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The experience and expression of anger, guilt, and sadness in marriage: An equity theory explanation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how expressions of anger, guilt, and sadness are related to (in)equity and marital satisfaction. Data from 92 couples demonstrated that being overbenefited was positively associated with guilt, whereas being underbenefited was positively associated with anger. For wives, being underbenefited was also positively associated with sadness. Results also revealed that (i) people who perceived equity reported using more constructive, prosocial emotional expressions, (ii) underbenefited people reported using more destructive, antisocial emotional expression, and (iii) overbenefited people reported using both prosocial and antisocial emotional expressions. Both husbands and wives reported higher levels of marital satisfaction when they perceived themselves to be treated equitably or to be overbenefited as compared to underbenefited. Results also suggested that angry feelings and aggressive expressions of anger mediated the relation between underbenefiting inequity and martial satisfaction, and that the

An earlier version of this paper was presented as a Top Four Paper in Family Communication at the November 2006 meeting of the National Communication Association, San Antonio, TX. All correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Laura Guerrero, Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287–1205, USA [e-mail: laura.guerrero@asu.edu]. Duncan Cramer was the Action Editor on this article.

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships Copyright © 2008 SAGE Publications (www.sagepublications.com), Vol. 25(5): 699–724. DOI: 10.1177/0265407508093786

way people express anger mediated the relationship between anger and marital satisfaction.

KEY WORDS: emotional expressions • emotions • equity • inequity • marital satisfaction

Researchers have used equity theory as a framework for understanding the emotions partners experience in their relationships (Sprecher, 2001a, 2001b). Equity is associated with contentment, relational satisfaction, and commitment (Sprecher & Schwartz, 1994), whereas inequity is associated with negative emotions such as anger, guilt, and sadness, (e.g., Sprecher, 2001a; Walster, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, & Hay, 1985). These associations have been found across both dating (e.g., Sprecher, 2001a) and marital (e.g., Utne, Hatfield, Traupmann, & Greenberger, 1984) relationships.

Little to no research, however, has investigated how individuals respond to the emotions of anger, guilt, and sadness in equitable versus inequitable relationships. How a person expresses (or fails to express) such emotions can affect marital satisfaction as much as or more than the experience of negative emotion. Indeed, being able to communicate negative emotions constructively is associated with relational satisfaction and physical health (Buck, 1984; Guerrero & Floyd, 2006; King & Emmons, 1990). Emotional experience and emotional expression are related but distinct concepts (Guerrero & La Valley, 2006). In some cases, the expression of a certain emotion may be related to (in)equity even though the experience of that emotion is not. For example, although underbenefited individuals may not experience much guilt in their relationships, when they do experience guilt they might express their feelings quite differently than overbenefited partners would (e.g., an underbenefited person might resent being made to feel guilty when s/he is already overburdened, which could lead to a more aggressive reaction). Thus, this study seeks to expand scholarly understanding of how emotion functions in equitable and inequitable relationships, by including variables related to both emotional experience and emotional expression.

The primary goals of the present study are threefold. First, we replicate past research showing that (in)equity is associated with both marital satisfaction and the emotional experiences of anger, guilt, and sadness. Second, we determine whether (in)equity is also associated with expressions of anger, guilt, and sadness. Finally, we investigate how (in)equity, emotional experience, and emotional expression work together to predict marital satisfaction.

Equity and marital satisfaction

Equity theory focuses on the balance of benefits and contributions in relationships (Walster & Traupmann, 1980; Walster et al., 1985; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). A relationship is equitable when partners perceive that

they have equivalent ratios of benefits versus contributions. When relationships are inequitable, people perceive themselves to be underbenefited or overbenefited. Underbenefited inequity occurs when people receive fewer benefits relative to contributions in comparison to their partner; overbenefited inequity occurs when people receive greater benefits relative to contributions in comparison to their partner.

Research has established that (in)equity is associated with both relational satisfaction and self-reported emotional experience. According to equity theory, people in equitable marriages should be contented and satisfied, whereas those in inequitable marriages should be distressed, with distress increasing along with the degree of inequity (Walster, Traupmann, & Walster, 1978). Around 50% of husbands and wives report that their marriages are equitable (Buunk & VanYperen, 1991; Peterson, 1990). These couples are likely to report high marital adjustment and relational satisfaction (e.g. Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999; Davidson, 1984; Davidson, Balswick, & Halverson, 1983; Traupmann, Hatfield, & Wexler, 1983; Utne et al., 1984).

Although both underbenefited inequity (UBI) and overbenefited inequity (OBI) are theorized to be more distressing than equity, people who are underbenefited are especially likely to report relational dissatisfaction (e.g., Walster et al., 1985; Traupmann, Petersen, Utne, & Hatfield, 1981). Sprecher (2001b) noted that UBI is related to dissatisfaction for men and lack of commitment for women, whereas OBI is unrelated to satisfaction and commitment. Buunk and Mutsaers (1999) found that the more overbenefited individuals felt, the happier they were in their marriages, particularly for men. Canary and Stafford (1994) contended that being underbenefited is more upsetting because those who are overbenefited are at least comforted by and enjoy the relative benefits they have. Our first hypothesis replicates these findings by predicting that:

- *H1*: Perceptions of equity are positively associated with marital satisfaction such that individuals who perceive themselves to be underbenefited report less satisfaction than those who perceive themselves to be in equitable relationships or to be overbenefited.

(In)equity and the experience of anger, guilt, and sadness

The distress that occurs in inequitable marriages can take various forms, including anger, guilt, or sadness (e.g., Adams, 1965; Walster et al., 1985), all of which are related to issues of fairness and injustice. Anger is one of the most intense emotions a person experiences in relationships (Lazarus, 1991) and feelings of injustice are one of the primary causes of anger (e.g., Canary, Spitzberg, & Semic, 1998). Guilt is an unpleasant and self-evaluative emotional reaction to "having violated a moral imperative or social standard" (Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998, p. 125), such as receiving more out of a relationship in comparison to one's partner (Walster et al., 1985). Sadness is an aversive negative reaction to loss or disappointment (Barr-Zisowitz, 2000;

Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987), and is related to injustice insofar as people become sad when a relationship does not meet their expectations for fairness.

As theorized in early work on equity theory (e.g., Adams, 1965; Jacques, 1961; Walster et al., 1985), research has demonstrated that UBI is positively related to the experience of anger and sadness. Sprecher (1986) found that underbenefited men reported feeling anger, hurt, and resentment. In contrast, underbenefited women experienced more sadness than anger. Sprecher (2001a) replicated the finding that underbenefited men were more likely to report anger than underbenefited women. However, underbenefited men were more likely to experience depression than anger, and underbenefited women were more likely to experience frustration than anger or depression. Although sex differences were inconsistent across these studies, the links between UBI and both anger and sadness were largely consistent.

