

**Cultural Differences in the Effects of Inequity on Coworker Friendships**

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**Abstract**

Americans and Koreans were compared on their responses to inequity. Whether they would be likely to do nothing or terminate the relationship was of interest, along with their level of satisfaction with different types of inequity. Koreans showed a greater reduction in satisfaction in relationships with inequity in the social dimension than did Americans. Koreans and Americans were similar in their satisfaction reduction with inequity in the task dimension. Culture interacted with type of inequity such that Koreans showed a greater decrease in satisfaction in overrewarding relationships than Americans but Koreans' and Americans' decrease in satisfaction did not differ for underrewarding relationships. In addition, Americans had less intent to do nothing (i.e., more intent to do something) about the relationship with inequity in the task dimension than Koreans whereas no difference was found between Koreans and Americans for social dimension. Koreans had greater intent to do nothing (i.e., less intent to do something) than Americans when underrewarded, but no difference was evident between Koreans and Americans when overrewarded. Willingness to terminate was not strongly endorsed by any participant.

### **Cultural differences in the effects of inequity on coworker friendship**

Imagine two individuals, Susan in the U.S. and Young Hee in Korea. Each has to work with her respective coworkers at her respective company on projects requiring multiple personnel. A universal organizational issue is the conflict between overachievers and individuals who cannot complete their work on time, are unavailable, or cannot complete quality work. Differences in ability or motivation often lead to the problem of inequity in coworker relationships and friendships, or in blended friendships, which involve interaction both at work and outside of work (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). The responses to inequity may differ across culture, as a function of the type of inequity, and as a function of the dimension in which the inequity lies (task vs. social). Susan and Young Hee may respond differently to their coworkers depending on whether they are overachievers or slackers, their culture, and whether they experience inequity at work or outside of work.

The current research examines cultural differences in responses to two inequity types (overbenefit [i.e., overreward] and underbenefit [i.e., underreward]) in the task *versus* social dimensions of a coworker friendship. Central to our interest in blended friendships in the U.S. and Korea is the question of how members of the relationships will respond in the face of inequity. What will Susan and Young Hee do in the face of inequity in their blended friendships? Will each choose to live with the inequity (i.e., do nothing) or terminate the relationship? How satisfied will they be with the equitable *versus* the inequitable friendships? This study focuses on less common responses to inequity in blended friendships: termination of the relationship, doing nothing, relational satisfaction of members of inequitable blended friendships.

Suggestions of answers to the above questions can be gleaned from literature on the differences between U.S. and Korean cultures, cross-cultural research on equity, and the basic tenets of Equity Theory. The following sections provide a brief review of these areas and advance hypotheses and research questions.

#### **Comparison of U.S. and Korean Cultures**

Confucianism, a philosophy of human nature considering proper human relationships as the basis of society, has had a profound impact on Korea (Yum, 2000). Confucianism is said to influence the culture of Korean workplaces as well (Chen & Chung, 1994; Kim, 1994). In Korean workplaces, individual goals and achievements are not valued as much as group goals and interpersonal harmony. Workers with strong social networks are valued over those with strong individual abilities (Yoon & Lim, 1999); loyalty, group belonging, and fellowship in the workplace are also highly valued. In addition, Korean managers and workers hold strong beliefs in organizational paternalism and solidarity (Kim, 1994). Spending time together outside work for drinking or other social activities is very common in Korean workplaces. In sum, Korean workplaces attempt to create a family-style climate and motivate their employees to behave as a family. This includes both providing social support for and maintaining interpersonal harmony with coworkers (Kim & Min, 1999).

Although Korea is usually considered to have cultural characteristics of collectivism, cross-cultural research does not always show Korea as collectivistic and America as individualistic. A meta-analysis has shown that Koreans are less individualistic than Americans, but not necessarily more collectivistic (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Further, economic crises and Westernization in Korea have caused changes that may indicate Koreans will behave similarly to Americans. They may become more interested in individual goals, as Americans are. Also, they may accept use of the equity norm in their workplaces. For example, pay-for-performance systems (equity-based) have been well received in Korean workplaces

(Chang, 2003). Further, as the individual performance of Korean workers becomes more important for careers in Korea, these workers may also become more interested in receiving rewards proportional to their effort (Lee, 1998-99). When previously compared, Koreans and Americans have displayed rather small differences (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996; Leung & Park, 1986). Given that Korean workplace culture seems to be evolving, previous comparisons may no longer be completely accurate.

