Global Measure of Equity and Multi-Trait Measure of Equity: Measuring Equity in Close Relationships

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According to equity theory, people perceive a relationship as equitable when they and their partners are getting what they both “deserve” from their romantic and marital relationships. In theory, couples are assumed to feel most comfortable when their romantic and sexual relationships are maximally profitable and (considering what they and their partners contribute to their relationship) they are reaping all the rewards they deserve—no more and certainly no less (see Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Equity has been found to relate to many aspects of relationships and appears to be important throughout a couple’s lifetime (Pillemer, Hatfield, & Sprecher, 2008). More recently, evolutionary theorists contend that concerns about equity have an enormous impact in the dating marketplace (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). The Global Measure of Equity and the Multi-Trait Measure of Equity were designed to assess men’s and women’s perceptions of how fair and equitable their love and sexual relationships are (Traupmann, Peterson, Utne, & Hatfield, 1981; Walster, 1975).

Description

On the Global Measure of Equity, men and women are asked to assess how fair and equitable they perceive their dating and marital relationships to be. Respondents indicate their judgments on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with answers ranging from +3 = I am getting a much better deal than my partner to −3 = My partner is getting a much better deal than I am.

On the Multi-Trait Measure of Equity, the experimenter begins by explaining the concept of equity (see Exhibit). The experimenter then hands the respondent a list of 25 items, which consist of Personal Concerns, Emotional Concerns, Day-to-Day Concerns, and Opportunities Gained and Lost (i.e., things one gains or loses simply by dating or being married). Each item can also be rated as to importance. Once again, men and women are asked to assess how fair and equitable their dating and marital relationships are and to indicate their judgments on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from +3 = I am getting a much better deal than my partner, to −3 = My partner is getting a much better deal than I am.

Response Mode and Timing

The equity measures can be administered either individually or in groups. Respondents are asked to circle the number (ranging from +3 to −3) indicating how true each statement is for them. The Global Measure of Equity generally takes 1 minute to administer. The Multi-Trait Measure of Equity takes approximately 15 minutes to administer. If each item on the Multi-Trait Measure is weighted by importance, the scale generally takes 30 minutes to complete.
Scoring
On the Multi-Trait Measure of Equity, the experimenter begins by calculating a Total Index, by summing the respondents’ estimates of how overbenefited, equitably treated, or underbenefited they consider themselves to be on each of the 25 scale items. On both the Global and the Multi-Trait Measure of Equity, participants who rate their relationships positively are generally categorized as overbenefited, those who rate them negatively are categorized as underbenefited, and those who rate them as 0 are categorized as participating in equitable relationships. Some researchers, of course, have treated the scores as a continuous variable.

Reliability
Despite its brevity, the Global Measure of Equity possesses reasonable reliability and has been used to study a variety of relationship types (see Canary & Stafford, 1992; Sprecher, 1986, 1988; Traupmann, 1978; Traupmann et al., 1981). During development of the Multi-Trait Measure of Equity, Traupmann and her colleagues (1981) demonstrated the larger scale’s reliability (Cronbach’s α for total inputs = .87; for total outputs scales = .90).

Validity
If the equity scales are valid, they should be related to other variables in ways expected by past theoretical and empirical work. There is some evidence for such construct validity. The Global Measure of Equity correlates with other measures of fairness and equity in intimate relationships. Sprecher (1986, 1988), for example, found that the Global Measure is positively and significantly correlated with the Sprecher Global Equity Measure (correlations range from r = .45 to r = .52, p < .001), which was created to measure day-to-day equity. Sprecher (2001) also correlated a multi-faceted measure of equity to the Global Measure of Equity, with r’s ranging from .43 to .73.

Other validity findings include the following: (a) Profitable and equitable dating relationships are associated with satisfying and comfortable relationships; inequity is associated with distress, guilt, anger, and anxiety. (b) Profitable and equitable dating relationships appear to be more stable (and more likely to lead to more serious relationships) than are inequitable relationships. (c) Those in equitable relationships are less likely to risk extramarital affairs than are their peers. (d) In close, intimate relationships, couples in equitable relationships have been found to feel more intensely about one another, share more of their lives, have more exciting sex lives, and have longer-lived relationships than do couples in fleeting affairs. (See Hatfield, Rapson, & Aumer-Ryan [2007] for a summary of this evidence.)