Equity theorists have also proposed that OBI is related to guilt (e.g., Adams, 1965; Jacques, 1961; Walster et al., 1985). In Sprecher's (1986) study, OBI was associated with guilt for men but not for women. Yet earlier studies showed that women (but not men) felt guilty when overbenefited (e.g., Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). In another study (Sprecher, 2001a), guilt was the only negative emotion consistently predictive of OBI for both men and women. Thus, similar to the findings linking UBI to anger and sadness, research on OBI and guilt has produced some inconsistency in regard to sex differences, but is consistent in demonstrating a relationship between OBI and guilt. Our next hypothesis seeks to replicate these findings:

- *H2*: Emotional experience is related to perceptions of inequity such that: (i) underbenefiting inequity is positively associated with anger; (ii) underbenefiting inequity is positively associated with sadness; and (iii) overbenefiting inequity is positively associated with guilt.

(In)equity and emotional expression

Perceptions of (in)equity may be related to different *expressions* of emotional distress, as well as different emotional experiences. Equity involves believing that one has a fair and balanced partnership with one's partner. Such a partnership likely involves cooperation, which includes engaging in constructive behavior that contributes to the well-being of the relationship while benefiting both partners. On the other hand, people in inequitable relationships may be more uncooperative with one another. For example, an underbenefited person may aggressively demand change in an effort to restore equity. Emotional expression may also contribute to perceptions of (in)equity. Having a partner who engages in antisocial or destructive modes of emotional expression can be a cost, whereas having a partner who engages in constructive modes of emotional expression can be a benefit.

Guerrero and La Valley (2006) noted that emotional expressions, like conflict strategies, can be conceptualized as falling along at least two dimensions:

constructive versus destructive, and active versus passive. Constructive expressions are prosocial and cooperative, whereas destructive expressions are antisocial and competitive. Active expressions are direct; passive expressions are indirect. Similarly, in her work on the investment model, Rusbult identified four responses to dissatisfaction (exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect) that are defined in terms of how constructive versus destructive, and passive versus active, they are. People report using the constructive responses of voice and loyalty when they are more committed to and satisfied with their relationships (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982).

Given that both the investment model and equity theory are social exchange theories, we expect that a similar pattern will emerge for emotional expression in equitable versus inequitable relationships. Specifically, people who perceive equity may be more likely to express emotions in a constructive, cooperative manner. Research has already documented that couples in equitable relationships are more likely to show positive affect, engage in prosocial maintenance behaviors, and cope with conflict constructively than are couples in inequitable relationships (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992; Farinelli, 2005; Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000). Next, we make specific predictions for the emotional expressions of anger, guilt, and sadness.

Anger. Guerrero (1994) identified four main forms of anger expression that can be classified in terms of how constructive-destructive and active-passive they are. *Distributive-aggression* involves actions that are destructive and active, such as throwing objects, yelling, or attacking (see also, Shaver et al., 1987). *Integrative-assertion* is constructive and active, and includes behaviors such as self-disclosure and problem-solving. *Passive aggression* encompasses passive, destructive behaviors, such as physically pulling away and/or ignoring someone. Finally, *non-assertive denial* is a passive behavior that involves hiding or denying one's angry feelings (Guerrero, 1994). Similar models of anger expression were identified by Feeney (1995).

In general, we contend that equity is associated with the integrative-assertive style, whereas UBI is associated with more destructive and passive anger expressions. Farinelli's (2005) work demonstrated that people in the underbenefited position sometimes express anger using aggressive attacks that communicate their frustration. Work on "the chilling effect" suggests that people experiencing UBI might also use passive aggression or non-assertive denial in response to anger. According to the chilling effect, the partner with less power (in this case, the underbenefited person) is sometimes hesitant to discuss relational problems or be assertive due to fear of judgment or retaliation by the more powerful relational partner (Roloff & Cloven, 1990). The relationship between OBI and expressions of anger is less clear. On the one hand, people may have more leeway to engage in aggressive anger displays when they are in the more dominant, overbenefited position (Dunbar, 2004). On the other hand, overbenefited partners may experience anger less intensely, which could lead to less aggressive displays, and they might feel guilty if they act aggressively toward their

already underbenefited spouses. Therefore, we pose hypotheses related to equity and UBI, but ask a research question related to OBI:

- *H3*: Perceptions of equity are associated (i) positively with reported use of integrative-assertion, and (ii) negatively with reported use of distributive-aggression, passive aggression, and non-assertive denial.
- *H4*: Perceptions of underbenefiting inequity are associated (i) negatively with reported use of integrative-assertion, and (ii) positively with reported use of distributive-aggression, passive aggression, and non-assertive denial.
- *R1*: Are individual perceptions of overbenefiting inequity associated with reported use of integrative-assertion, distributive-aggression, passive aggression, or non-assertive denial?

Guilt. Communication provides the means to lessen one's guilt by taking corrective action (Lewis, 2000; Planalp, Hafen, & Adkins, 2000). Specifically, guilty people apologize, aim to justify their behavior through explanation, and/or aim for appeasement through behaviors such as giving gifts or being especially nice (Aune, Metts, & Ebesu-Hubbard, 1998; Mongeau & Schulz, 1997; Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). Given the tendency for those in equitable relationships to engage in constructive behaviors (e.g., Messman et al., 2000), people who perceive their marriages to be equitable would arguably be likely to apologize/concede, explain/justify, and appease, as these are generally constructive and cooperative responses to guilt. Conversely, those who perceive inequity may be more likely to respond in a negative manner, or to deny wrongdoing, especially if they are underbenefited (Farinelli, 2005).

The relationship between OBI and expressions of guilt is more speculative. One possibility is that overbenefited individuals use appeasement to compensate for their "superior" position within the relationship. Conversely, given the wife demand/husband withdraw pattern evident in some marriages (see Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995), and the intensity of emotion that women feel in the overbenefited position (Walster et al., 1985), wives may be likely to correct their guilt in an active mode (e.g., apology, justification), whereas husbands may be more likely to use passive strategies (e.g., avoidance, denial). Thus, we pose a research question along with the following hypotheses:

- *H5*: Perceptions of equity are associated (i) positively with reported use of apologies/concessions, explanations/justifications, and appeasement, and (ii) negatively with denial/withdrawal.
- *H6*: Perceptions of underbenefiting inequity are associated (i) negatively with reported use of apologies/concessions, explanations/justifications, and appeasement, and (ii) positively with denial/withdrawal.
- *R2*: Are individual perceptions of overbenefiting inequity associated with reported use of apologies/concessions, explanations/justifications, appeasement, or denial/withdrawal?

Sadness. When people's expectations of their partners and their relationships are not met, sadness may surface gradually and then linger (Barr-Zisowitz,

2000; Shaver et al., 1987). This may be the case when people experience UBI (Sprecher, 2001a). People may cope with sadness differently depending on the degree to which they perceive equity, UBI, or OBI. In general, sadness and depression are associated with action tendencies related to passivity and withdrawal (Lazarus, 1991), which can cause people to dwell on their problems and remain depressed (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). According to Guerrero and Reiter (1998), behavioral responses to sadness that constitute a withdrawing response often focus on immobilization (e.g., staying in bed, missing work or school) or solitude (e.g., spending time alone, avoiding others). Such responses are destructive when they keep the sad person isolated and focused on her or his negative affect (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987).

