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INEQUITY AMONG INTIMATES: APPLYING EQUITY THEORY TO THE FAMILY

Kathryn J. Lively, Brian Powell, Claudia Geist and Lala Carr Steelman

ABSTRACT

Despite advocacy for greater dialogue between social psychologists and family scholars, there has been little cross-fertilization between the two. One exception is in the area of equity theory. We address how advances in equity theory and in family research each have even greater capacity to enrich the other. We do so by using the 1996 General Social Survey, 1992–1994 National Survey of Family and Households, and 2002 International Social Survey Programme to explore the relationship between emotion and perceived inequity in the family. We summarize key findings as a prelude to future scholarship in the United States and globally.

Over the last several decades, the social psychological study of group processes has produced an impressive array of knowledge on social interaction. One area of scholarly inquiry that has truly flourished is the application of equity – particularly, the implications of equity or, more accurately, perceived equity...
for emotional well-being (Hegtvedt, 1990; Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999; Stets, 2003). In its simplest form, equity theory posits that when individuals perceive an injustice, they concurrently experience emotional distress (Adams, 1965; Austin, 1977; Austin & Walster, 1974; Homans, [1961], 1974). While this may imply that distress is experienced only when an occurrence or situation disfavors oneself, the theory also suggests that distress occurs when an inequity favors oneself and disfavors another (Sprecher, 1986).

Over a decade ago in this series on advances in group processes, two of the coauthors of this chapter (Steelman & Powell, 1996) advocated more dialogue between group processes scholars and family sociologists, pinpointing the family as the key group for which group processes may or may not apply. They discussed how social psychological insights derived from experiments could, and should, inform the work of family scholars and, in turn, how family scholarship can broaden the scope of experiments. One area within family research that has begun to apply insights from social psychology is the study of the degree to which principles of equity (either explicitly or implicitly) operate among long-term intimates – with a particular focus on the psychosocial costs of perceived inequity in the division of household labor (Mikula, 1998). Building upon this work, in this chapter we bridge existing research on emotion within the family and equity theory (also see Clay-Warner’s (2006) discussion of justice and the workplace). At the same time, we also speak to the ways in which new findings from scholarship on families (particularly that which has been culled from large scale, nationally representative datasets) have a similar ability to enhance our understanding of equity.

We accomplish this goal by identifying certain challenges in sociological scholarship on perceived inequity in the household division of labor and discussing some patterns gleaned from a number of different, yet complementary, data sources: the 1996 The General Social Survey (GSS) modules on emotion and gender, the 1992–1994 National Survey of Family and Households (NSFH), and the International Social Survey Programme’s (ISSP), 2002 Family and Changing Gender Roles survey. We concentrate on the relationship between everyday emotions and perceived inequity with respect to numerous types of family inequity, including, but not limited to, the division of household labor. We also explore the degree to which perceptions of and consequences of inequity vary across nations. Our intention here is not to provide comprehensive and unequivocal resolutions to these issues. Rather, we offer a summary of some key patterns that have been emerging from our and others’ work as a prelude to future scholarship not only in the United States but also globally.
EQUITY THEORY AND EMOTION

As noted above, equity theory (Adams, 1965; Austin, 1977; Austin & Walster, 1974; Hegtvedt, 1990; Hegtvedt & Markovsky, 1995; Homans, [1961], 1974; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978) posits that when individuals perceive an inequity (to themselves or to others in the interaction), they will suffer emotional distress. Understanding whether and how discontent accompanies a sense of unfairness may be valuable when predicting behavior and other feelings across a variety of relationships (Burke & Harrod, 2005; Clay-Warner, 2006; Hochschild, 1989; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Most studies that delve into the link between equity and specific everyday emotions, however, evaluate results obtained in laboratory settings that ordinarily assess interaction between strangers, as opposed to encounters with acquaintances, friends, or loved ones (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000). Although some scholars have attempted to examine general principles of equity in intimate or close relationships, even these have relied mostly on college student samples (Walster et al., 1978; Sprecher, 1986, 1992; also see Burke & Harrod, 2005; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990).

Despite the theory’s focus on emotional distress, equity theorists acknowledge the need to distinguish between various types of distress. Homans ([1961], 1974), for example, differentiates between anger and guilt (also see Hegtvedt, 1990; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Mikula et al., 1998). Other scholars, too, emphasize the need to explore the relationship between equity and the positive side of emotions, including excitement, satisfaction, contentment, joy, and respect (Oliver, Shor, & Tidd, 2004; Sprecher, 1986; Stets, 2003; Weiss & Suckow, 1999). Equity theorists’ attention to a range of emotions resonates with more general calls within sociology to explore more fully the variety of ways in which day-to-day feelings govern human behavior (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001; Lively & Heise, 2004; Lawler & Thye, 1999; Massey, 2002).

In his meta-analysis of the role of emotion in social interactions, Kemper (1978) concludes that all emotions offer clues about how individuals respond to perceived injustice (also see Sprecher, 1986). According to his social interactional theory, emotions typically arise out of perceptions of injustice that occur along two fundamental axes: power and status (Kemper, 1978). Anger, for example, and other similar emotions occur when actors perceive an injustice to themselves in the course of a social encounter that happens through no fault of their own. Such a proposition meshes nicely
with the main principles guiding equity theory. Moreover, just as individuals are expected to experience anger and other angry feelings when denied anticipated power or status, they also are more fearful, particularly when an insult is delivered by a well-liked other. In terms of positive emotions, Kemper argues that individuals who receive what they perceive as their fair share of power and status in a given social interaction should concurrently feel positive emotions, such as happiness, tranquility, ease, and contentment (also see Smith-Lovin & Heise, 1988). When individuals receive too much power or status in a given interaction or relationship encounter, however, they are susceptible to self-reproach, particularly if they perceive their rewards came at the expense of an intimate, such as a spouse or domestic partner (Burke & Harrod, 2005; Hegtvedt, 1990; Homans [1961], 1974; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992).