Exhibit

Global Measure of Equity and Multi-Trait Measure of Equity

Calculating Equity
Technically, equity is defined by a complex formula (Traupmann et al., 1981; Walster, 1975). Respondents’ perceptions of the equitableness of their dating relationships or marriages are computed by entering their estimates of Inputs and Outcomes of Persons A and B (I_a, I_b, O_a, and O_b) into the equity formula:

\[
\frac{(O_a - I_a)}{(I_a)^{α}} = \frac{(O_b - I_b)}{(I_b)^{α}}
\]

Respondents are classified as “overbenefited” if their relative gains exceed those of their partners. They are classified as “equitably treated” if their relative gains equal those of their partners, and as “underbenefited” if their relative gains fall short of those of their partners.

References
In practice, however, the equity of love relationships can reliably and validly be assessed with the use of two simple measures: the Global Measure of Equity and the Multi-Trait Measure of Equity.

Global Measure of Equity

Women were asked: “Considering what you put into your dating relationship or marriage, compared to what you get out of it . . . and what your partner puts in, compared to what (s)he gets out of it . . . how does your dating relationship or marriage ‘stack up?’”

Possible responses are:

+3 = I am getting a much better deal than my partner.
+2 = I am getting a somewhat better deal.
+1 = I am getting a slightly better deal.
0 = We are both getting an equally good, or bad, deal.
−1 = My partner is getting a slightly better deal.
−2 = My partner is getting a somewhat better deal.
−3 = My partner is getting a much better deal than I am.

On the basis of their answers, persons can be classified as overbenefited (receiving more than they deserve), equitably treated, or underbenefited (receiving less than they deserve).

Multi-Trait Measure of Equity

Introduction: Explanation of Concepts

“We’re interested in the give-and-take that goes on in a dating relationship or marriage. We’d like to ask you a few questions about the things you put into your relationship . . . and the kinds of things you get out of it. We know that most people don’t ordinarily keep careful track of exactly what they’re giving and getting from their dating relationships or marriages. They certainly don’t pull their relationship apart and think about the various aspects of their relationship, one by one. But in order for us to get some idea of what goes on in dating and marital relationships, we have to ask you and the other people we’re interviewing to spell out some of the give-and-take that naturally occurs.

“Let us look at some of the critical areas in any dating relationship or marriage. Look over this list. [Hand respondent list.] We’d like to ask about you and your partner’s Personal Concerns, your Emotional Concerns, your Day-to-Day Concerns, and a little about the things the two of you feel you gain or lose—simply by dating or being married. We’d like you to read each item.

“[Each item is read through, aloud if interviewer is used. After reading each item, respondent is asked]: Considering what you put into your dating relationship or marriage (in this area), compared to what you get out of it . . . and what your partner puts in compared to what he or she gets out of it, how does your dating relationship/marriage ‘stack up?’”

Areas Involved in Dating/Marital Give-and-Take

Personal Concerns

Social Grace
1. Social Grace: Some people are sociable, friendly, relaxed in social settings. Others are not.

Intelect
2. Intelligence: Some people are intelligent and informed.

Appearance
3. Physical Attractiveness: Some people are physically attractive.
4. Concern for Physical Appearance and Health: Some people take care of their physical appearance and conditioning, through attention to such things as their clothing, cleanliness, exercise, and good eating habits.

Emotional Concerns

Liking and Loving
5. Liking: Some people like their partners and show it. Others do not.
6. Love: Some people feel and express love for their partners.
Understanding and Concern
7. Understanding and Concern: Some people know their partner’s personal concerns and emotional needs and respond to them.

Acceptance
8. Accepting and Encouraging Role Flexibility: Some people let their partners try out different roles occasionally, for example letting their partner be a “baby” sometimes, a “mother,” a colleague or a friend, an aggressive as well as a passive lover, and so on.

Appreciation
9. Expressions of Appreciation: Some people openly show appreciation for their partner’s contributions to the relationship—they don’t take their partner for granted.

Physical Affection
10. Showing Affection: Some people are openly affectionate—touching, hugging, kissing.

Sex
11. Sexual Pleasure: Some people participate in the sexual aspect of a relationship, working to make it mutually satisfying and fulfilling.
12. Sexual Fidelity: Some people live up to (are “faithful” to) their agreements about extramarital relations.

Security/Freedom
13. Commitment: Some people commit themselves to their partners and to the future of their relationship together.
14. Respecting Partner’s Need to be a Free and Independent Person: Some people allow their partners to develop as an individual in the way that they choose: for example, they allow their partners freedom to go to school or not; to work at the kind of job or career they like; to pursue outside interests; to do things by themselves or with friends; to simply be alone sometimes.