However, because perceptions of equity are associated with more constructive behavior and cooperation (e.g., Messman et al., 2000), those in equitable relationships might be more prone to cope with sadness by engaging in active, prosocial behavior, rather than immobilization and solitude. Constructive responses to sadness allow people to get on with their normal lives, distract themselves from their problems, and receive comfort from others. Guerrero and Reiter (1998) identified two especially helpful responses to sadness: social support seeking (i.e., spending time with and talking over problems with loved ones) and positivity/distractions (i.e., acting cheerful and keeping busy with activities).

UBI and OBI may be associated with less constructive responses to sadness. In particular, a chilling effect could cause underbenefited individuals to withdraw when feeling sad or depressed (see Roloff & Cloven, 1990), and overbenefited individuals may avoid discussing their feelings with their spouses so as not to overburden them any further. Based on these possibilities, we advance the following hypothesis and research questions:

- *H7*: Perceptions of equity are associated (i) positively with reported use of social support seeking and positivity/distraction, and (ii) negatively with immobilization/solitude.
- *R3*: Are perceptions of underbenefiting inequity associated with reported use of social support seeking, positivity/distraction, or immobilization/solitude?
- *R4*: Are individual perceptions of overbenefiting inequity associated with reported use of social support seeking, positivity/distraction, or immobilization/solitude?

Predicting marital satisfaction

The logic behind equity theory is that inequity leads people to experience negative emotion, which in turn leads to relational dissatisfaction. However, how relational partners express negative emotion may be as important, if not more important, than emotional experience. Partners who routinely engage in positive affective behavior tend to be satisfied with their relationships (e.g., Broderick & O'Leary, 1986; Davidson et al., 1983). People also tend

to be more satisfied with the communication in their relationships when they express negative emotions in a constructive fashion, such as using use non-aggressive means to express anger (Guerrero & La Valley, 2006). Moreover, partners cannot see one another's internal emotional experiences, but they can observe, and be affected by, one another's emotional expressions.

Thus, both the experience and expression of emotions such as anger, guilt, and sadness are likely related to marital satisfaction, as is the degree to which one is under- or over-benefited. To date, however, no study has examined how (in)equity, emotional experience, and emotional expression work together to predict marital satisfaction. One possibility is that emotional experience and emotional expression mediate the association between (in)equity and marital satisfaction. Emotional expression variables could also mediate the relationship between emotional experience and marital satisfaction. To test these and other possibilities, a research question focusing on the experience and expression of anger, guilt, and sadness was posed:

- *R5*: How do (in)equity, emotional experience, and emotional expression work together to predict marital satisfaction?

Method

Participants and procedures

Undergraduate students in communication classes at a university in the Southwest received extra credit in a class for recruiting a couple to participate in a study on "communication and emotion in marriages." Couples were entered into a drawing to receive one of five free sets of movie tickets. A total of 184 individuals (92 couples) participated. Of these, 68 couples reported to a university classroom and filled out questionnaires separately under the supervision of one of the researchers. The remaining 24 couples (who lived outside of the area) were mailed two stamped envelopes by a student recruiter, who called them ahead of time to see if it was okay to send them the questionnaires. These couples were instructed to fill out their questionnaires independently and then place them in separate envelopes and mail them to the principal investigator. Postmarks were checked to make sure that the questionnaires were mailed from out of town. We compared the couples that completed questionnaires at the university against the couples who mailed the questionnaires on all of the variables in this study and there were no significant differences between these samples.

The average age of the wives was 35.7 years old (SD = 11.99; range = 19 to 60 years old). The average age of the husbands was 38.5 years old (SD = 11.00; range = 22 to 66 years old). The ethnic distribution for wives was 78.3% White, 10.9% Latina or Hispanic, 4.3% Native American, 2.2% African American, and 4.3% Other. For husbands, the ethnic distribution was 81.5 % white, 11.5% Latino or Hispanic, 2.2% Native American, 2.2% African American, and 3.3% Other. A category labeled "Asian American" was also included but no respondents marked this box. The average length

of the participants' marriages was 10 years and 1 month (range = 6 months to 35 years and 7 months).

Measures of (in)equity

Participants completed three items measuring (in)equity. Two of these scales have been used by Sprecher (1986, 2001b) – the Hatfield Global Measure of Equity/Inequity (Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979) and Sprecher's (1986) equity measure that focuses on the contributions people make to their relationships. The Hatfield measure is anchored with the question: "Who is getting a 'better deal' considering what you put into your relationship and what you get out of it, and what your partner puts into the relationship compared to what she or he gets out of it?" Participants checked one of seven options: I am getting a much better deal than my partner (7), I am getting a better deal than my partner (6), I am getting a somewhat better deal than my partner (5), I am getting the same deal as my partner (4), I am getting a somewhat worse deal than my partner (3), I am getting a worse deal than my partner (2), and I am getting a much worse deal than my partner (1). The Sprecher measure is anchored with the question: "Consider all the times when the exchange in your relationship has become unbalanced and one partner contributed more than the other for a time. When your relationship becomes unbalanced, which of you is more likely to be the one who contributes more?" Response choices were: My partner is much more likely to contribute more (7), My partner is more likely to contribute more (6), My partner is somewhat more likely to contribute more (5), We contribute the same amount (4), I am somewhat more likely to contribute more (3), I am more likely to contribute more (2), and I am much more likely to contribute more (1).

Because the Hatfield scale is a general measure of equity, and the Sprecher scale focuses on contributions, we created a scale focusing on the other side of the (in)equity equation-the level of benefits received. This scale was anchored as follows: "Think about the rewards that you and your partner receive from having a relationship with one another. When comparing your rewards to your partner's rewards, who is getting more from the relationship?" Options were: I get much more than my partner (7), I get more than my partner (6), I get somewhat more than my partner (5), We get the same amount (4), My partner gets somewhat more than me (3), My partner gets more than me (2), and My partner gets much more than me (1).

The equity index. An equity index was created by averaging answers to the three questions that asked about global equity, contribution equity, and reward equity (Cronbach's alpha for inter-item reliability was .83 for wives and .88 for husbands.) For this scale, a score of 4 indicates perfect equity, scores above 4 up to 7 indicate various degrees of OBI, and scores under 4 down to 1 indicate various degrees of UBI. The average score on the equity index was 4.18 (SD = 1.18) for husbands and 3.75 (SD = 1.11) for wives, with a paired t-test showing that the difference between husbands and wives was significant, $t(91) = 2.16$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$.