Evidently, neither researchers nor their data agree upon characteristics of the Korean workplace. In a recent study, preferred information-seeking strategies of Koreans did not differ much from those of Americans (e.g., Shin, Park, & Han, 2004). However, compared to Americans, Koreans were more concerned with behavioral outcomes that can affect others and other people's expectations (e.g., Park & Levine, 1999). In sum, it is not easy to give a cookie-cutter description of these two cultures as completely similar or different; each has its own evolving "personality," and both bear investigation.

### **Equity, Culture, and Relationship Dimension**

Little research has been done to examine cultural differences in *responses to inequity* in relationships. The majority of research examining cultural differences in equity has focused on comparing equity *versus* equality as a preferred reward allocation rule. In other words, most cross-cultural research have investigated (*inequity as an outcome*), rather than as *a cause for relational outcomes*. Past research does not shed much light on how Koreans and Americans would react to overreward and underreward situations. Furthermore, cross-cultural research findings on equity (and/or equality) as a reward allocation rule have been equivocal with regard to cultural differences in preference for the equity norm in different relationship dimensions.

It has been suggested that adherence to the equity norm can vary with the types of goals (the goals of economic productivity *versus* pleasant social relations, Deutsch, 1975; Katz & Kahn, 1978) and relationship types (ingroup vs. outgroup members, Leung, 1988) that people prioritize. When the equality norm is used for reward allocation, the focus is on equal distribution of rewards, regardless of each individual's input amount. If, for example, regardless of the fact that Jane contributed 20 % and John 80 %, both Jane and John receive 50% of the output, the equality rule is being used. With the equity norm, however, to create equity, the amount of reward must be proportional to the amount contributed and that proportion must be equal across partners. According to an equity orientation, in the previous example Jane was being overrewarded and John was being underrewarded. If the equity rule was used to create an equitable distribution, Jane would receive 20% of the output and John would receive 80% of the output, creating a ratio of 1:1 for each member of the team.

In situations focused on productivity, both Koreans and Americans were more likely to endorse the equity rule, but in situations focused on social maintenance (harmony), both were more likely to prefer the equality rule (Leung & Park, 1986). In the U.S., where people are considered individualistic and economically oriented (rather than attuned to social harmony), equality, rather than equity, is a preferred allocation rule in some situations. Specifically, in situations involving high interdependence and solidarity goals, Americans prefer the equality rule (Chen, Meindl, & Hui, 1998). Further, those Americans higher in collectivism have less positive preferences for the equity rule (Ramamoorthy & Carroll, 1998). Endorsement of a given allocation rule (equity/equality) clearly is not completely correlated with culture.

Understandably, strict adherence to the equity rule might seem less agreeable among friends, where it might be more palatable to maintain relationships than to make sure the effort to reward ratio is just right. On the other hand, for different types of relationships, it may seem

more prudent to ensure that each person receives an amount equivalent to what he or she put in (equity). Leung (1988) indicates that people in collectivistic cultures use the equality rule for in-group members and the equity rule for out-group members. Hui, Triandis, and Yee (1991) found that high-performing Chinese participants were more likely to use the equality rule with their friends than their coworkers, and low-performing participants were more likely to use the equity rule, allocating rewards proportionally. Leung and Bond (1984) found that Chinese participants preferred an allocator who used the equality rule with friends (in-group members). In addition, Koreans rated individuals using the equality principle as more likable, friendlier, and warmer than did Americans (Leung & Park, 1986). These findings seem to indicate that Koreans may be less concerned with an equitable ratio of inputs and outputs in social relationships than in task relationships.

Generally speaking, people respond differently to overreward and underreward whether the inequity occurs in social relationships (Sprecher, 1992) or task relationships (Leventhal & Bergman, 1969). How those responses differ as a function of social and task dimensions and in different cultures remains to be seen. Empirical evidence on cross-cultural differences in reward allocation in a group setting suggests that the effect of culture on responses to inequity does not seem to be a function of task and social aspects of inequity. For example, for both social and task situations, Hong Kong Chinese preferred equal reward distribution more strongly than Americans did (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982) and in another study, people from the U.S., Korea, and Japan showed a similar pattern in their preferences for giving rewards (Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990). In general, the expected cultural differences in responses to social and task contributions were not observed. However, overall, Koreans were more generous with giving social rewards (i.e., willingness to extend the relationship to other situations such as friendship, working partners in other projects, etc.) than were Americans (Kim et al., 1990).

