

Equity Theory and Exchange and Communal Orientation From a Cross-National Perspective

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ABSTRACT. The present study explored differences between subjects from the United States and the Netherlands with respect to the evaluation of potential contributions to an intimate relationship, sex role attitudes, and communal and exchange orientation; the applicability of equity theory to intimate relationships; and the possible moderator effect of individual difference variables (i.e., exchange and communal orientation). The sample consisted of 133 students from the United States (41 male, 92 female; mean age, 20.9 years) and 143 students from the Netherlands (40 male, 103 female; mean age, 22.9 years). Clear differences were found between the American and Dutch subjects. They evaluated several contributions to an intimate relationship differently, and there were greater differences between American male and female students than between Dutch male and female students. American subjects had more sex role stereotyped attitudes and were more exchange oriented; equity theory fit better among the Americans, although exclusively for those who were low in communal orientation. The results imply that studies conducted in the United States on these issues cannot simply be generalized to other nations.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY has been one of the most renowned in the area of attraction and relationships since the seminal work of Thibaut and Kelley (1959). This theory assumes that individuals look for the maximum level of rewards at the lowest possible costs. Accordingly, individuals tend to end up in relationships in which there is a more or less even distribution of outcomes for both partners. Equity theory, as presented first by Adams (1965) and developed more fully by Hatfield (formerly Walster; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), makes similar assumptions but focuses upon what participants contribute to relationships in proportion to what they obtain from them. According to Walster et al., individuals who are involved in an inequitable relationship feel uneasy about it and become distressed. This will be true for

the overbenefited who feel guilty because they receive more from the relationship than they believe they deserve, as well as for the underbenefited, who feel sad, frustrated, angry, and hurt because they receive less than they believe they deserve (cf. Sprecher, 1986). Not surprisingly, the underbenefited feel more distressed because they receive fewer rewards from the relationship. Many studies have provided support for these predictions (Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, & Hay, 1985; VanYperen & Buunk, 1990).

Despite the empirical support for the tenets of equity theory, its assumptions have not gone unchallenged. For example, Clark and Mills (1979) argued that exchange principles do not apply to intimate relationships, because the typical relationship between romantic partners is communal. They suggest that in this type of relationship the giving of a benefit in response to a need is appropriate. In a series of elegant experiments, they showed that when one desires a communal relationship with another individual, and the other has been benefited, attraction decreases after the return of a benefit to the other. Clark, Quелlette, Powell, and Milberg (1987) conceptualized *communal orientation* as an individual difference characteristic, referring to the desire to give and receive benefits in response to the needs of others and out of concern for others. Their study showed that persons high in communal orientation helped other individuals significantly more than did those low in communal orientation.

In exchange relationships, there is, according to Clark and Mills (1979), an expectation that benefits are to be reciprocated. In this vein, *exchange orientation* can be defined as the desire to give benefits with the expectation of specific repayment or in response to specific benefits received in the past, as well as the desire for the other individual to follow the same rule (see also Milardo & Murstein, 1979). In a study of Buunk and VanYperen (in press), it was shown that the assumptions of equity theory applied only to individuals high in exchange orientation.

Strong disagreement is often encountered with the assumptions of social exchange theory in teaching social psychology and interpersonal attraction to undergraduate students in the Netherlands. Dutch students also resist the belief that results of American studies, emphasizing the importance of physical attractiveness and other stimulus values for partner choice (Murstein, 1971), hold for the Dutch population also. The resistance to these assumptions and

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findings particularly concerns the value attached to superficial features, the bargaining or exchange process, and the assumption of what is considered selfish, egocentric, and solipsistic behavior. Such resistance is, of course, not proof of the invalidity of social exchange theory for the Netherlands.

There is, however, some indirect evidence to substantiate these anecdotal impressions. For instance, in a study of work-related values, Hofstede (1984) found that subjects from the Netherlands and the United States were similar in three of four value dimensions; power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism. In contrast, the subjects from the United States scored much higher on the dimension of masculinity than those from the Netherlands, indicating that in the United States people emphasize and encourage more self-assertive interests (such as earnings and advancement) and that the values of men and women differ more from one another (cf. Buunk, 1987). Furthermore, a study on parent-adolescent values in the United States and Denmark showed that American adolescents emphasized hard work and achievement, whereas their Danish counterparts stressed a pleasant personality and the ability to get along with others (Kandel & Lesser, 1972, cited in Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1979, pp. 93-94).

