actually facilitate bravery under fire. Piliavin and Piliavin (1971) have made the suggestion that many heroes may have distinguished themselves from their more timid mates simply because they did not quite realize what they were getting themselves into. It is thus possible that heroes have more in common with those who desert under fire, i.e., an inability to rapidly calculate the possible disastrous outcomes of their impulsive actions, than either group has to the ordinary unflamboyant "dog face."

(A measure designed to tap an individual's awareness of the consequences of his actions—such as Schwartz's "Awareness of Consequences" Scale (1968)—would be useful in testing these hypotheses.)

Reactions of the Victim

We now turn to the forgotten man in our equation, the man on the short end of the stick, the victim. No one doubts that he is angry, depressed, distressed. It is also generally the case that he is powerless. Whether he receives help or not is, if not in the lap of the gods, certainly not with any certainty in his own hands. We have in recent years witnessed one of the ways in which groups of society's victims have responded: rioting, snip-

ing at police and firemen, looting, burning, destroying. Their intent is clear in equity terms: If I can't get more, you'll have less. Unfortunately, they are so greatly outclassed and so heavily segregated that the majority of the destruction has fallen back on them. What is left to such a victim?

If he cannot "get his" or destroy the assets of the over-endowed, he is left with only two options: (a) he can acknowledge that he is exploited but that he is so impotent that he is unable to do anything about it, or (b) he can justify his exploitation. Often, victimized individuals find it less upsetting to distort reality and justify their victimization than to acknowledge that the world is unjust and that they are too weak to elicit fair treatment (Lerner & Matthews, 1967). Surprisingly enough then, victims on occasion restore psychological equity in much the same ways that their exploiters would surely favor. Victims may alter their perceived outcomes by imagining that their exploitation has brought them compensating benefits ("Suffering brings wisdom and purity"). In this regard, recent data (Comer & Piliavin, 1972; Comer, 1969) indicate that not only do the physically normal attribute such compensating characteristics as perseverence, religiousness, trustworthiness, kindness, goodness, generosity, and courage to the physically handicapped, but the recently handicapped also attribute these characteristics to themselves to a greater degree than to the physically normal. (Interestingly, this effect does not seem to be maintained. Long-term handicapped—2–3 years—show quite negative attitudes towards the similarly handicapped. This finding is worth pondering in regard to the long-term efficacy of the use of this psychological equity-restoring technique.)

Victims may console themselves that in the long run the exploiter will be punished as he deserves and equity will be restored. A quote from Baldwin (1955) exemplifies this point:

> [Negro religion] is not, as *Cabin in the Sky* would have us believe, merely a childlike emotional release. Their faith may be described as childlike, but the end it serves is often sinister. . . . religion operates here as a complete and exquisite fantasy revenge: . . . the bad will be punished and the good rewarded, for God is not sleeping, the judgment is not far off [p. 54–55].

Finally, victims can restore psychological equity by convincing themselves that their exploiter actually deserves the enormous benefits he receives because he possesses previously unrecognized inputs (Jecker & Landy, 1969; Walster & Prestholdt, 1966). It appears then that under the right circumstances victims as well

as harm-doers will deny reality in order to convince themselves that their inequitable relationships are, in fact, equitable ones.

Responses of the Victim to Help

Sometimes an innocent victim *is* helped by others. How should we expect such a victim to react? Society expects him to be grateful. Should we? How a victim feels about his helpers probably depends on whether the helpful act reduces the inequity between the donor and himself or increases it. An act of help that exactly restores equity should be appreciated more than help that is either insufficient or excessive.

A helpful act can be inadequate in at least two ways. The act may alleviate only a minuscule portion of the victim's suffering, or the act of charity may actually increase the discrepancy between the philanthropist's relative outcomes and those of the victim. For example, the rich man who makes a charitable donation as a tax write-off may inflate his own relative outcomes more than those of the recipient. The recipient may then correctly perceive that he has been used.

A helpful act may also be excessive. Sometimes restitution comes too late. By the time a harm-doer gets around to helping his victim, the victim may already have restored actual equality (by secretly bad-mouthing the harm-doer, stealing from him, etc.) or psychological equity (i.e., by justifying his own deprivation). By the time the harm-doer makes restitution the victim no longer feels he deserves it. Thus, the assistance is perceived as producing an inequity rather than as eliminating one. A helpful act is excessive also if the victim *needs* more help than he feels he *deserves* or feels he can ever repay. The welfare recipient may feel he must accept subsistence money without feeling entitled to it.

We would expect a victim to be more enthusiastic about help which is perceived to exactly restore equity to his relationship with the helper than about help which is perceived to be either inadequate or excessive. A lengthy discussion of factors which determine whether recipients will respond to gifts with enthusiasm or with embarrassment is available in Walster et al. (in press). The most important determinant of a recipient's enthusiasm for an "undeserved" gift seems to be the recipient's ability to repay the donor.

Reseachers have investigated the reactions to help of welfare clients, underdeveloped nations, and the physically handi-

capped—recipients who rarely expect to be able to repay their benefactors—and of receivers of holiday gifts, members of the *Kula* ring (a complex institution of international ceremonial exchange), and the kindness of neighbors—recipients who expect to repay helpful acts in kind. Their findings suggest that the recipient's ability to repay is an important determinant of how help affects a relationship. Help which cannot be repaid seems to produce discomfort, ingratitude, and hatred. Help which can be repayed seems to generate pleasant social interactions.

Equity researchers have come to the following conclusion. *Conclusion IV: Undeserved gifts produce inequity in a relationship. If the participants know the recipient can and will reciprocate, the inequity is viewed as temporary, and thus it produces little distress, and little need to justify the inequity. If the participants know the recipient cannot or will not reciprocate, however, a real inequity is produced; the participants will experience distress and will therefore need to restore actual or psychological equity to the relationship.*

It has been demonstrated that individuals are more likely to accept gifts that can be reciprocated than gifts that cannot (Walster et al., in press).

Summary

In this paper we have attempted to integrate equity theory with specialized theories and data concerning the reactions of bystanders and victims caught up in emergencies. These interlocking lines of theory and research provide a better understanding of the factors which shape a bystander's response to emergency situations. First, we discussed variables which determine whether or not onlookers attend to the emergency. Then we considered variables which determine how aroused a bystander will become once he notices the emergency. Next, we discussed factors which determine how the bystander will respond to the emergency, i.e., by helping, denigrating the victim, or by running away. (Some of the specific costs and rewards which are associated with each of these alternative responses were discussed.) Finally, we discussed factors which affect how a victim will respond to those who provide or deny him assistance.

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