### **Responses to Inequity**

**Relational satisfaction.** Walster, Berscheid, and Walster (1973) define an equitable relationship as one in which either the participant or an outside observer perceives all participants to have equal relative outcomes. Equal relative outcomes occur when the relational partners possess equal ratios of inputs to outcomes. Both inputs (e.g. assets, liabilities) and outputs (e.g., rewards, costs) can be positive or negative. Underreward occurs when a participant in the relationship contributes less than his or her partner while receiving equal or more rewards; overreward occurs when a participant in the relationship contributes more than his or her partner while receiving equal or fewer rewards.

Responses to each type of inequity may differ, given the different connotations of being advantaged *versus* disadvantaged in a relationship. In some studies, underreward was positively related to relationship uncertainty and dissatisfaction, while overreward was not (e.g., Dainton, 2003; Sprecher, 2001). Hegtvedt (1990) found that overrewarded subjects were the least distressed, followed by equitably treated subjects, and finally underrewarded subjects, who experienced the most distress. This indicates a difference in the strength of experienced distress between underrewarded and overrewarded subjects.

Despite this difference, either type of inequity creates discomfort in those experiencing it (Walster et al., 1973), so it seems likely that satisfaction would be impacted by inequity. Previous research has shown that inequity is negatively related to satisfaction in various relationships. For example, inequitably treated individuals, compared to those treated equitably, have less satisfaction in close friendships (Medvene, Teal, & Slavich, 2000), dating relationships (Dainton, 2003; Sprecher, 2001), marriage (Utne, Hatfield, Traupmann, & Greenberger, 1984;

Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990), and parental relationships with children (Vogl-Bauer, Kalbfleisch, & Beatty, 1999). Thus, when experiencing inequity in coworker friendship, it is expected that people will show less satisfaction than when the friendship is equitable. For the two types of inequity, overreward *versus* underreward, the amount of decrease in satisfaction from equitable relationship to inequitable relationship may differ. Assuming an association of underreward with disadvantage and overreward with advantage, a greater decrease in relationship satisfaction may be observed for underreward than for overreward. Thus, the first hypothesis predicts the effects of two types of inequity on relationship satisfaction with a coworker friend.

H1: When comparing equitable and inequitable relationships, people will show a greater decrease in satisfaction for underreward than for overreward.

It is questioned if Koreans and Americans would react differently to inequity in task *versus* social dimensions. According to Oyserman et al. (2002), Koreans are less individualistic than Americans. If we assume that Americans are very individualistic in the workplace, we may speculate that Koreans would be more comfortable with inequity in the task dimension than Americans, who expect a winner-take-all attitude in the workplace. Considering westernization and the increasing emphasis on individual achievement in Korean workplaces (Chang, 2003; Lee, 1998-99), however, Koreans may not differ much from Americans. Similarly, for the social dimension of a coworker friendship, Koreans and Americans may or may not differ, as the rules of social interaction in the two cultures might be more or less similar than different. Thus, the following research questions are posed:

RQ 1: Will Koreans and Americans differ in satisfaction level change for overreward *versus* underreward relationships?

RQ 2: Will Koreans' and Americans' satisfaction level change for inequity (overreward vs. underreward) vary with the relationship dimension (task vs. social) in which inequity occurs?

### **Intent to Do Nothing and Willingness to Terminate**

Equity theory says inequity in relationships means discomfort for those in the relationship. This discomfort may result in various restoration attempts, including taking action, psychological restoration of equity, terminating the relationship (Walster et al., 1973), or doing nothing (Sprecher, 1992). Relationship termination and doing nothing about the inequity are two of the more extreme ways of dealing with inequity.

Doing nothing is the opposite of terminating; it involves simply ignoring the inequity and continuing the relationship. Because most people would try to restore equity in some way, even if it is not physically evident (they may psychologically resolve inequity), it is expected that in an equitable relationship, people have higher intention to do nothing, while in inequitable relationships, people have lower intention to do nothing. Further, people's intention to do nothing may vary with inequity types. That is, people's intention to do nothing may differ between overreward and underreward. Given that Korean workplaces encourage a family atmosphere of social support, Koreans may be likely to overlook some inequity and do nothing. However, the changes in Korean workplaces (e.g., Westernization, more emphasis on individuals) lead to a less clear conclusion: Koreans may respond similarly to Americans. Koreans' *versus* Americans' intentions cannot be easily predicted here. Thus, research questions are advanced.