The present study focused upon the applicability of exchange principles within the confines of an intimate relationship to a Dutch compared with an American population. The first issue examined was to what extent those from the United States and the Netherlands differed in the value they attached to various behaviors and characteristics considered exchange elements in intimate relationships. Hofstede's (1984) study suggested that more "masculine" values would be relatively more prevalent in the United States, whereas "feminine" values would be more prevalent in the Netherlands. Accordingly, assertive characteristics may be more important in the United States, including factors that facilitate being financially successful (such as ambition, stability, and healthiness), whereas social values (such as sociability and having many friends) may be valued more in the Netherlands. In accord with this line of reasoning, a communal orientation (being responsive to another person's needs) could be expected to be more prominent in the Netherlands.

It is difficult to predict differences in exchange orientation. However, as some authors have argued that such an orientation can be viewed as a more masculine characteristic (Kidder, Fagan, & Cohn, 1981; Major, 1987), it may be more widespread in the United States. Furthermore, because of the stronger emphasis on masculine values in the United States, it could be expected that sex role stereotyped attitudes would be more predominant there.

The next issue that concerned us was to what extent equity within the relationship is related to satisfaction in the samples from both countries. Americans were expected to be somewhat more concerned with equity than the Dutch subjects. Hence, it was expected that more than Dutch subjects, American subjects in equitable relationships would be more satisfied than

those in inequitable relationships; more than Dutch subjects, American subjects who felt advantaged would be more satisfied with their relationship than those who perceived themselves to be deprived (Hatfield et al., 1985).

The last issue was to what extent exchange and communal orientation function as moderators between the perception of equity and satisfaction. On the basis of the above-mentioned studies, we expected that equity principles would not operate in the relationships of people low in exchange orientation and of people high in communal orientation, or would operate to a lesser extent. Furthermore, we explored whether, in this respect, differences between the samples from the two countries existed.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of 4 male and 49 female students from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, 37 male and 43 female students from the Carnegie Mellon University and Allegheny Community College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and 40 male and 103 female students from the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands (total $N = 276$). This sample was a subsample of all students who filled out the questionnaire. All students selected were between 19 and 27 years old and currently involved in a dating or more serious relationship. Of the English-speaking, multicultural sample from Hawaii, 57% identified themselves as Asian (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, or Korean) and 24.5% as Caucasian. Of the Pennsylvania sample, 76.2% identified themselves as Caucasian and 11.2% as Black. There were no differences in ethnic background among the Dutch students. The mean age of the Dutch students was somewhat higher than that of the Americans: 22.9 versus 20.9 years.

The students participated voluntarily and/or in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. They filled out the questionnaire immediately or took it home and delivered it later on. The number of subjects in the analyses varied due to occasional missing data.

Measures

Contributions to an intimate relationship. A total of 24 exchange elements based on earlier research (VanYperen & Buunk, 1990) were presented to the respondents, and they were asked to indicate whether each element was a positive, a negative, or no contribution to an intimate relationship. Each exchange element was followed by a 7-point semantic differential scale that ranged from *an extremely negative contribution* to *an extremely positive contribution*. Examples of the exchange elements were health, attractiveness,

sociability, inattentiveness, intelligence, addictions, ambition, care of children, and completion of domestic tasks.

Perception of equity. The respondents next indicated the difference in perceptions of the 24 exchange elements between their partner and themselves on a 7-point scale. The scale ranged from *This applies to me much more than it does to my partner* to *This applies much more to my partner than it does to me*. To get an indication of the equitableness of the relationship, the exchange elements were weighted by importance and summed. This detailed equity measure appeared to be more stable over time than a global measure (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990).

Communal orientation. The measure of communal orientation developed by Clark et al. (1987) was employed. Some examples of items are "When making a decision, I take other people's needs and feelings into account"; "I don't especially enjoy giving others aid"; "When I have a need, I turn to others I know for help." In the present study, the coefficient alpha was somewhat lower than that reported by Clark et al. in the American sample ($n = 124$), .68, and in the Dutch sample ($n = 142$), .74.

Exchange orientation. The measure of exchange orientation was an unpublished scale also developed by Clark and her colleagues consisting of nine statements followed by a 5-point scale ranging from *definitely does not sound like me* to *definitely sounds like me*. Some examples of items are "When I give something to another person, I generally expect something in return"; "I do not think people should feel obligated to repay others for favors"; "I do not bother to keep track of benefits I have given others." The coefficient alpha was .62 for the American version ($n = 131$), and .68 for the Dutch version ($n = 140$). The correlation between exchange and communal orientation in both samples was close to zero.

Relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was measured by an eight-item Likert scale developed by Buunk (1990). The items included are "I feel happy when I'm with my partner"; "We have quarrels"; "Things go well between us"; "I regret being involved in this relationship"; "My partner irritates me"; "I consider leaving my partner"; "I enjoy the company of my partner"; "I feel our relationship won't last." Possible answers ranged from *never* (1) to *very often* (5). The coefficient alpha was very high for both the American and Dutch samples, .87 ($n = 124$) and .88 ($n = 143$), respectively. The correlations between relationship satisfaction and exchange or communal orientation on one hand, and sex role attitudes on the other, were not significant in either the American or Dutch sample.

Sex role attitudes. These attitudes were assessed on a 17-item Likert scale developed by the authors. Some items are "A woman who has children should be a mother before all else"; "It is ridiculous for a woman to help a man put on his coat"; "A man who easily becomes emotional and breaks into tears is a softie"; "From the beginning of a relationship, a woman has to be careful she is not pushed into the traditional female role." The coefficient alpha was adequate, .75 for the American version ($n = 120$) and .84 for the Dutch ($n = 138$). The correlation with communal orientation was $-.24$ in the sample from the United States and $-.25$ in that from the Netherlands ($p \leq .01$); no significant correlation with exchange orientation was found.

Results

Differences Among Samples

The first question examined was to what extent the samples from the United States and the Netherlands differed in the value attached to various behaviors and characteristics that were considered to be contributions to an intimate relationship. Before analyzing the differences between countries, the differences between the Hawaiian and Pennsylvanian subjects were examined by conducting a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the 24 contributions as the dependent variables (see Table 1). Because no more than 4 male subjects from Hawaii were represented in the sample, only the differences between both American female subgroups were tested. The results showed three differences between the two groups, $F(24, 67) = 1.78$; $p \leq .05$. In comparison with their same-sex colleagues from Pennsylvania ($n = 43$), Hawaiian female subjects ($n = 49$) considered the accomplishment of domestic chores as more positive, $F(1, 90) = 5.47$; $p \leq .05$, and addiction to tobacco as more negative, $F(1, 90) = 5.22$; $p \leq .05$, whereas the Pennsylvania subjects found sociability (e.g., being cooperative, honest, spontaneous, flexible) a more positive contribution, $F(1, 90) = 4.09$; $p \leq .05$. Because only three out of the possible 24 differences were significant at the .05 level—without a systematic pattern and apparently unrelated to the differences in ethnic background between the two samples—we decided to cluster both subgroups from the United States for a more convenient presentation of the results.

Next, the aggregated data from the United States were compared with the data from the Netherlands by MANOVA with country and gender as independent variables and the 24 contributions as dependent variables. There were clear differences between the American and Dutch subjects with regard to their considerations of importance of the various contributions to an inti-

TABLE 1
Ordering of the Factors From Most Positive To Most Negative Contribution to an Intimate Relationship

Contribution	<i>M</i> Total	<i>M</i> USA		<i>M</i> Holland	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Positive					
1. Conforming to the partner	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.3
2. Sociable; pleasant to be with	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.4
3. Leading an interesting and varied life	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.3
4. Intelligent, all-round educated	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.4
5. Strong-minded, self-assured	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.2
6. Accomplishing domestic chores	1.3	1.1	1.4	1.5	1.2
7. Doing odd jobs in and around the house	1.2	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.2
8. Committed to the relationship	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.1
9. Getting along well with the family-in-law	1.1	1.0	1.4	.9	1.0
10. Taking care of the children	1.1	.9	1.0	1.2	1.1
11. Physically attractive	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.0	.9
12. Popular, having many friends	.9	.7	.6	1.0	1.3
13. Successful	.9	1.0	1.2	.9	.6
14. Sexual needs	.9	.7	.9	1.0	.9
15. Ambitious	.8	1.0	1.3	.3	.4
16. Dependent	.3	.5	.4	.6	.1
Negative					
17. Physically unhealthy	-1.0	-1.4	-1.4	-.6	-.6
18. Addicted to tobacco	-1.5	-1.9	-2.0	-1.1	-1.1
19. Mentally unstable	-1.8	-2.1	-2.1	-1.2	-1.6
20. Inattentive, thoughtless	-1.9	-1.8	-2.4	-1.4	-1.6
21. Suspicious and jealous	-2.0	-1.8	-2.1	-2.2	-2.1
22. Antisocial	-2.4	-1.8	-2.3	-2.4	-2.6
23. Unfaithful	-2.4	-2.4	-2.6	-2.3	-2.3
24. Addicted to alcohol	-2.6	-2.5	-2.7	-2.2	-2.7