Measure of absolute equity. A measure of absolute equity was computed via two steps. First, we subtracted 4 from the equity index and took the absolute value of that difference. After this step, a score of 0 represented perfect equity and scores above 0 (up to 3.0) represented different degrees of inequity without regard for whether that inequity was underbenefiting or overbenefiting. In order to reverse the scoring so that a score of 3.0 would represent perfect equity and a score of 0 would represent maximum inequity (again without regard for whether the inequity was UBI or OBI), 3 was subtracted from each of the scores calculated in step 1 and the absolute value was again computed. For wives, the average score on the absolute equity measure was 2.09 (SD = .69), with a range of .67 to 3.00. For husbands, the average score on the absolute equity measure was 2.07 (*SD* = .73), with a range of .33 to 3.00.

Measures of under- and overbenefiting inequity. Like Sprecher (1986, 2001a), we created separate measures for UBI and OBI. To assess the degree of UBI, we subtracted the equity index score from 4 so that participants who were underbenefited would have positive scores, those who were overbenefited would have negative scores, and those in perfectly equitable marriages would have scores of 0. Then we changed all the negative scores to 0. Thus, individuals who perceived themselves to be in equitable or overbenefiting marriages were given scores of 0 on UBI, while those who were underbenefited received a score that could theoretically range from .33 to 3.00. The average score on UBI was .56 (*SD* = .76) for wives and .37 (*SD* = .66) for husbands, with a range of .00 to 2.33 for both wives and husbands. A paired *t*-test demonstrated that wives were more likely to report UBI than husbands, albeit this effect was small, $t(91) = 1.99$, $\eta^2 = .03$.

For OBI, a similar procedure was followed except that 4 was subtracted from the equity index score. Those perceiving UBI or equity received a score of 0, whereas those perceiving OBI received a score that could theoretically range from .33 to 3.00. The average score on OBI was .35 (*SD* = .55) for wives and .55 (*SD* = .72) for husbands, with ranges of .00 to 1.67 and .00 to 2.67, respectively. A paired *t*-test demonstrated that husbands reported significantly more OBI than wives, $t(91) = 2.06$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$.

Measure of marital satisfaction

Marital satisfaction was measured by averaging the 7 items in Hendrick's (1988) relational satisfaction scale (see Table 1). Items included: "How much do you love your partner?" with endpoints of "not very much" (1) and "very much" (7); and, "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?" with endpoints of "very unsatisfied" (1) and "very satisfied" (7).

Measures of emotional experience

Respondents were asked "To what extent do you experience the following emotions in your marriage?" with endpoints of "not at all" (1) and "to a great extent" (7). The following emotions from Nowlis' (1965) mood adjective checklist were rated: annoyance, guilt, sadness, anger, frustration, disappointment, self-reproach, depression, and remorse. Separate principal

TABLE 1
Descriptive data and reliability coefficients for marital satisfaction, emotional experience, and emotional expression measures

	Wives' reports			Husbands' reports			
Variable	***Mean***	***SD***	**alpha**	***Mean***	***SD***	**alpha**	***t*(91)**
Marital satisfaction	5.49	.88	.86	5.57	.91	.91	–.39
Anger-related emotions	2.94	1.27	.87	2.57	1.15	.88	2.18*
Guilt-related emotions	1.97	1.01	.85	2.04	1.05	.83	–.60
Sadness-related emotions	2.66	1.32	.86	2.40	1.06	.85	1.60
Integrative-assertion	5.21	.96	.89	5.12	.92	.91	.83
Distributive-aggression	3.20	1.32	.85	2.88	1.31	.88	1.90
Passive aggression	3.23	1.38	.78	3.27	1.27	.75	–.20
Non-assertive denial	2.59	1.44	.80	3.48	1.46	.83	–3.92***
Apology/concession	4.79	1.28	.77	4.54	1.17	.85	1.44
Explanation/justification	5.24	.75	.76	5.07	.78	.73	1.72
Appeasement	4.16	1.28	.87	4.07	1.23	.88	.50
Denial/withdrawal	2.93	1.12	.77	3.12	1.17	.85	–1.80
Positivity/distractions	4.59	.97	.91	4.68	.97	.88	–.86
Social support seeking	4.99	.93	.85	4.94	1.09	.86	.39
Immobilization/solitude	3.44	1.16	.80	3.44	1.08	.77	.01

Note. Although sex differences in the variables in this table were not of particular interest in the present study, paired *t*-tests were conducted to check for such differences; ***$p < .001$, *$p < .05$, two tailed.

components analyses with orthogonal rotation were conducted for the husband and wife sub-samples. These analyses suggested that: (i) anger, annoyance, and frustration loaded together as anger-related emotions, (ii) guilt, self-reproach, and remorse loaded together as guilt-related emotions, and (iii) sadness, depression, and disappointment loaded together as sadness-related emotions. Reliabilities, means, standard deviations, and ranges for these three measures, as well as the emotional expression measures described next, are displayed in Table 1.

Measures of emotional expression

Anger. We used Guerrero's (1994) scale for measuring modes of anger expression, which is anchored with the stem "When I am angry with my partner I tend to …" *Integrative-assertion* was measured with 4 items (e.g., "listen to my partner's side of the story," "discuss problems with my partner"). *Distributive-aggression* was measured with 7 items (e.g., "criticize my partner," "slam doors"). *Passive aggression* was measured with 4 items (e.g., "give the silent treatment," "give cold or dirty looks"). Finally, *non-assertive denial* was measured with 3 items (e.g., "hide angry feelings from my partner").

Guilt. On the basis of past work (e.g., Aune et al., 1998), we developed scales to measure four responses to guilt. Respondents were asked to think

about times they had felt guilty about something they said, did, or did not say or do in their marriages. They were asked to keep these memories in mind when they responded to the stem: "When I am feeling guilty I tend to . . ." *Apology/concession* (4 items) included behaviors such as "apologize" and "admit responsibility." *Explanations/justifications* (4 items) was comprised of behaviors such as "give an explanation for my actions" and "tell my partner the reason(s) I did what I did." *Appeasement* (7 items) consisted of behaviors such as "be extra nice to my partner" and "promise to be a better partner in the future." Finally, *denial/withdrawal* (5 items) included behaviors such as "avoid talking about the issue" and "deny doing anything seriously wrong."

Sadness. To measure constructive versus destructive forms of sadness expression, we utilized scales from Guerrero and Reiter's (1998) Behavioral Responses to Sadness scale. Participants were asked to think about how they express sad feelings in their marriage and to respond to the stem: "When I am sad or depressed I tend to . . ." *Positivity/distractions* (11 items) included behaviors such as "keep busy with things I like to do." *Social support seeking* (4 items) was comprised of behaviors such as "talk over my problems with my spouse." The third scale (8 items) combined behaviors related *to immobilization* (e.g., "stay in bed") and *solitude* ("spend time alone"). Although Guerrero and Reiter (1998) identified immobilization and solitude as separate behavioral responses to sadness, the correlations among the items as well as the reliability analysis suggested that these items should be combined for the present study.