Kemper's theoretical predictions dovetail nicely with several experimentalists' predictions, as well as Sprecher's (1986) survey-based analysis of general investments in intimate relationships among college students. Sprecher reports that individuals who perceive an inequity, either in their own favor or that of the other, suffer more negative emotions (e.g., anger, depression, sadness, anxiety, guilt and, in some cases, fear) than those who gauge that their partner's and their investments are fairly distributed. She also finds that individuals who report overbenefiting have fewer feelings of excitement, satisfaction, contentment, joy, and respect than do their counterparts who see fairness in the relationship (Sprecher, 1986; also see Burke & Harrod, 2005).

Kemper's and Sprecher's observations also are consistent with various theories of identity (Heise, 1977; Burke, 1991). Identity control theory predicts that when individuals are subjected to social disconfirmation of their identity — whether it is positive or negative — they become disenchanted (Burke, 1991; Stets, 2004; also see Stets, 2003). Affect control theory implies that individuals who reap short-term rewards have positive feelings (Heise, 1977; Smith-Lovin & Heise, 1988). However, to do so routinely in an ongoing sequence of over rewards at the expense of another can actually culminate in an adverse re-identification (e.g., from sweetheart to tyrant). Undergoing a re-identification, the overbenefited actor should correspondingly experience negative emotions (e.g., anger, rage, self-reproach) consistent with a negative identity (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; also see Lively & Heise, 2004).

Group processes research on equity traditionally has relied primarily on experiments to test emotional reactions to unequal exchanges. Given that most experimental studies rely exclusively on college student samples and, as a result, interactions are with virtual if not actual strangers, we have little information on how individuals respond when they perceive an injustice from which they
Inequity theory. Moreover, just as individuals and other angry feelings when denied are more fearful, particularly when an other. In terms of positive emotions, to receive what they perceive as their fair in social interaction should concurrently presence, tranquility, ease, and contentment (38). When individuals receive too much in a situation or relationship encounter, however, such, particularly if they perceive their intimate, such as a spouse or domestic Hegstedt, 1990; Homans [1961], 1974; lovetall nicely with several experimentalists (1986) survey-based analysis of general emotions among college students. Sprecher et al. (1986) examine an inequity, either in their own favorative emotions (e.g., anger, depression, cases, fear) than those who gauge that are fairly distributed. She also finds that others have fewer feelings of excitement, respect than do their counterparts who see others also present with various (Burke, 1991). Identity control theory projects to social disconfirmation of their negative — they become disenchanted cases, 2003). Affect control theory implies rewards have positive feelings (Heise, however, to do so routinely in an ongoing role of another can actually culminate in from sweetheart to tyrant). Undergoing a nearly should correspondingly experience (self-reproach) consistent with a negative (Heise, 1992; also see Lively & Heise, 2004).

Equity traditionally has relied primarily on task to unequal exchanges. Given that most in college student samples and, as a result, as strangers, we have little information to perceive an injustice from which they are advantaged or disadvantaged in an interaction with a significant other, or even with someone with whom they are expected to have an ongoing, long-term relationship. Because strangers in experiments do not necessarily know or see their partners nor have any attachments to them, they at least theoretically can be quite predatory in their behavior without feeling badly. As we shall see later, subjects may find it offensive to overbenefit from their own actions under conditions where they know — and are attached to — their partners.

The closely related field of procedural justice, which examines not only justice outcomes but also the procedures that lead to them, does tend to pay more attention to the effects of perceived injustice in situations populated by more enduring, if somewhat non-intimate, relationships — most typically, work relationships (Clay-Warner, Hegstedt, & Roman, 2005; Hegstedt, Clay-Warner, & Ferrigno, 2002). These studies provide valuable insight into how justice processes operate in more established settings, but they tell us little about how these operations affect those involved in more intimate relations (also see Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990).

Further, studies of procedural justice typically do not address how discrete emotions are affected by perceptions of unfairness (Clay-Warner, 2006). Indeed, most survey-based studies of procedural justice in either the workplace or the family tend to rely on anticipated emotional reactions (Hegstedt et al., 2002), composite measures of affect (Tyler, 1994), satisfaction (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990), or organizational commitment (Clay-Warner, Reynolds, & Roman, 2005). In fact, a recent review of this literature states that as of 2006 there had only been one procedural justice study published that deals with discrete emotion (Clay-Warner, 2006). But this study — much like its counterparts that examine discrete emotional reactions to equity outcomes — is based on the experiences of individuals who are not enmeshed in enduring intimate relationships, such as those found within families (Krebsiel & Cropanzano, 2000). We, therefore, are left with the question of the degree to which patterns discerned in laboratory settings or, to a lesser degree, in the workplace generalize to familial relationships or to other populations.

EXISTING RESEARCH ON EQUITY WITHIN THE FAMILY

In terms of equity theory, one of the most burgeoning lines of scholarship within the family looks at perceived inequity in the household division of labor. Several scholars have examined inequity's consequences for marital conflict, marital stability, marital satisfaction, and marital happiness
(Greenstein, 1996; Perry-Jenkins & Folk, 1994; Wilcox & Nock, 2006), but we believe that some of the most promising research has explored inequity’s relationship to depression (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Kessler & McRae, 1982; Krause & Markides, 1985; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Lennon, Wasserman, &Allen, 1991; Robinson & Spitze, 1992; Ross & Mirowsky, 1988; Ross, Mirowsky, & Huber, 1983). With few exceptions, these studies concur that individuals who experience their burden as unfair to themselves have more negative outcomes — in terms of increased depression, increased marital conflict, or decreased marital satisfaction and/or happiness (also see Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Smith, Gager, and Morgan (1998), however, propose a counter argument — that is, individuals who are already upset about their marriages are more likely to see their housework arrangements as unfair than those individuals who are either happy or satisfied (a point to which we return in the discussion).