mate relationship. The differences were largely in line with expectations, $F(24, 249) = 8.61$; $p \leq .001$. As shown in Table 1, more than Dutch subjects, Americans considered getting along well with in-laws, physical attractiveness, being successful (e.g., having a high income, a successful career), and ambition as positive contributions. In addition, physical unhealthiness, addiction to tobacco, mental instability, and inattentiveness were perceived by the American subjects as more negative contributions to a close relationship (univariate $p \leq .05$). Dutch subjects found childcare and popularity

more positive contributions and antisociability (e.g., being negativistic, conflictive, egoistical) a more negative contribution than did American subjects ($p \leq .05$). (See also Table 1.)

These findings indicate that the most salient difference between American and Dutch subjects was the greater emphasis Americans put upon status variables (such as being good-looking and successful, physical and mental healthiness, and ambition), whereas the Dutch stressed more social values (such as not being antisocial and having a lot of friends). However, it must be noted that American and Dutch subjects considered the most positive and the most negative contributions (such as conforming to the partner, sociability, leading an interesting and varied life, unfaithfulness, and addiction to alcohol) equally important.

There were also some gender differences, multivariate $F(24, 249) = 1.89$; $p \leq .01$; women considered getting along with in-laws as a more positive contribution and inattentiveness, antisociability, and addiction to alcohol as more negative contributions ($p \leq .05$). Furthermore, an interaction effect between gender and country was found, multivariate $F(24, 249) = 1.73$; $p \leq .05$; the accomplishment of domestic chores and doing odd jobs were considered more positive by Dutch men and American women ($p \leq .05$).

To examine the suggestion of Hofstede (1984), which indicated that the values of men and women differ more from one another in a more masculine society like that of the United States in comparison with a more feminine society like that of the Netherlands, differences were tested between men and women in each country by conducting two additional MANOVAs with gender as the independent variable. Indeed, the differences with regard to the evaluation of the 24 contributions between men and women from the Netherlands were not significant at the .05 level, $F(24, 118) = 1.51$. Conversely, significant differences were found between the American men and women, multivariate $F(24, 108) = 1.85$; $p \leq .05$. American women, more than American men, considered strong-mindedness and getting along with in-laws as positive contributions, and inattentiveness and antisociability as negative contributions ($p \leq .05$).

More evidence in line with the suggestion of Hofstede (1984) was found when another MANOVA was executed with country and gender as independent variables, with the perception of equity, relationship satisfaction, exchange and communal orientation, and sex role attitudes used as dependent variables. A significant difference at the multivariate level was found between the samples from the United States and the Netherlands, $F(5, 238) = 14.2$; $p \leq .001$. Subjects from the United States were more exchange oriented than the Dutch, $F(1, 242) = 27.11$; $p \leq .001$, and had more sex role stereotyped attitudes, $F(1, 242) = 41.08$; $p \leq .001$. Gender effects were also found, $F(5, 238) = 8.71$; $p \leq .001$: Men had more sex-role stereotyped attitudes

than women, $F(1, 242) = 24.53$, and women were more communally oriented, $F(1, 242) = 25.53$; $p < .001$. There was no interaction effect between country and gender, $F(5, 238) = .99$, *ns*.

Relationship Satisfaction

The second question dealt with in this study was to what extent equity within the relationship was related to satisfaction with the relationship in each country. Equity theory predicts that subjects who feel their relationship is equitable will be more satisfied with it. The overbenefited should be slightly less satisfied, and the disadvantaged should be extremely less satisfied. These expectations from equity theory were tested by executing a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) with orthogonal polynomial contrasts. To do so, three subgroups were created on the basis of the equity measure: the underbenefited (25% of the subjects), the equitably treated (50%), and the overbenefited (25%) (see VanYperen & Buunk, 1990). Next, it was predicted a priori that the recoded equity measure should be scaled as follows: underbenefited group (+1), equitably treated group (+3), overbenefited group (+4) (Hatfield, Greenberger, Traupmann, & Lambert, 1982). This procedure is recommended when unequal-interval quantitative dimensions are of interest (Gaito, 1965; Kirk, 1982). A significant quadratic trend would indicate that equitably treated persons are most satisfied, and a significant linear trend would indicate that overbenefited persons are more satisfied than those who are deprived.