Results

Several options are available for dealing with dyadic data (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). For this study, we dealt with the issue of non-independence by conducting separate analyses for husbands and wives. We made this decision, in part, to be consistent with other studies that have examined equity and emotional experience (e.g., Sprecher, 2001a). The results of our individual analyses were also consistent with and more easily interpretable than the results of dyadic-level analyses that we conducted. (For more information on these dyadic-level analyses, please contact the first author).

(In)equity and marital satisfaction

H1 was addressed using regression analyses testing for linear and quadratic effects. Recall that for the equity index a score of 1.0 represents the most UBI possible, a score of 4.0 represents perfect equity, and a score of 7.0 represents the most OBI possible. Thus, a linear trend would show that people become more satisfied as they move away from an underbenefited position and toward an overbenefited position. A quadratic trend would demonstrate that people who perceive themselves to be in equitable marriages report more satisfaction than those who perceive OBI or UBI.

Regression analyses testing for linear and quadratic effects were conducted for husbands and wives separately.

Results supported H1. When wives' reports of marital satisfaction were regressed on the equity index, a significant linear effect emerged in the first step of the analysis, $F(1,90) = 29.50$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .25$. Adding the quadratic trend accounted for an additional 15% of the variance, $F(2,89) = 29.21$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .40$. As is shown in Figure 1, wives tended to be more satisfied when they perceived their marriages to be equitable or overbenefiting as compared to underbenefiting, with the highest satisfaction scores generally found for those in inequitable relationships. The same pattern held for husbands. The linear trend was significant, $F(1,90) = 22.18$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .20$, and the quadratic trend accounted for an additional 10% of the variance, $F(2,89) = 19.10$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .30$. Figure 2 shows that men who perceived their marriages to be equitable or overbenefiting were more likely to report satisfaction than were men who perceived their marriages to be underbenefiting.

Inequity and emotional experience

Regression analyses using the simultaneous entry method were used to test H2, which predicted that UBI associates positively with self-reported anger

FIGURE 1
Linear and curvilinear effects of equity on wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction

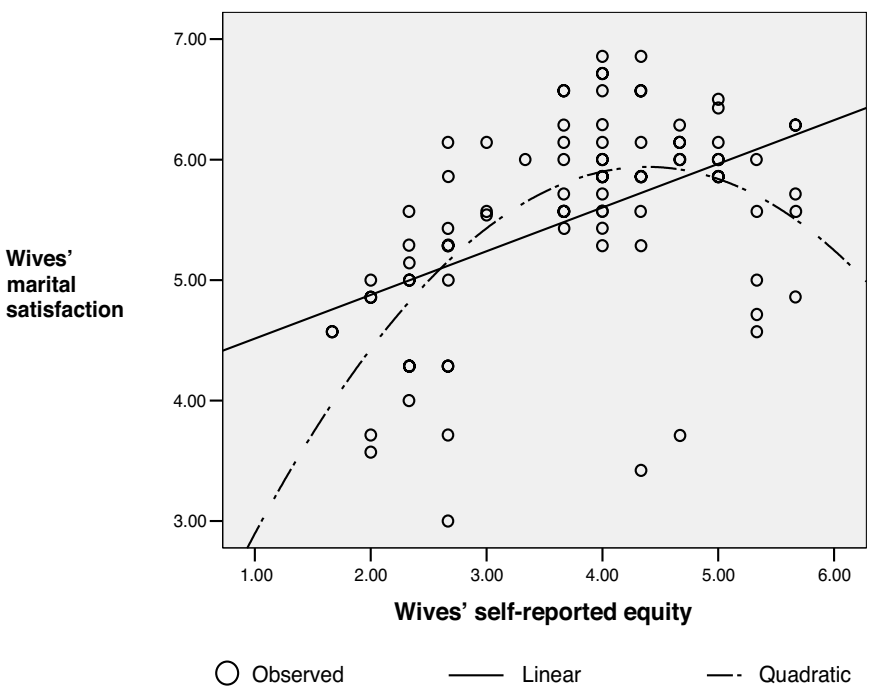
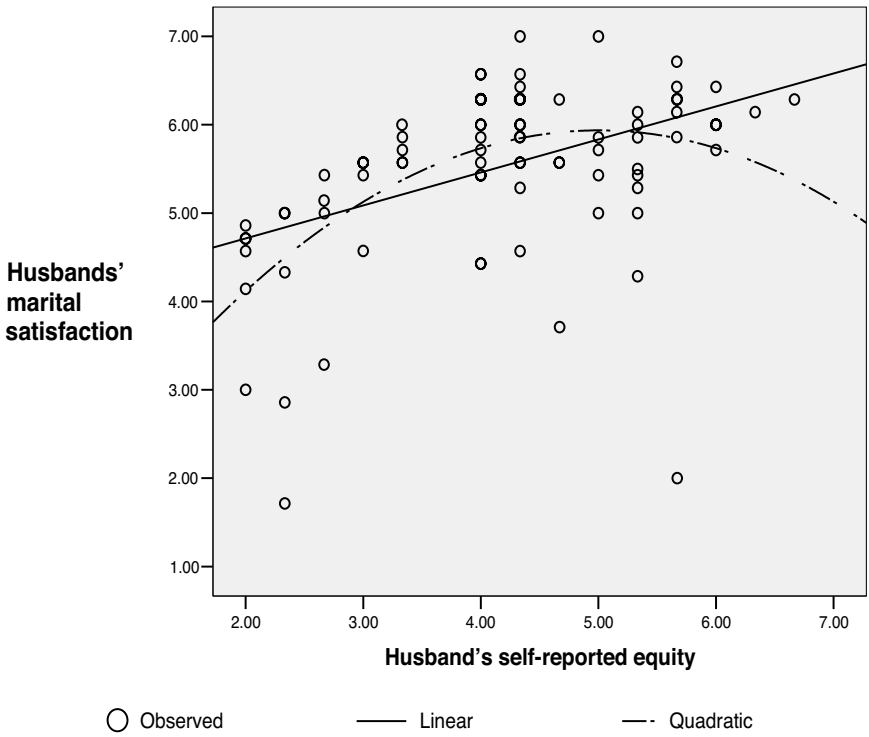


FIGURE 2
Linear and curvilinear effects of equity on husbands' perceptions of marital satisfaction



and sadness, and that OBI associates positively with guilt. These hypotheses were supported (see Table 2), except for the hypothesized association between UBI and sadness for men. OBI also associated negatively with anger for both men and women.

(In)equity and emotional expression

To determine whether (in)equity associated with the various measures of emotional expression, we conducted a series of 18 hierarchical regression analyses with equity, UBI, and OBI serving as separate criterion variables (see Tables 3–5). Marital satisfaction and the appropriate measure of emotional experience (e.g., anger experience when testing the association between equity and anger expression) were entered in the first step as covariates. The relevant emotional expression measures were entered in the second step.