Some family scholars writing on household division of labor explicitly refer to and seriously engage equity theory. Others make a seemingly obligatory reference to equity theory but go no further, while others ignore the theory altogether. Given the variations in the extent to which equity theory is explicitly engaged or elaborated, it is perhaps not surprising that several challenges remain. First, studies of inequity within the family to date have yet to delineate the differences — or similarities — in the implications of under and overbenefiting both at the hands of and at the expense of intimate others. Second, they have been slow to embrace fully the work of experimentalists, whose forceful demonstrations in lab experiments showcase the values of incorporating a broad array of outcomes, especially emotions. Third, these studies as a rule have yet to explore the relative influence of various forms of inequity that potentially operate simultaneously. Fourth, scholarship on the family has yet to address whether perceptions of and consequences of inequity documented in U.S. samples extrapolate to other countries. These challenges have implications for social psychologists and family scholars, as well as for experimentalists and survey researchers, and, in particular, may speak to the importance of an increased dialogue across these groups. Below we outline these challenges and offer evidence from our own research that illustrates these challenges.

Under and Overbenefiting: At the Hands or Expense of Significant Others

Most sociological work on equity within the family has focused on underbenefiting or has drawn attention to the person who is (or perceived to
Folk, 1994; Wilcox & Nock, 2006), but promising research has explored inequity’s (Fujimoto, 1994; Kessler & McRae, 1994; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Lennon, Lon & Spitz, 1992; Ross & Mirowsky, 1983). With few exceptions, these studies focus on their burden as unfair to themselves, terms of increased depression, increased satisfaction and/or happiness (also see, Gager, and Morgan 1998), however, is, individuals who are already upset by the possibility of their housework arrangements not being either happy or satisfied (a point to

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be) underbenefiting. In the case of housework, this refers to the person who is doing more than his or her “fair share” of the household labor. The consequences for someone who does not contribute his or her fair share is either neglected or given little thought. Some studies combine underbenefiting and overbenefiting together as an absolute pattern of inequity, without explicitly comparing the unique effect of each (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994).

Despite what these studies tell us about family life, their foci seem out of step with much of the aforementioned social psychological work on equity theory that uses either surveys of undergraduates or experiments to scrutinize the emotional consequences of both forms of inequity (Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Hegtvedt, 1990; Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999). The greater attention to underbenefiting has been justified in two ways. First, given their emphasis on domestic labor and the undervalued status of housework, family scholars argue that individuals more likely perceive themselves as doing more than their fair share than vice versa. This pattern, however, may be particularly strong in the United States, a point to which we return below. Second, these studies typically center exclusively or primarily on women, who — considering that they continue to do two-thirds of domestic labor regardless of competing time commitments — arguably may be more likely to view their burden as too cumbersome as opposed to too light. Although not explicitly stated, a third reason for the enduring attention to underbenefiting is simply sociologists’ greater interest in the plights of the disadvantaged. Whatever the reason, we know little about how individuals respond to the experience of overbenefiting in the realm of household labor. Indeed, given the debates within the social psychological literature — particularly the opposing perspectives associated with identity (Burke, 1991) and affect control theory (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992) — regarding the consequences of overbenefiting, this issue is one where family scholars would do well to entertain seriously the differing, if not competing, expectations.

As an illustration, we use the General Social Survey’s, 1996 Emotions Module to examine the unique effects of under and overbenefiting in the household division of labor. The GSS has been the source of more survey-based analyses of emotion than any other dataset (Mabry & Kiecolt, 2005; Lively, forthcoming; Lively & Heise, 2004; Lively & Powell, 2006; Schieman, 2000; Simon & Lively, 2005; Simon & Nath, 2004; Sloan, 2004; Stets & Tsushima, 2001). The GSS includes self-reports on respondents’ experiences of 18 different emotion states, as well as a subset of questions pertaining to the antecedents, the experience of, and the management of anger.1 Because our interest lies in linking emotional experience to perceptions of inequity in
the domestic division of labor, we restrict our analysis to individuals who reported being married or cohabiting with a romantic partner and who responded to both gender and emotion modules ($N = 699$).

To assess respondents’ recent emotional reactions, individuals were instructed: “Now I’m going to read a list of different feelings that people sometimes have. After each one, I would like you to tell me on how many days you have felt this way during the past seven days.” The 18 emotions represent a gamut of emotion states – both positive and negative – that embody multiple dimensions (e.g., evaluation and activation) of emotion.²

Our key interest here is the relationship between individuals’ perceptions of fairness of the division of labor and two composite scores of negative and positive emotions. Negative emotions include feelings of distress, anger, rage, fear, and self-reproach, while positive emotions include feelings of tranquility, hope, joy, and pride.

Perceptions of fairness are measured by one item that asked respondents “How fair do you feel the division of work around the house is in your household? Would you say that it is fair to both you and your spouse or partner, unfair to you, or unfair to your spouse or partner?” This question allows us to more broadly test the tenets of equity theory because we can assess the implications of inequity to self (i.e., underbenefiting) and inequity to others (i.e., overbenefiting). We recognize that this measure only captures the respondent’s perception of fairness, but Thompson (1991) argues persuasively that individuals’ assessments of what is “fair” is the crucial predictor when examining the psychosocial costs of perceived inequity in the division of household labor, even more so than more objective indicators of who does what (also see Major, 1987).