Among the Americans, the relationship between equity and satisfaction was curvilinear, as predicted by equity theory (see Figure 1). The quadratic trend was significant at the .05 level $F(1, 113) = 5.09$, and the linear trend was significant at the .10 level, $F(1, 113) = 2.71$. Thus, the underbenefited and the overbenefited felt less satisfied than the equitably treated, and the underbenefited felt less satisfied than the overbenefited. In contrast, among the Dutch, the predictions from equity theory were not confirmed; the overbenefited were most satisfied with their relationship, and the underbenefited least satisfied. Accordingly, the linear trend among the Dutch was highly significant, $F(1, 126) = 16.27$; $p \leq .001$, in contrast to the quadratic trend, $F(1, 126) = 1.60$.

Among the Dutch subjects, a significant interaction effect was found between the linear equity trend and gender, $F(1, 123) = 7.68$; $p \leq .01$. It appears that the differences between the underbenefited, the equitably treated, and the overbenefited men were very small. In contrast, underbenefited Dutch women were by far least satisfied, and overbenefited women most satisfied. Thus, the linear trend among Dutch subjects was found, particularly among women.

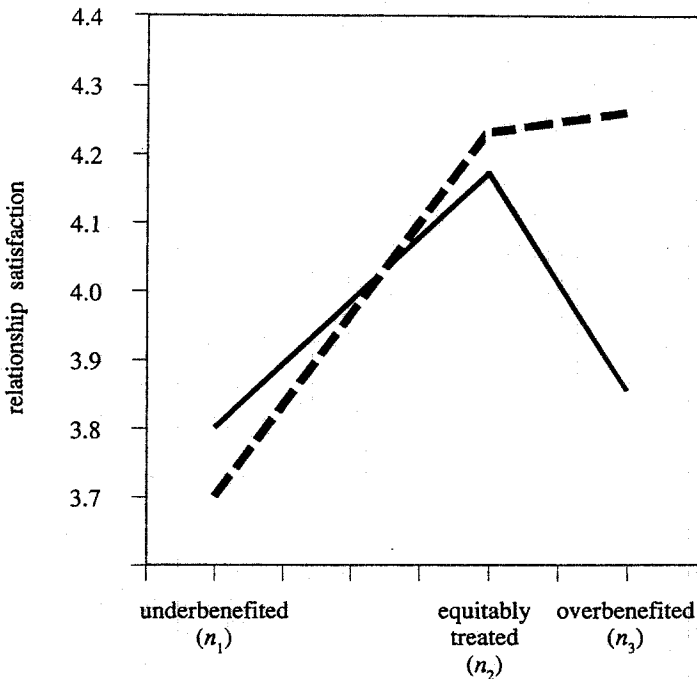


FIGURE 1: The relationship between equity and relationship satisfaction. Solid line: American subjects ($n_1 = 36$, $n_2 = 52$, $n_3 = 28$); dashed line: Dutch subjects ($n_1 = 27$, $n_2 = 70$, $n_3 = 32$).

Equity, Satisfaction, and Individual Differences

To address the third question of to what extent exchange and communal orientation function as moderators between the perception of equity and satisfaction, a mean split was made of the full sample to create subjects high and low in exchange and communal orientation. Next, a two-way ANOVA with orthogonal polynomial contrasts was executed, with equity and exchange orientation as independent variables and satisfaction as a dependent variable. Then the same analysis was executed with communal orientation. Due to the small number of men in the sample, it was not possible to conduct these analyses separately for both genders.