RQ 3: Comparing equitable and inequitable relationships, will Koreans and Americans differ in the amount of change in intent to do nothing about overrewarding *versus* underrewarding relationships?

RQ 4: Will Koreans' and Americans' changes in intent to do nothing about inequitable relationships (overreward vs. underreward) vary with the relationship dimension (task vs. social) in which inequity occurs?

Inequitably treated partners are less likely to engage in relationship maintenance than equitably treated partners (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1993, 2001; Dainton, 2003; Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000; Vogl-Bauer et al., 1999). That is, those in inequitable situations may be less interested in continuing their relationships (termination). Regarding cultural differences on willingness to terminate inequitable relationships, once again research questions, rather than hypotheses, are advanced. The Korean "family" orientation leads us to believe that Koreans would be less likely to terminate, but the Korean workplace can also be individually focused, making predictions difficult.

RQ 5: Comparing equitable and inequitable relationships, will Koreans and Americans differ in their willingness to terminate overreward *versus* underreward relationships?

RQ 6: Will Koreans' and Americans' willingness to terminate inequitable relationships (overreward vs. underreward) vary with the relationship dimension (task vs. social) in which inequity occurs?

## Method

### Participants

The U.S. sample consisted of 341 participants including 288 undergraduates and 53 working adults. The sample included 39.6 % males, 58.4 % females, and 2.1 % who did not indicate their sex. Of the 341 participants, 78.6 % were Caucasian, 7.5 % were African-American, 3.6 % were Asian American, 2.7 % were Hispanic, 0.9 % were Pacific Islander, 0.3 % were Native American, 2.4 % were Mixed, and 2.1 % were other ethnicities (fifteen did not indicate an ethnicity). Ages ranged from 18 to 62 years old ( $M = 24.48$ ,  $SD = 8.31$ ), with 57.3 % of the participants between the ages of 20 and 22. Nine participants did not denote their ages. When asked if they have a person who they identify as both a friend and coworker, in other words, a blended friend, 80.1 % of the 341 participants indicated that they did.

The Korean sample was collected in Korea and included 145 undergraduate students and 136 employed adults.<sup>1</sup> Here, ages ranged from 19 to 59 years old ( $M = 28.1$ ,  $SD = 7.56$ ), and more females ( $n = 169$ ) than males ( $n = 104$ ) participated (8 neglected to denote their gender). Of 172 participants who answered a question about whether they had a blended friend, 84.88 % indicated that they did.

**Design.** The design was a 2 (national culture: U.S. and Korea)  $\times$  2 (equity level: underreward and overreward)  $\times$  2 (relationship dimension: inequity in task and social dimensions). The questionnaires were originally written in English. Four Koreans fluent in English translated the vignettes and scales for the current study directly from the original instruments. Another several Koreans checked the translated version for its fluency and semantic meaning in Korean.

Participants from each culture received the questionnaires in their native language. All subjects initially received an equitable vignette followed by scales to establish a baseline for their responses to an equitable relationship. Following that was an inequitable (either overreward or

<sup>1</sup> Because many Korean undergraduate students do not have as much working experiences as U.S. undergraduate students, a greater number of Korean employed adults, compared to U.S. employed adults, were recruited to substantiate similarity between the Korean and U.S. samples for the topic (i.e., coworker friendship) of the current study.

underrewarded, not both) vignette, which was also followed by various scales. In total, each participant responded to two vignettes, with the equitable version first, followed by an inequitable depiction of the blended friendship. Each vignette described a relationship between the participant and a fictional, gender-neutral friend (Chris in the English version and Junghyun in the Korean version), who were portrayed as organizational peers. English versions of all vignettes are listed in Appendix A.

Equity was manipulated in three ways: by setting up the participant to receive less benefit than Chris (Junghyun in Korean version), more benefit than Chris or about the same benefit as Chris. In the underrewarded condition, participants read a vignette containing this sentence: “However, sometimes Chris can’t seem to get Chris’ part done and you end up doing the entire report. You never complain about helping Chris, but simply do the report and move on.” In the overrewarded condition, the vignette included, “However, sometimes you can’t seem to get your part done and Chris ends up doing the entire report. Chris never complains about helping you, but simply does the report and moves on.”