Expressions of anger. H3, H4, and R1 focused on anger expression. To test H3, the absolute equity measure was regressed on the four modes of anger expression. (Recall that for this measure, higher scores represent greater equity and lower scores represent greater inequity, regardless of whether

TABLE 2
Regression analyses results for emotional experience

Criterion variable	$F(3,88)$	R^2	Predictor(s)	Beta	*t*-value
Husbands' reports:					
Underbenefiting Inequity	7.84***	.21	anger	.45	3.73**
Overbenefiting Inequity	16.71***	.36	guilt	.64	6.13***
			anger	–.52	–4.79***
Wives' reports:					
Underbenefiting Inequity	27.38***	.48	anger	.65	8.09***
			sadness	.24	2.12*
Overbenefiting Inequity	10.52***	.26	guilt	.47	3.50***
			anger	–.38	–3.98***

Notes. Only significant predictor variables are shown in this table.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

that inequity is UBI or OBI). Results for the final models (shown in Table 3) are partially supportive of H3, with both husbands and wives reporting more assertive-integration, husbands reporting less non-assertive denial, and wives reporting less distributive-aggression when they perceive their

TABLE 3
Final results for the hierarchical regression analyses regressing (in)equity on expressions of anger

Criterion Variable	$F(6,85)$	R^2	Predictor(s)	Beta	*t*-value
Husbands' reports:					
Equity	7.80***	.35	integrative-assertion	.34	2.88**
			non-assertive denial	–.37	–3.62***
Underbenefiting Inequity	11.46***	.45	marital satisfaction	–.34	–3.49***
			distributive-aggression	.22	2.71**
Overbenefiting Inequity	4.32**	.23	distributive-aggression	–.27	–2.07*
			non-assertive denial	.27	2.47*
Wives' reports:					
Equity	10.34***	.42	distributive-aggression	–.25	–2.23*
			integrative-assertion	.37	3.19**
Underbenefiting Inequity	15.26***	.52	marital satisfaction	–.24	–2.05*
			anger experience	.43	4.06***
			distributive-aggression	.27	2.51**
Overbenefiting Inequity	4.34**	.24	anger experience	–.37	–2.68**
			distributive-aggression	–.29	–2.22*
			non-assertive denial	.25	2.08*

Notes. Only the significant predictor variables that emerged in the final model are shown in this table. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$, two-tailed. For all models, Step 1 included marital satisfaction plus the anger experience measure; Step 2 included all four anger expression measures.

TABLE 4
Final results for the hierarchical regression analyses regressing (in)equity on expressions of guilt

Criterion variable	*F*(6,85)	R^2	Predictor(s)	Beta	*t*-value
Husbands' reports:					
Equity	8.46***	.37	guilt experience	–.41	–3.81
			apology/concession	.28	2.28*
Underbenefiting Inequity	14.99***	.51	marital satisfaction	–.41	–4.52***
			apology/concession	–.25	–2.11*
			appeasement	–.32	–2.34*
Overbenefiting Inequity	8.93**	.43	marital satisfaction	.34	3.25**
			guilt experience	.51	4.67***
			appeasement	.30	2.88**
			denial/withdrawal	.23	2.11*
Wives' reports:					
Equity	11.27***	.44	marital satisfaction	.31	3.18**
			guilt experience	–.23	–2.63**
			apology/concession	.26	2.89**
Underbenefiting Inequity	5.17***	.59	marital satisfaction	–.44	–5.24***
			apology/concession	–.28	–2.55*
			appeasement	–.24	–2.05*
Overbenefiting Inequity	6.03***	.30	guilt experience	.45	4.38***
			appeasement	.26	2.08*

Notes. Only the significant predictor variables that emerged in the final model are shown in this table. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$, two-tailed. For all models, Step 1 included marital satisfaction plus the guilt experience measure; Step 2 included all four guilt expression measures.

marriage to be equitable. H4, which predicted that people who perceive themselves as underbenefited are more likely to report using distributive-aggression, passive aggression, and non-assertive denial, was only supported for distributive-aggression. In response to R1, for both husbands and wives, non-assertive denial was positively related to OBI whereas distributive-aggression was inversely related to OBI.

Expressions of guilt. The next set of hypotheses (H5–H6) and R2 focused on expressions of guilt. A regression analysis provided limited support for H5, with individuals who perceived equity more likely to report apology/concession (see Table 4). H6 predicted that UBI would be positively related to denial/withdrawal and inversely related to the three prosocial responses to guilt. Regression analyses provided partial support for H6, with both wives and husbands reporting less apology/concession and appeasement when they reported high levels of UBI. In response to R3, both husbands and wives reported using more appeasement when they perceived themselves as high in OBI. Overbenefited husbands also reported using more denial/withdrawal.

TABLE 5
Final results for the hierarchical regression analyses regressing (in)equity on expressions of sadness

Criterion Variable	$F(5,86)$	R^2	Predictor(s)	Beta	*t*-value
Husbands' reports:					
Equity	3.60*	.15	marital satisfaction	.33	2.79**
Underbenefiting Inequity	14.22***	.44	marital satisfaction	–.50	–5.21***
			social support seeking	–.20	–2.12*
			immobilization/solitude	.23	2.24*
Overbenefiting Inequity	3.92**	.20	marital satisfaction	.31	2.89**
Wives' reports:					
Equity	13.11***	.43	marital satisfaction	.44	4.64***
			sadness experience	–.19	–2.06*
			social support seeking	.19	2.11*
			immobilization/solitude	–.24	–2.23*
Underbenefiting Inequity	17.54***	.51	marital satisfaction	–.61	–6.52***
			immobilization/solitude	.40	4.07***
Overbenefiting Inequity	3.75**	.18	sadness experience	.22	2.00*
			social support seeking	–.29	–2.59*
			immobilization/solitude	–.26	–2.05*

Notes. Only significant predictor variables are shown in this table. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$, two tailed. For all models, Step 1 included marital satisfaction plus the sadness experience measure; Step 2 included all three sadness expression measures.

Expressions of sadness. Partial support was obtained for H7, but only for wives. Specifically, women were more likely to report social support seeking and less likely to report immobilization/solitude when they perceived high levels of equity. These findings, however, did not emerge for husbands (see Table 5). In relation to R3, UBI associated positively with immobilization/solitude for both wives and husbands, and negatively with social support seeking for husbands only. Finally, relevant to R4, wives who reported OBI reported less social support seeking and more immobilization/solitude in response to sadness.