Although no moderator effect of exchange orientation was found, communal orientation did show the expected effect on the relationship between

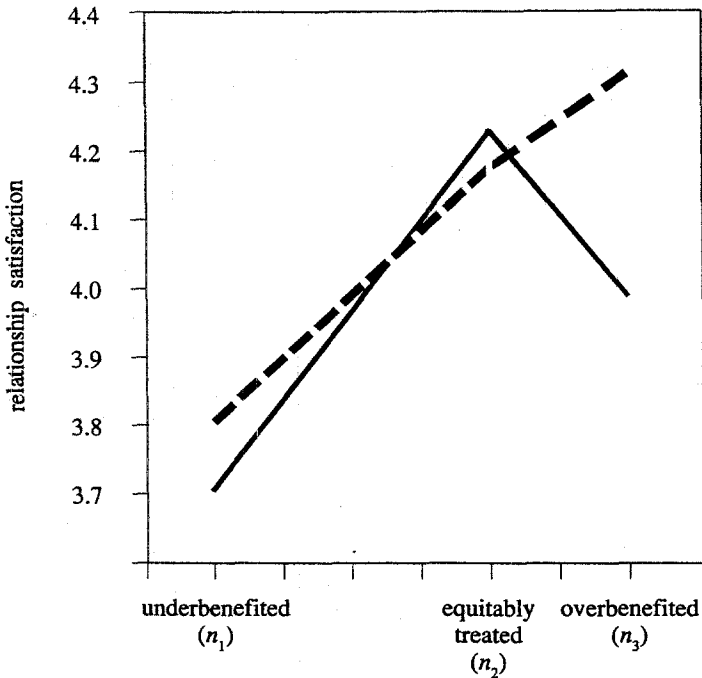


FIGURE 2: The relationship between equity and relationship satisfaction. Solid line: subjects low in communal orientation ($n_1 = 21$, $n_2 = 63$, $n_3 = 28$); dashed line: subjects high in communal orientation ($n_1 = 41$, $n_2 = 56$, $n_3 = 30$).

equity and satisfaction, as shown in Figure 2. Aside from the main effect of equity—both linear and quadratic trends were significant, $F(1, 233) = 16.26$; $p \leq .001$, and $F(1, 233) = 6.24$; $p \leq .05$, respectively—an interaction effect was found between the quadratic trend and communal orientation, $F(1, 233) = 4.38$; $p \leq .05$. Accordingly, the predictions from equity theory were confirmed only among subjects low in communal orientation, whereas subjects high in communal orientation were more satisfied when they felt overbenefited than when they felt equitably treated.

In addition, differences between countries were explored. It appeared that the moderator effect of communal orientation could be largely ascribed

to the American subjects, because the quadratic trend was apparent only for the Americans low in communal orientation: $F(1, 105) = 5.39; p \leq .05$, for the interaction between the quadratic trend and communal orientation for the American subjects exclusively. Although the Dutch underbenefited subjects low in communal orientation were least satisfied, those who felt overbenefited were as satisfied as the equitably treated. On the other hand, the results for the subjects of both countries high in communal orientation were quite similar: Overbenefited subjects were obviously more satisfied than the equitably treated, and far more satisfied than the underbenefited.

Discussion

Some limitations of this study must be noted. The sample was small and rather restricted in terms of educational background to test differences between two societies. Due to the small sample size, it was not possible to test the differences between the Hawaiian male subjects and those from Pennsylvania or the differences between men and women with regard to the moderator effect of individual differences between equity and satisfaction. The restriction of the sample to college students is a minor problem, because the aim of the study was not to generalize to an entire population but to compare two student samples. Nevertheless, this comparison may be indicative of the differences between the United States and the Netherlands with regard to values and behaviors in close relationships, and it enables us to discuss the validity of results from American studies (frequently with college students as subjects) for other populations. A more general limitation of cross-national research is that the researchers are forced to work with translated scales. Although the adequacy of the translation was checked several times by individuals who have an excellent command of both the Dutch and English languages, it can never be known for sure whether both versions measure the same constructs.

Regarding the contributions to an intimate relationship, strong differences appeared to exist concerning assertive interests: Americans attached greater value to being successful, ambitious, healthy, mentally stable, and attractive. They were also more exchange oriented and had more sex role stereotyped attitudes. Furthermore, the differences between the American men and women regarding the evaluation of contributions to an intimate relationship were greater than the differences between the Dutch. All these results support the finding of Hofstede (1984) that masculine values are more prevalent in the United States, and feminine values in the Netherlands.

More empirical support for these cross-national value differences was provided by the relation between equity and satisfaction. As shown in Figure 1, only among the American subjects was equity related to satisfaction as assumed by equity theory. It was expected that equity principles would not

operate in the relationships of people low in exchange orientation or high in communal orientation, or would operate to a lesser extent. Indeed, Americans were more exchange oriented, but no difference between countries was found with respect to communal orientation. Apparently, the curvilinear relation between equity and satisfaction among the Americans can be ascribed to their relatively high exchange orientation.