As seen in the first column of Fig. 1, both under and overbenefiting are positively related to the composite negative emotions score.³ And, as has been found in experimental studies, the effect of underbenefiting is stronger than the effect of overbenefiting. A complementary pattern is also seen in the first column of Fig. 2 – that is, positive emotions are negatively related to the perception of doing more than and less than one’s fair share. As in the case of negative emotions, the reaction is stronger when faced with underbenefiting. In other words, consistent with equity theory but contrary to the implicit assumption of much of the scholarship on the division of labor, both under and overbenefiting are associated with strong emotional responses, although the association between underbenefiting and negative emotion is greater than with that of overbenefiting. That said, a quick look at the rest of these two figures reveals an even more complicated story when examining discrete emotions, as we discuss below.
in restricting our analysis to individuals who were living with a romantic partner and who completed the emotional reactions, individuals were asked a list of different feelings that people might like you to tell me on how many days last seven days. The 18 emotions represent both positive and negative that embody emotion and activation of emotion. The relationship between individuals’ perceptions and two composite scores of negative and positive emotions include feelings of distress, anger, and positive emotions include feelings of distress, anger, and positive emotions.

Complementary to these measures of equity theory because we can do self (i.e., underbenefiting) and inequity recognize that this measure only captures fairness, but Thompson (1991) argues that what is “fair” is the crucial social costs of perceived inequity in the more so than more objective indicators of equity.

Fig. 1, both under and overbenefiting are associated with negative emotions score. And, as has been the case, the effect of underbenefiting is stronger than that of overbenefiting. The complementary pattern is also seen in negative emotions are negatively related to and less than one’s fair share. As in the reaction is stronger when faced with the antecedents of equity theory but contrary to the scholarship on the division of labor are associated with strong emotional reactions between underbenefiting and negative emotions. That said, a quick look is an even more complicated story when we discuss below.

Emotions, Equity, and the Household Division of Labor

Sociologists who study inequity in the household typically do not portray themselves as studying emotion, but, rather, depression (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). However, the instrument that they most typically use to tap into depression is, for all intents and purposes, a combination of emotion and affective behavior. As can be seen in Table 1, the Center for the Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) scale is, to large measure, a list of emotions that affect control theorists would refer to as simultaneously negative, weak, and inactive and may inhibit, rather than activate, human action (Lively & Heise, 2004; MacKinnon & Keating, 1989; Morgan & Heise, 1988). Among these emotions are feeling blue, sad,
lonely, and fearful. Admittedly, showing how these types of emotions relate to perceived inequity in the division of household labor is instructive; however, insights from sociological scholarship on other emotions, such as affect control theory (Heise, 1977), suggest that a broader range of emotions should be scrutinized (also see Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998). Perhaps the most important of these is anger (Kemper, 1978; Lively & Powell, 2006; Lovaglia & Houser, 1996; Schieman, 2000). Given anger’s status as a justice emotion (Collins, 2005; Kemper, 1978), it is counterintuitive that family scholars have virtually ignored anger as a consequence of inequity. Indeed, some have argued that anger may be a prelude to depression (Simon & Lively, 2005).

Scholars also lack a clear understanding of household inequity’s effect on various positive emotions (e.g., tranquility, pride, and joy). The failure to address these emotions is particularly ironic, given that some suggest that
positive emotions, notably pride and joy, may actually perpetuate gender inequality in families. Some scholars posit that women enjoy doing the lion’s share of domestic labor because it ratifies successful enactment of traditional female activities or performances and offers immediate awareness of accomplishment (Coltrane, 2002; Sanchez, 1994; Thompson, 1991).

The above discussion suggests that scholars interested in the affective consequences of inequity must go beyond the study of depression and even beyond scales that aggregate disparate positive (or negative) emotions. As a corrective, our current work (Lively, Steelman, & Powell, 2004, 2007) uses the General Social Survey (1996) and the National Survey of Family and Households (1992–1994) to examine the correlations between perceptions of under and overbenefiting and a range of day-to-day emotions.

In our analyses, we rely primarily on the GSS, because this is the dataset with the most comprehensive set of emotion items. Its inclusion of multiple discrete emotion states enabled us to use confirmatory factor analysis to derive nine discrete emotion factors: distress, anger, rage, tranquility, hope, fear, self-reproach, pride, and joy, as suggested by Lively and Heise (2004).

For more information regarding reliability, see Lively and Heise (2004).

Overall, our analyses reveal that individuals’ emotional reactions vary not only by the direction of the perceived inequity but also by the emotion under consideration. As represented in the last five columns of Fig. 1, we find that individuals who perceive that their burden is too heavy (that is, unfair to
themselves) are likely to experience more distress, anger, rage, and fear than individuals who perceive their and their partners' contributions as fair. Individuals who view their burden as too light also experience more distress, anger, rage, and fear than those who report that they and their partners contribute equitably, although the effect of overbenefiting for these negative emotions is weaker than the effect of underbenefiting. All negative emotions do not operate similarly, though: Self-reproach is positively linked to overbenefiting but is not implicated with feelings of underbenefiting, a finding that is consistent with Kemper's (1978) predictions.

Patterns regarding various positive emotions, displayed in the last four columns of Fig. 2, suggest a more ambiguous relationship to perceived inequity in the division of household labor. Underbenefiting is significantly and negatively linked to tranquility and hope. For experiencees of pride and joy, however, the relationship is not significant although it is in the same direction. Overbenefiting is also significantly and negatively linked to feelings of tranquility. For the other positive emotions, the relationship is weak and in the case of pride is in the opposite direction. In other words, the relationship between inequity and the composite scale of positive emotions, discussed earlier in this chapter, is not applicable across all positive emotions.