Inequity, emotional experience, and emotional expression as predictors of marital satisfaction

Our final research question addressed how inequity, emotional experience, and emotional expression associate with marital satisfaction. To address this question, we conducted two hierarchical regression models (one for husbands, one for wives) with marital satisfaction as the criterion variable. This time, the measures of UBI and OBI were entered in the first step, the emotional experience measures were entered in the second step, and the emotional expression measures were entered in the third step. Across both analyses, the *F*-change statistics demonstrated that the block of variables

TABLE 6
Hierarchical regression analyses results with marital satisfaction regressed on measures of inequity, emotional experience, and emotional expression

Criterion variable	*F*	R^2	Predictor(s)	Beta	*t*-value
Husbands' reports:					
Step 1	21.61***	.33	underbenefiting inequity	–.60	–6.16***
Step 2	15.08***	.47	underbenefiting inequity	–.38	–3.83***
			guilty feelings	–.36	–3.01**
			angry feelings	–.29	–3.20**
Step 3	6.19***	.57	underbenefiting inequity	–.21	–2.16*
			guilty feelings	–.36	–3.26**
			social support seeking	.22	2.54**
			positivity/distractions	.21	2.35*
			distributive-aggression	–.23	–2.29*
			withdrawal-denial	–.22	–2.20*
Wives' reports:					
Step 1	26.67***	.38	underbenefiting inequity	–.63	–7.36***
Step 2	17.05***	.48	underbenefiting inequity	–.32	–3.06**
			angry feelings	–.44	–4.24***
Step 3	8.54***	.65	underbenefiting inequity	–.31	–3.15**
			angry feelings	–.26	–2.71**
			distributive-aggression	–.33	–3.07**
			integrative-assertion	.22	2.50*
			avoidance-denial	–.24	–3.47**
			social support seeking	.22	2.60*

Notes. Only significant predictor variables are shown in this table. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$, two tailed. Degrees of freedom are (2,89), (5,86), and (16,75) at Steps 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The *F*-values represent the overall *F*-values for the model at each Step.

added at each step significantly increased the amount of variance accounted for by the model. For both wives and husbands, UBI was negatively associated with marital satisfaction, although the strength of this association decreased as more variables were added to the model (see Table 6). In Step 2, both guilty and angry feelings were inversely associated with satisfaction for husbands, but only the association between guilty feelings and satisfaction remained significant in Step 3. For wives, angry feelings emerged as a negative predictor of satisfaction in both Steps 2 and 3. In Step 3, somewhat different groups of emotional expression were associated with marital satisfaction for husbands versus wives as shown in Table 6.

To test for possible mediation effects, we followed screening procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) and then conducted Sobel tests. According to Baron and Kenny, to qualify as a candidate for mediation, three conditions must be satisfied. First, the independent variable must be significantly associated with the mediating variable. Second, the potential mediating variable must be significantly associated with the dependent

variable. Third, when these variables are entered into a regression analysis, there is evidence for mediation if the independent variable becomes nonsignificant with a Beta weight near zero after the potential mediator is added to the model. Partial mediation is likely when the Beta weight is reduced but still significant.

Based on these criteria, the data in Table 6 (plus the data from the previous hypothesis tests) suggested that there was potential for several mediation effects, all of which are described next. First, there was the potential for anger to mediate the relationship between UBI and marital satisfaction. A comparison of the relevant b-weights (for the associations between the potential mediator and the independent variable, and the potential mediator and the dependent variable) suggested that anger did indeed mediate the association between UBI and marital satisfaction for both men (Sobel test statistic = 2.51, $p < .05$) and women (Sobel = 2.62, $p < .01$). Second, we examined whether the relationship between UBI and marital satisfaction was mediated by social support seeking and/or distributive-aggression for husbands, and distributive-aggression for wives. Results showed that social support seeking did not mediate this relationship for husbands (Sobel = 1.16, $p < .05$) but distributive-aggression did for both husbands (Sobel = 2.66, $p < .01$) and wives (Sobel = 2.51, $p < .05$). Third, we determined that the association between anger and marital satisfaction was partially mediated by distributive-aggression (Sobel = 2.92, $p < .01$) for men, and by distributive-aggression (Sobel = 4.41, $p < .001$) and integrative-assertion for women (Sobel = 2.36, $p < .05$) for women.

Discussion

The present study replicates past work showing that people who are underbenefited report experiencing high levels of anger and low levels of marital satisfaction, and that people who are overbenefited report experiencing guilt. Perhaps more importantly, this study extends past research on equity theory in three ways by demonstrating that: (in)equity is associated with emotional expression; emotional expression accounts for additional variability in marital satisfaction beyond the effects of (in)equity and emotional experience; and anger expression appears to mediate the association between anger experience and marital satisfaction. These and other findings are elaborated upon next.

(In)equity and emotion

In line with equity theory predictions (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), the present study demonstrated that husbands and wives who perceive UBI report experiencing more anger, whereas husbands and wives who perceive OBI report experiencing more guilt and less anger. These findings are somewhat different than those of Sprecher (1986), who found that underbenefited women experience more sadness than anger. In the present study, underbenefited women did report a tendency to experience sadness, but

anger was clearly the stronger predictor of UBI. Consistent with the present investigation, Sprecher (2001a) found that guilt was the only negative emotion consistently predictive of OBI for both men and women, and that underbenefited women were more likely to feel frustration than sadness. Indeed, anger and guilt produced stronger findings than sadness in the present investigation. There are at least two explanations for this. First, anger and guilt may play more central roles in equity theory than sadness. Second, participants recalled feeling anger and guilt in the context of their marriage whereas they recalled more general experiences of sadness.

The most novel contribution of this study is the inclusion of emotional expression. In accordance with Messman et al.'s (2000) work on maintenance and Farinelli's (2005) work on conflict, we predicted that equity would be related to constructive, cooperative expressions of anger, guilt, and sadness, whereas UBI would be related to destructive, antisocial expressions of these emotions. Significant associations between (in)equity and emotional expression emerged even when marital satisfaction and emotional experience were controlled, suggesting a direct link between (in)equity and emotional expression. Although many of the specific hypotheses related to emotional expression were only partially supported, the data are consistent with three general findings, as described next.

Equity and emotional expression. The first general finding derived from the present study is that equity is positively related to constructive expressions of emotion and negatively related to destructive, antisocial responses. Wives and husbands who perceived equity in their marriages reported using more integrative-assertion when angry, and less antisocial forms of anger expression (non-assertive denial for husbands; distributive-aggression for wives). In response to guilt, perceptions of equity were related to greater reported use of apologies/concessions for both husbands and wives. Finally, when expressions of sadness were examined, wives who perceived equity reported using social support seeking rather than immobilization/ solitude.

UBI and emotional expression. The second general finding derived from the present study is that UBI is positively related to destructive, antisocial forms of emotional expression, and negatively related to constructive forms of emotional expression. When husbands and wives perceived high degrees of UBI in their marriage, they reported engaging in more distributive-aggression when angry, and more immobilization/solitude when sad. Underbenefited husbands also reported using less social support seeking in response to sadness. For sadness, this pattern of being more likely to withdraw or isolate oneself and less likely to seek support from one's partner is consistent with a chilling effect (Roloff & Cloven, 1990; see also, Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). Interestingly, however, there is no evidence for a chilling effect for expressions of anger in the present study since people experiencing UBI tended to vent their frustration through distributive-aggression. Thus, underbenefited spouses may not fear judgment or retaliation from their partners in response to expressions of anger, but they may

be afraid that expressions of sadness will somehow put them in a weaker position within the relationship. This may be especially true for husbands, who reported less social support seeking when underbenefited.