Plans and Goals for the Future
15. Plans and Goals for the Future: Some people plan for and dream about their future together.

Day-to-Day Concerns
Day-to-Day Maintenance
16. Day-to-Day Maintenance: Some people contribute time and effort to household responsibilities such as grocery shopping, making dinner, cleaning, and car maintenance. Others do not.

Finances
17. Finances: Some people contribute income to the couple’s “joint account.”

Sociability
18. Easy to Live With: Some people are easy to live with on a day-to-day basis; that is, they have a sense of humor, aren’t too moody, don’t get drunk too often, and so on.
19. Companionship: Some people are good companions, who suggest interesting activities for both of them to do together, as well as going along with their partner’s ideas about what they might do for fun.
20. Conversation: Some people tell partners about their day’s events and what’s on their mind . . . and are also interested in hearing about their partner’s concerns and daily activities.
21. Fitting In: Some people are compatible with their partner’s friends and relatives; they like the friends and relatives, and the friends and relatives like them.

Decision-Making
22. Decision-Making: Some people take their fair share of the responsibility for making and carrying out decisions that affect both partners.

Remembering Special Occasions
23. Remembering Special Occasions: Some people are thoughtful about sentimental things, such as remembering birthdays, your anniversary, and other special occasions.

Opportunities Gained and Lost
Opportunities Gained
24. Chance to be Dating or Married: Dating and marriage give many people the opportunity to partake of the many life experiences that depend upon dating or being married, for example the chance to become a parent and even a grandparent, the chance to be included in “married couple” social events, and, finally, having someone to count on in old age.
Opportunities Forgone

25. Opportunities Forgone: Dating and marriage necessarily require people to give up certain opportunities ... in order to be in this relationship. The opportunities could have been other possible mates, a career, travel, etc.

On the basis of their answers, persons can be classified as overbenefited (receiving more than they deserve), equitably treated, or underbenefited (receiving less than they deserve).

To calculate a Total Index, the experimenter sums the respondents’ estimates of how Overbenefited, Equitably treated, or Underbenefited they are in each of the 25 areas and divides by 25.

If experimenters wish to weight the items by importance, they can simply go through the 25 items, one by one, and ask: “How important is this area to you?”

8 = Extremely Important
7 = Very Important
6 = Fairly Important
5 = Slightly Important
4 = Slightly Unimportant
3 = Fairly Unimportant
2 = Very Unimportant
1 = Extremely Unimportant

Then weight the item by importance.

The equity formulas used by previous researchers, from Aristotle to Stacy Adams, only yield meaningful results if A and B’s Inputs and Outcomes are entirely positive or entirely negative. In mixed cases the formulas yield extremely peculiar results. Thus, we proposed an equity model designed to transcend these limitations. See Walster (1975) for a discussion of the problems and the mathematical solutions. The superscript k simply “scales” equity problems (by multiplying all inputs and outcomes by a positive constant) such that the minimum of |I_A| and |I_B| is greater than or equal to 1.

Female Sexual Response Patterns: Grafenberg Spot/Area and Ejaculation

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Investigations of the physiological aspects of the Grafenberg Spot/Area have often been conducted in clinical settings; however, many social science researchers are also interested in this topic and may prefer to use a survey research design. Thus, women can be asked questions about their knowledge, attitudes, and feelings regarding their sexuality and experience with the Grafenberg Spot/Area and ejaculation. This survey instrument on Female Sexual Response Patterns was designed to obtain information about female sexuality with a special focus on experiences related to stimulation of the Grafenberg Spot/Area and female ejaculation. Various sections of the instrument contain questions concerning the Grafenberg Spot/Area and other related topics, such as experiencing orgasm and ejaculation through stimulation of the Grafenberg Spot/Area along with related urinary and bladder conditions.

Description

The entire instrument consists of 192 open-ended and closed-form items. Several variables were included concerning demographics, parent-child attachment, childhood/adolescence, socialization, partner relationships, sexual attitudes, sexual behaviors, and knowledge and/or experience with the Grafenberg Spot/Area and female ejaculation. It was important to us to obtain accurate descriptions of the location of the Grafenberg Spot/Area and source of ejaculation. Thus, these questions were open-ended and contained labeled diagrams of the female anatomy.

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