We have repeated these analyses using the National Survey of Families and Households (1992–1994). Just as the GSS emotions module receives a great deal of attention from emotions scholars, the NSFH is widely utilized by family sociologists, perhaps more so than any other recent dataset on families (Blair & Johnson, 1992; DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Greenstein, 1996; Lennon & Rosenfeld, 1994; Perry-Jenkins & Folk, 1994; Sanchez & Kane, 1996; Smith et al., 1998). The NSFH includes an item on equity similar to the question in the GSS (“How do you feel about the fairness in your relationship in each of the following areas?”). Equity in household chores is one of the areas listed. Responses range on a 5-point scale from very unfair to me to very unfair to spouse/partner. To be consistent with GSS, these responses are transformed into three dummy variables: unfair to me, fair to both, and unfair to spouse/partner. As in the GSS, emotion items are measured by the number of days within the last week that the respondent felt, for example, fear. Unfortunately, the number of emotion items within the NSFH is comparatively small (mostly restricted to those items embedded within the CES-D), although the most recent waves notably have added a few items on anger. We limit our sample to include married or cohabitating couples only and collapse the individual emotion items into clusters (e.g., negative
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... more distress, anger, rage, and fear than their partners' contributions as fair. This too light also experience more distress, who report that they and their partners affect of overbenefiting for these negative of underbenefiting. All negative emotions Self-reproach is positively linked to feelings of underbenefiting, a of the (1978) predictions.

Positive emotions, displayed in the last four ambiguous relationship to perceived and hope. For experiences of pride and not significant although it is in the same significantly and negatively linked to other positive emotions, the relationship is the opposite direction. In other words, the composite scale of positive emotions, is not applicable across all positive

... using the National Survey of Families as the GSS emotions module receives a case scholars, the NSFH is widely utilized are so than any other recent dataset on DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Glass & Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Perry-Kane, 1996; Smith et al., 1998). The similar to the question in the GSS ("How our relationship in each of the following... to me to very unfair to spouse/

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ns are measured by the number of days respondent felt, for example, fear. Emotion items within the NSFH is used to those items embedded within the scales notably have added a few items on the married or cohabitating couples only on items into clusters (e.g., negative

... emotions (α = .91), distress (α = .90), anger (α = .85), and fear (N = 4,840)). Our analyses of NSFH yield findings largely consistent with our analyses of GSS, although the magnitude of the relationships is somewhat smaller.8

Taken as a whole, this research underscores the importance of looking at a broader range of emotions, much more so than typically found in both experiments and surveys of this genre. This clearly is one area in which experimental work surely can inform and has informed survey work on family issues. And since survey researchers can test multiple emotions simultaneously, survey studies may be able to open and motivate new lines of inquiry for those who conduct their studies in more controlled settings.

Although both the GSS and NSFH show solid support for equity theory, the findings reveal some seeming discrepancies regarding gender's effect on the relationship between perceived inequity and emotion. The GSS data suggest that some patterns are more significant for men (that is, men experience significantly more anger and rage than women do when they perceive doing more than their fair share). This pattern, however, is not the case in the NSFH. Instead, these data imply that women are more emotionally reactive than men – at least, that is, when they perceive that they are doing less than their fair share. Differences such as this one accentuate the need for survey researchers to collect more data on emotion and its link to dimensions of inequity and for experimentalists to pay even closer attention to the effects of personal characteristics.9

Do All Inequities Offend Equally?

We do not dispute the potentially inequitable or emotionally laden character of domestic labor; as mentioned above, some of our own work has been on this very issue. Such an unwavering focus, however, implies that inequity in housework arrangements is more consequential than other inequities that operate within the home. Unfortunately, such an implication has been insufficiently tested.

A major strength of experimental design lies in its unparalleled ability to isolate the causal effects of an independent variable upon a corresponding dependent variable. The simple elegance associated with such designs, however, comes at a cost: Most laboratory settings also have the constraints of a limited number of items that can be manipulated. In other words, in experiments it is often the case that only one type of inequity is manipulated. But intimate group dynamics, especially among family members, tend to be messier than those captured in most experimental studies (Steelman &
Powell, 1996). One aspect of this complexity stems from the multiple forms of inequities (as well as the perceptions of inequities) that can occur. In the household, for example, there may be inequities not only in housework, but also in paid work, spending, and childcare, among others. These inequities may not go hand in hand. For example, someone who believes s/he is underbenefiting in terms of household-related tasks may perceive that s/he is overbenefiting in the realm of paid work.

Although it may be challenging to design and execute an experiment that captures the effects of multiple inequities simultaneously, this task may be simpler when using multivariate quantitative techniques applied to survey data (see Glass & Fujimoto, 1994 for one example). As an illustration, we turn once again to the NSFH. Unlike the GSS, which includes questions regarding perceived inequity in the household division of labor only, the NSFH also includes items concerning perceived inequities in paid work, spending, and childcare. In order to ascertain the relative effects of these different types of inequity on emotional reactions (i.e., a composite of all of the negative emotions, distress, anger, fear, and overall happiness), we estimate ordinarily least squares regression parameters with all four inequity measures entered into the models simultaneously. Whereas the majority of emotion items within the NSFH are measured in terms of "the number of days in the last seven" that the respondent experienced particular emotions, overall happiness is a global measure that ranges from extremely unhappy to extremely happy.

Fig. 3 displays the relative effects of underbenefiting and overbenefiting perceived inequity in household labor, paid work, spending, and childcare on an aggregated scale of negative emotions. As noted earlier in the chapter, when household inequity is included by itself (i.e., without other forms of inequity), the effects of underbenefiting and overbenefiting on negative emotions are strong. But, as seen in Fig. 3, when other forms of inequity in the home are controlled for, perceived inequity in household labor, along with inequity in childcare, has the least impact. Rather, the areas of underbenefiting and overbenefiting that appear most closely linked to negative emotions are paid work and spending.