The data for expressions of guilt showed that UBI was inversely related to both apology/concession and appeasement. Given that underbenefited partners already perceive themselves to carry the greater load in their relationships, they may not feel the need to compensate for feelings of guilt by apologizing or appeasing their spouse. Perhaps underbenefited individuals resist the impulse to take corrective action because they realize, at some level, that to do so would add to the partner's benefits without directly reducing their costs. In addition, because they experience guilt relatively infrequently, underbenefited individuals may not feel as compelled to take remedial action as overbenefited individuals.

OBI and emotional expression. The third general finding derived from this study is that people who perceive OBI report using a mix of prosocial and antisocial forms of emotional expression. OBI produced one of the most interesting, and sometimes inconsistent, profiles of emotional expression. In terms of anger, OBI was negatively associated with distributive-aggression and positively associated with non-assertive denial. Thus, contrary to Dunbar's (2004) presumption that those who are in the more powerful position would have more leeway to display anger in an aggressive manner, overbenefited husbands and wives were more likely to hide their feelings of anger or deny that their angry feelings exist. Consistent with some of Dunbar's other work (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005), however, people in the overbenefited (and therefore more dominant position) may not always have to show angry feelings to get what they want because the underbenefited person accommodates their needs. Another possible explanation is that overbenefited spouses feel guilty displaying feelings of anger toward their already underbenefited partners.

Because OBI is associated with distress in the form of guilt, the expression of guilt may be most relevant for people in the overbenefited position. For both husbands and wives, OBI was positively associated with appeasement. For husbands, OBI was also positively associated with denial/withdrawal. Given that being overbenefited is the "superior" position in the relationship, it may be that spouses in this position feel more of a need to compensate for their feelings of guilt through behaviors designed to gain appeasement, such as giving gifts or compliments (Aune et al., 1998). The finding that husbands reported engaging in denial/withdrawal in response to guilt is consistent with research on demand-withdraw patterns in marriages (e.g., Heavey et al., 1995), which shows husbands to retreat more than wives when dealing with conflict issues.

Finally, although OBI did not associate with responses to sadness for husbands, wives in the overbenefited position reported less social support seeking and immobilization/solitude. This combination of responses may seem odd because the former involves reaching out for support whereas the latter involves isolating oneself. However, it is critical to consider that

the social support items focused on communicating with one's spouse. It is possible, then, that women in the overbenefited position hesitate to further overburden their husbands with their problems and instead seek social support from family and friends.

(In)equity and marital satisfaction

While our findings for emotional expression and (in)equity are novel, our findings linking (in)equity and marital satisfaction are consistent with a long tradition of research (e.g., Schafer & Keith, 1981; Peterson, 1990; VanYperen & Buunk, 1990; Walster et al., 1985). Similar to past work (e.g., Traupmann et al., 1981), our study demonstrated that people report the most relational satisfaction when they perceive their marriage to be characterized by equity or OBI as opposed to UBI, with those who perceive equity slightly more satisfied than who perceive OBI. These findings were fairly robust, with effect sizes ranging from .30 to .40 for husbands and wives, respectively.

The present study extended past research by examining how (in)equity combines with emotional experience and emotional expression to predict marital satisfaction. Our results suggest that UBI is a better predictor of marital satisfaction than OBI or equity. However, the strength of the negative association between UBI and marital satisfaction diminishes somewhat when emotion variables are considered. The wives in our study tended to be the most satisfied when they had low levels of UBI and anger, expressed anger through integrative-assertion rather than distributive-aggression or avoidance-denial, and coped with sadness by seeking social support. The husbands in our study tended to be most satisfied when they had low levels of UBI and guilt, refrained from expressing anger using distributive-aggression, refrained from using withdrawal-denial in response to guilt, and coped with sadness through social support seeking and positivity/distractions. Although the findings differed somewhat for husbands and wives, the overall pattern conformed to the idea that constructive communication is associated with marital satisfaction, whereas destructive or passive communication is associated with marital dissatisfaction, even when UBI and the experience of negative emotion are controlled.

Importantly, the analyses also uncovered several mediation effects. Specifically, our data suggest that the association between UBI and martial satisfaction is mediated by both anger and aggressive anger displays. Thus, while UBI itself may be distressing, the experience and aggressive expression of anger may be more proximally related to low levels of martial satisfaction than UBI per se. Our data also demonstrated that the relation between anger and marital satisfaction is partially mediated by how anger is expressed. Underbenefited husbands who express their anger using distributive-aggression appear especially likely to be dissatisfied with their marriages. Underbenefited wives appear most likely to be dissatisfied with their marriages when they express their anger using high levels of distributive-aggression coupled with low levels of integrative-assertion. These finding support arguments made by Canary et al. (1998) and Guerrero and La Valley

(2006), who proposed that the way anger is expressed is a more important determinant of relational satisfaction than is the experience of anger.

Limitations and general conclusions

In summary, the present study upholds equity theory as a predictive framework for studying marital satisfaction, emotional experience, and emotional expression. Nonetheless, several limitations may affect the generalizability of our findings. For instance, the majority of participants reported their ethnicity as White. Also, most of the participants were probably fairly well-educated since they belonged to the same social network as the college student who recruited them. Other strengths and limitations revolve around the measures used to assess emotional expression. One of the strengths is that we measured a fairly wide array of emotional expressions that can be categorized on the basis of how constructive and active they are. A related limitation, however, is that the study did not include all forms of emotional expression that might be relevant to (in)equity, such as Rusbult et al.'s (1982) loyalty response, which is considered both passive and constructive. The present study also fails to consider the types of situations that lead to the experience and expression of these emotions in equitable and inequitable marriages. Finally, this study does not address the causal direction of the associations found. Although it would be tempting to conclude that (in)equity causes people to experience and express emotion differently, various emotional experiences and expressions could also cause people to perceive more or less (in)equity. Thus, the relationship between (in)equity and emotion is likely mutually reciprocal.

In addition to investigating issues related to causality and events leading to emotional experience and expression in equitable versus inequitable relationships, future research should examine how perceptions of (in)equity associate with the expression of other emotions such as hurt, love, jealousy, and anxiety. Perceptions of equity may also be related to how people respond to hurtful events, such as infidelity, deception, and jealousy inductions (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Feeney, 2004). The present study can contribute to this research not only by providing support for the idea that equity is associated with more constructive patterns of emotional expression, but also by providing a new way to measure (in)equity that includes an item assessing benefit (or reward value) as well as items assessing overall rewards and costs (the Hatfield measure) and contributions (the Sprecher measure). Overall, we are encouraged by this study's findings; they add to our understanding of the nuances of marital communication and the critical role that perceptions of (in)equity play in the experience and expression of emotion.

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