However, no difference was found between low and high exchange-oriented individuals, in contrast to an earlier study (Buunk & VanYperen, *in press*). In that study, the equity predictions were confirmed only among high exchange-oriented individuals. Underbenefited, equitably treated, and overbenefited low exchange-oriented individuals were all equally satisfied with their relationships and more satisfied than high exchange-oriented individuals. The inconsistency in results between these two studies with regard to exchange orientation can be partially ascribed to the dissimilar operationalizations of exchange orientation. In the present study, we used the exchange orientation scale of Clark and her associates; in the former study, Murstein's scale was used (Milardo & Murstein, 1979). Moreover, the Buunk and VanYperen (*in press*) study employed only a global measure of equity, instead of the detailed measure used in the present study. In addition, in the present study, the subjects were mainly unmarried college students; in the former study, the sample consisted of older, primarily married subjects. Nevertheless, the results of both studies seem to suggest that exchange orientation plays a crucial role with respect to the relation between equity and satisfaction.

As indicated before, no difference between countries was found in degree of communal orientation. However, communal orientation appeared to be a moderator between equity and satisfaction (see Figure 2), especially among the American subjects. A curvilinear relation between equity and satisfaction was observed among the Americans low in communal orientation and a linear one among the Americans high in communal orientation. A linear relation was also found among Dutch subjects, whether low or high in communal orientation (cf. Davidson, 1984; Traupmann, Petersen, Utne, & Hatfield, 1981; VanYperen & Buunk, *in press*). Thus, the difference between the American and Dutch subjects with respect to the relationship between equity and satisfaction can be partially explained by differences in communal orientation between these national samples.

In summary, equity considerations appeared to be important in the relationships of the American subjects, who were more exchange oriented than the Dutch, and in the relationships of individuals low in communal orientation, particularly the Americans. These results are noteworthy, because the correlation between exchange and communal orientation was close to zero.

Another noteworthy finding was the linear relation between equity and satisfaction among individuals high in communal orientation (see Figure 2).

It seems that overbenefited subjects high in communal orientation did not feel guilty, as assumed by equity theory, and consequently did not feel less satisfied than equitably treated individuals. This finding is in line with the proposition of Mills and Clark (1982) that in communal relationships, such as an intimate relationship, receipt of a benefit does not create a specific debt or obligation to return a comparable benefit (p. 123). In the case of being underbenefited, however, no difference was observed between subjects high and low in communal orientation; they were equally dissatisfied with their relationships. Apparently, when underbenefited, even individuals high in communal orientation obviously do keep track of the inputs and outcomes of themselves and their partner, although they are not supposed to do so.

Although women were generally more communally oriented than men, the linear trend of the subjects high in communal orientation was observed only among the Dutch and not among the American women. These results with the Dutch women contrast with those of Rachlin (1987), who found that advantaged wives were equally dissatisfied as deprived wives and advantaged husbands were slightly less satisfied than equitably treated husbands. She suggested that men and women have different thresholds for inequitable conditions, because it may be more psychologically dissonant for women to be advantaged than to be deprived, with the reverse being true for men, given socialization experiences and traditional sex role ideology (p. 191). This difference between our results and Rachlin's can be explained by the more sex role stereotyped attitudes of American subjects in general, and men in particular, in comparison with, respectively, Dutch subjects and women. Dutch female subjects appeared to have the least sex role stereotyped attitudes. Consequently, they did not experience, or experienced to a lesser degree, the psychological dissonance suggested by Rachlin (1987).

In conclusion, this study reveals clearly differences between the American and Dutch subjects, who evaluated several contributions to an intimate relationship differently. In addition, there were greater differences between the American men and women than between the Dutch men and women, the Americans had more sex role stereotyped attitudes and were more exchange oriented, and equity theory fit better among the Americans, although exclusively for those who were low in communal orientation. Overall, the data of this study suggest that the concepts of communal and exchange orientation can help in resolving the controversy between those who claim that equity theory (and exchange theories in general) are appropriate in studying processes in intimate relationships and those who maintain that intimate relationships are above considerations such as equity and exchange (Hatfield et al., 1985). Furthermore, our data imply that the results of studies conducted in the United States on these issues cannot simply be generalized to other nations.

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