We repeat this analysis by disaggregating negative emotions into three emotion clusters (distress, anger, and fear), as well as exploring overall happiness and a shortened version of the CES-D scale. These patterns are summarized in Table 2. For each dependent variable, each inequity is ranked in order of its relative strength (with 1 being the strongest and 4 being the weakest). For none of these variables is housework inequity the most influential. It should be quite apparent that household inequity
complexity stems from the multiple forms of inequities) that can occur. In the
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To design and execute an experiment that
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Fig. 3. Perceived Inequity in Housework, Paid Work, Spending, and Childcare:
Simultaneous Effects on Negative Emotions (Aggregated Scale). Notes: Models
cluded measures for perceived inequity for all domains simultaneously; models also
l for gender, race, age, education, marital status (cohabiting vs. married),
ployment status, and reported amount of housework. Source: National Survey of
ilies and Households. Metric: Number of days in the past week respondents felt
pecific emotion(s).

typically yields the weakest or second weakest influence on the measures,
with a key exception being happiness. The pattern is similar whether we look
underbenefiting or overbenefiting.
These results have clear implications and also offer challenges and
portunities for social psychologists and family sociologists. For social
psychologists, especially those using experiments, they suggest that
peting forms of inequity deserve study, but in a simultaneous fashion.
for family sociologists, they suggest the importance of being careful not to
sume the importance of any item without first explicitly comparing/
trasting its effects to the relative effects of others. These findings also
peak to the importance of surveys including a broader range of familial
dynamics, not just housework. Finally, and perhaps most notably, it
Table 2. Perceived Inequity in Housework, Paid Work, Spending, and Childcare: Effects on Emotions (in Order of Strength).

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<th>Negative&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<th>Anger</th>
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Notes: Models included measures for perceived inequity for all domains simultaneously; models also control for gender, race, age, education, marital status (cohabiting vs. married), employment status, and housework time.

Source: National Survey of Families and Households, N = 4,840.

<sup>a</sup>Negative is an aggregated score consisting of distress, anger, and fear.

<sup>b</sup>Depression is measured by the CESD.

<sup>c</sup>Significantly different from the effects of inequity in housework (p < .05).

implies that the emphasis on housework, although certainly important, inadvertently diverts our attention from other factors that may be even more salient. It may not be all that surprising that perceived inequities in domestic labor are less emotionally laden than other forms of inequity in the home—namely, spending and paid work. Sanchez and Kane (1996) argue that women interpret domestic labor as an opportunity to “do gender”—or, more specifically, “do femininity”—by engaging in stereotypically female tasks (DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; West & Zimmerman, 1987), whereas men may view less input as a way to “do masculinity” or to avoid tasks for which they have little preparation (Shelton & John, 1996). If so, the emotional benefits of fulfilling their feminine/masculine self-identities may counterbalance the sting of exploitation. These findings suggest that scholars’ ongoing fascination with inequity in the household division of labor may have more to do with the enduring pull of Hochschild’s (1989) “second shift” than with the relative effects of inequities in household labor when compared to inequities in other seemingly more volatile domains.
Cross-Cultural Variations in Perceptions and Consequences of Equity

Equity theory and its applications are rooted not in objective measures of equity, but rather in perceptions. When examining the relationship between inequity and emotions, researchers, therefore, must first take into account people’s perceptions of the situation. Perceptions of inequity between strangers in brief exchanges may differ from those experienced within long-term or repeated interactions among intimates. Given cultural scripts about the nature of family and individuals’ personal histories with particular family members, what people define as equitable in an experiment may not translate readily within a family.

Just as perceptions of equity may vary across the contexts of a survey or experiments, they may also vary cross-culturally. People’s perceptions of equity are not created in a vacuum but are enmeshed in cultural norms regarding fairness, gender, and family. Cross-national social psychologists have championed research that takes such factors into account (Miller-Loessi, 1995). We believe that the study of equity is one realm where both experimental social psychologists and family scholars can augment our understanding of how particular cultures and their embedded norms have the ability to affect individual perceptions.

As an example, we analyzed the ISSP: 2002 Changing Family and Gender Roles. The ISSP is an ongoing program of cross-national collaboration on surveys covering topics important for social science research; this particular module, as indicated in the title, focuses exclusively on issues pertaining to family and gender issues. Our analysis of these data first examines variations in perceived inequity in the household division of labor (“Which of the following best describes the sharing of household work between you and your spouse/partner?”). These items are assessed using a 5-point scale ranging from “I do much less than my fair share” to “I do much more than my fair share.” As in the other examples discussed earlier, these analyses are restricted to individuals who are either married or in a domestic relationship (N = 29,377).

For aggregated perceptions of equity to be accurate, a necessary (but not sufficient) condition requires a balance between those who say that they were doing more than their fair share and those who say they are doing less than their fair share. But the ISSP data show that this condition is not met in the United States: 40.4% of respondents report doing more than their fair share and only 17.9% report doing less than their fair share.

Although one could speculate that such a self-enhancing tendency is expected (Headley, 1986; Smith & Powell, 1990; Taylor & Brown, 1988), this
imbalance is greater in the United States than in most other countries surveyed in the ISSP. In Hungary, for example, 20.1% say they are providing more than their fair share of housework and a comparable 19.6% say they are providing less than their fair share. In Japan, slightly more respondents (29.2%) say they do less than their fair share than those who say they do more (26.0%). Fig. 4 summarizes the result of a multinomial logistic regression comparing the odds of saying that one is doing more than one’s fair share. This figure clearly demonstrates that the tendency to overestimate underbenefiting relative to overbenefiting is significantly higher in the United States than in 25 other countries.

As applied to principles of equity, these findings suggest that the United States tilts towards the extreme. In the bulk of studies on equity, either in laboratory settings or in the home, sociologists have focused routinely on the United States. But in the case of housework, Americans are more likely to perceive inequity – particularly when that inequity is disadvantageous to self. There are several plausible explanations for this pattern. As linked to the concept of self-enhancement (Headley, 1986; Smith & Powell, 1990; Taylor & Brown, 1988), individuals’ tendency to self-enhance in the realm of domestic labor may be a function, in part, of the considerable discourse on household labor that occurs within the U.S. media and the academic presses. Another possibility may be tied to the American propensity towards “rugged individualism.” Individuals who are more focused on their own individual contributions to household labor may be more likely to be less attuned to the contributions of others.

In the few empirical studies of equity in advanced industrial countries other than the United States, individuals appear to see the basic question of justice through a different prism and treat it with more consideration of the welfare of others in both small groups and large organizations. Indeed, the very definition of what constitutes equity in European discourse, for example, sounds more like parity or at the very least an assured equality of opportunity, regardless of individuals’ real or relative contributions. These studies show that equity – including how people interpret what it is and react to it – cannot be disentangled from the cultural context in which it is embedded (Schmitt & Maes, 1998; Syroit & Poppe, 2000). They, along with the findings presented here also suggest that the scope of equity research focusing on the United States primarily may be unfortunately limited, if not skewed.

The cross-national fluctuations in perceptions of equity – and the location of the United States at one of the extremes – also prompted us to look at gender differences in perception across countries. In her ongoing work on
Fig. 4. Perceptions of Underbenefiting vs. Overbenefiting (Log Odds). Notes: Dark gray bars indicate a significant difference compared to the United States (reference category, model also controls for gender. Derived from multinomial logistic regression (categories: “more than fair share” (underbenefiting) “less than fair share” (overbenefiting), and “fair share”). Results for other comparisons (e.g., “more than fair share” vs. “fair share”) are available upon request. Source: International Social Science Programme, N = 29,377.
women's and men's assessments of their contribution to the division of household labor, Claudia Geist, one of the coauthors of this chapter, finds significant gender differences not only in the reported number of hours of household labor performed, but also in perceptions of equity (or fairness). More importantly, these patterns vary considerably by country (Geist, forthcoming). As seen in Fig. 5, in only nine of the countries surveyed in the ISSP (Japan, Taiwan, Portugal, Hungary, Chile, Cyprus, Switzerland, Norway, and Slovenia) are women more likely than men to report that their contributions to the household labor are fair; in the majority of countries, however, men are more likely to report the same. Once again, the United States is towards the end of the spectrum – ranking among the countries with the greatest gender variation in perceptions of equity.

In addition to our interest in the effects of nationality on attributions of fairness, and gender differences therein, we have begun to examine how cross-national perceptions of equity relate to emotion. Unfortunately, ISSP includes only one item of interest on emotion: happiness (“If you were to consider your life in general, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, as a whole?”). Our preliminary analysis of this item reveals some intriguing cross-national variation. For example, although we see a fairly strong effect of underbenefiting occurs across countries, the effect of overbenefiting appears to be strongest in the cluster of post-communist countries (e.g., Poland and Bulgaria).

In sum, just as people's perceptions (and gender differences in perceptions) of their own contributions to household labor vary by country, so do their emotional reactions to perceived inequity. This calls into question the universality of equity principles gleaned predominantly from U.S. samples – not in terms of their existence (Mikula et al., 1998; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990), but in terms of their relative effect on everyday emotions. Indeed, these types of variations underscore the need for equity researchers to look beyond the boundaries of the United States and to explore more comprehensively the types of political and/or welfare regimes where equity (or inequity) yields its greatest or weakest influence.  

CONCLUSION

Over a decade ago, we (Steelman & Powell, 1996) drew attention to the importance of applying social psychological theory to occurrences in naturalistic settings – in particular, the family. Since then, others also have advocated the need for more multi-methodological approaches to the study
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Fig. 5. Perceptions of Equity in Housework: Differences (in Percentages) between Men and Women Who Think They Do a “Fair Share” of Housework. Note: Positive scores indicate that men are more like than women to believe that they are doing a “fair share.” Source: International Social Science Programme, N = 29,377.
of an array of topics (Lively, 2008; Morgan, 1998; Pearce, 2002). In fact, some social psychologists have already been successful in this type of merger (Blader & Tyler, 2003; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; De Cremer & Tyler, 2007; Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990; Simpson & McGrimmon, 2005). We believe that equity theory is particularly ripe not only for study in naturalistic settings, but also for the development of a more synergistic relationship between survey research and experimental design.

Critics of experimental work often emphasize the utility of conducting analyses in “real-world settings”; however, to do so may undercut the ability of researchers to tease out causality and to ensure internal validity. That said, where some experimentalists could easily benefit from attending to the findings of family scholars is by broadening the scope of the emotions that they regularly study, as well as by more aggressively exploring the scope conditions by assessing whether the abstract relationships found under particular experimental conditions generalize to more complex situations and beyond the United States.

Similarly, family scholars, especially those relying on survey methodology, would do well to pay closer attention to the issue of causality in their research on the relationship between equity and emotion. When studies rely solely on survey data (particularly cross-sectional data), scholars relinquish an elegant feature of experimental design, namely random assignment of subjects to varying household labor regimens. The inability to manipulate the labor demands unfortunately raises the possibility of selection biases and challenges the causal ordering of variables.

Despite the theoretical appeal of equity theory and corroborating evidence from qualitative studies (Hochschild, 1989), most family scholars cannot unequivocally conclude that perceived inequity in the household division of labor causes emotional distress (also see Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Extrapolating from some tenets of affect control theory, Scher and Heise (1993), for instance, suggest that individuals may look to their environment, their own social roles, and the social roles of others in order to make sense of their feelings. Such an interpretation views emotions not as the end result of cognitive assessment of equity or justice, as do the majority of those studying perceived inequity in the family (Hochschild, 1989; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Ross et al., 1983), but rather as a precursor of equity judgments. As one example, Scher and Heise contend that cultural scripts regarding feelings of anger and shame lead individuals to assess their situations as either fair or unfair. Psychological studies of mood and affect also show that individuals who are in bad moods are more likely than those who are in good moods to view their situations as inequitable (Gallagher &
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In fact, studies have been successful in this type of merger (Hochschild, 1989; De Cremer & Tyler, 2000; Simpson & McGrimmon, 2005). We particularly ripe not only for study in the development of a more synergistic and experimental design.

Many emphasize the utility of conducting surveys; however, to do so may undercut the ability of others to enhance internal validity. That could easily benefit from attending to the broadening of the scope of the emotions that are more aggressively exploring the scope of the abstract relationships found under generalize to more complex situations but only those relying on survey methodology. Attention to the issue of causality in their equity and emotion. When studies rely (cross-sectional data), scholars relinquish control design, namely random assignment of regimens. The inability to manipulate raises the possibility of selection biases and variables.

The sentiment of equity theory and corroborating (Hochschild, 1989), most family scholars test perceived inequity in the household distress (also see Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990) and that individuals may look to their and the social roles of others in order to an interpretation views emotions not as a test of equity or justice, as do the majority in the family (Hochschild, 1989; et al., 1983), but rather as a precursor of peers. Scher and Heise contend that cultural and shame lead individuals to assess their psychological studies of mood and affect in bad moods are more likely than those for situations as inequitable (Gallagher & Clore, 1985; Melton & Scher, 1992; O'Malley & Davis, 1984; Sinclair & Mark, 1992). If emotions do, in fact, drive equity judgments, our findings underscore the need to incorporate a wider spectrum of emotions that may facilitate such judgments not only within the context of long-term interpersonal relationships, but also in computer simulations and/or experimental settings.

The aforementioned research offers a formidable challenge to survey researchers who unwaveringly place equity as the independent variable and emotion as the dependent variable. Indeed, our reading of the literature suggests that both perspectives certainly have merits (also see Smith et al., 1998; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). There are, however, some statistical techniques that can be applied to cross-sectional survey data that may also shed some insight into the issue of causality. These non-recursive models enable researchers to compare the relative effects of both sides of the causal chain. In our own work, for example, we have used a series of two-stage least squares models that estimated the effects of perceived inequity and emotionality simultaneously. These auxiliary analyses suggest that the relative effect of perceived equity on emotions is greater than the effect of emotions on perceived equity (Lively et al., 2007; also see Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Even with advances in statistics techniques, however, these approaches remain, at best, inconclusive.

In reading the literature on family, however, it becomes clear that the dichotomy that exists between research on equity and research on the family is not merely a methodological one, but more a split between social psychologists and family scholars. Although some family scholars use equity theory as a starting point, more often than not the theory is relegated to a minor role or is all but ignored. Even those scholars who use equity theory as part of their theoretical frame too often ignore basic insights — for example, that overbenefiting also matters to emotional well-being. This oversight ultimately disadvantages family scholars' analytic goals, which presumably include a desire to better understand how social processes (of which inequity is but one) operate within family life. By the same token, that family scholars do not rely on social psychological principles to the degree that we would prefer speaks not only to their seeming inattention to the work of social psychologists, but also to social psychologists' failure to build bridges beyond what may be perceived by others as an increasingly inauspicious community.

These issues are not new. Over a decade has passed since we pointed to "an invisible wall" that separates social psychological research from research on the family (Steelman & Powell, 1996). Since then, some cracks
have appeared, particularly as family scholars interested in the division of household labor have paid increasing attention to social psychological principles of equity. These studies, granted, have focused only on the more rudimentary principles of equity theory; nonetheless they add to earlier cross-fertilizations, including inquiries into dating, mate selection, and marriage that have drawn heavily from social psychological-based studies of exchange. Despite these advances the potential for more discussion – and collaboration – between the two fields abounds.

NOTES

1. We realize that the question of self-report data is an important one. See Simon and Nath (2004) for a detailed discussion of self-report data and social desirability within the GSS emotions module.

2. Although the module actually includes 19 emotion items, one of these – restless – is not included in our analysis because it is more appropriately classified as a cognitive-behavioral state than as an emotional one (Clore, Ortony, & Foss, 1987; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988).

3. The models on which Figs. 1 and 2 are based also control for the amount of housework performed by both self and spouse (or cohabitating partner), as reported by the respondent. These items are measured by a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = very little to 5 = all. Consistent with other empirical examinations of household inequity, “actual” (i.e., reported amount) contributions wield less influence than perceived fairness of contributions. Models controlling for sex, race, age, education, income, employment status, marital status (married or cohabitating), and the presence of children in the home resulted in very similar patterns.

4. All results presented in the text are significant (p < .05), unless otherwise specified.

5. Inclusion of both anxious and depressive symptoms in CES-D and other depression scales also may mask the degree to which clusters of emotions are differentially affected by particular social arrangements (also see Hegvedt & Killian, 1999). The CES-D also confounds emotion and behavior associated with generalized distress (e.g., the inability to sleep, eat, or concentrate).

6. Affect control theorists classify emotion by three culturally shared dimensions of affective meaning: evaluation (good or bad), potency (powerful or powerless), and activation (active or inactive) (Heise, 1977; Smith-Lovin & Heise, 1988). Studies indicate that positive, active, and powerful emotions correlate with positive, active, and powerful social statuses and behaviors, just as negative, inactive, and weak social statuses correlate with negative, inactive, and behaviors (Lively & Heise, 2004; Tsoudis & Smith-Lovin, 1998).

7. An appendix containing the descriptions, metrics, means, and alphas of these factors is available from the first author.

8. Although the equity items in both datasets are similar, the measurement of housework performed is not. Unlike the GSS (see footnote 3), the NSFH asks


Inequity among Intimates

Lively, K. J. (Forthcoming). Emotional sequencing and the management of emotion, by women and men. Social Forces.


Inequity among Intimates