Relationship dimension was manipulated by setting the inequity in either the task dimension (e.g., projects in which the work was unevenly distributed) or in the social dimension (e.g., unequal sharing of the driving responsibilities for a shared hobby outside of work). The social dimension manipulation included this section: “Outside of work, you and Chris rollerblade together. You often spend weekends rollerblading together, and you also do other things together, like going out for a drink after work.” The task dimension manipulation included this section: “At work, you and Chris must jointly come up with a monthly budget report for your company’s supply closet. You are supposed to do an inventory of everything in the supply closet and Chris is supposed to do the math to figure out what needs to be replaced and how much the replacements will cost.” Relationship dimension was held constant across the equitable and inequitable vignettes given to each participant, so that a participant may have received *Social-Equitable*, *Social-Overreward* but not *Task-Equitable*, *Social-Underreward*.

**Procedure.** Undergraduate student participants completed the questionnaire in their regularly scheduled class times and working adults completed the questionnaire either in their workplaces or their homes. Undergraduate students received class or extra credit in exchange for their participation; working adults were thanked, but received no other compensation. Instructors collected undergraduate students’ completed questionnaires and gave them to one of the researchers (personally or by mail) and working adults mailed their completed questionnaires to the researchers.

### Measurement

Participants read the equitable version of the vignettes and then completed scales for satisfaction with the equitable relationship. The satisfaction scale as well as scales for intent to do nothing and willingness to terminate all followed the inequitable vignette. Scales measuring realism and fairness of the vignettes were administered following both inequitable and equitable vignettes. All scales were a Likert-type format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All items and their reliabilities are listed in Table 1. Table 2 shows correlations among satisfaction with the inequitable relationships, intent to do nothing about the inequitable relationships, and willingness to terminate the inequitable relationships.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted separately for American and Korean samples for each scale. Items that did not contribute to unidimensionality of their relevant scales were removed as indicated in Table 1. Manipulations checks were completed on perceptions of realism and fairness of the vignettes for both data sets.

Table 1: Measurement Items and Reliabilities.

		U.S.	Korea
	vignettes		
<b>Realism</b>			
1. A friendship like this could develop in real life.	Equitable	.91	.91
2. It is possible to have a coworker like Chris.			
3. I can imagine being in a friendship like this one.	Inequitable	.84	.86
4. The relationship with Chris could happen in real life.			
<b>Fairness</b>			
1. Chris is taking advantage of me.	Equitable	.81	.72
2. I am getting more benefits from the relationship.*			
3. Chris and I both get a similar amount of benefits from the relationship.*	Underreward	.83	.75
4. I am taking advantage of Chris.			
5. Chris is getting more benefits from the relationship.*	Overreward	.82	.71
<b>Satisfaction</b>			
1. I am very satisfied with this relationship.	Equitable	.85	.73
2. This relationship is good compared to most.			
3. Given the situation described, I would wish I hadn't gotten in this relationship.* (recoded)	Inequitable	.79	.69
4. This relationship meets my expectations for a friendship.			
5. I care for Chris very much.*			
6. There are no problems in this relationship.‡ (recoded)			
<b>Do Nothing</b>			
1. I would not change anything about this relationship	Inequitable	.89	.70
2. I would let the relationship ride as is for a while.			
3. I would wait and see what happens.			
4. I would leave it alone.**			
5. Confrontation is not worth the risk.**			
<b>Termination</b>			
1. I would end the friendship.	Inequitable	.84	.77
2. I would stop working with Chris			
3. I would quit my job.			
4. I would ask for a transfer.			
5. I would stop spending time with Chris outside of work.†			

† omitted from US survey (inequitable)

‡ omitted from US survey (both)

\* omitted from Korean survey (both)

\*\* omitted from Korean survey (equitable)

Table 2: Correlations among satisfaction with, preference for doing nothing about, and willingness to terminate the inequitable relationships.

Culture	Inequity Type	Relational Dimension		Satisfaction	Doing Nothing
US	Underreward	Social	Doing Nothing	.62**	
			Termination	-.35**	-.04
	Task	Social	Doing Nothing	.45**	
			Termination	-.25*	.11
	Overreward	Social	Doing Nothing	.55**	
			Termination	-.03	.28**
Task	Social	Doing Nothing	.52**		
		Termination	.14	.22	
Korea	Underreward	Social	Doing Nothing	.35**	
			Termination	-.17	.06
	Task	Social	Doing Nothing	.38**	
			Termination	-.03	.33**
	Overreward	Social	Doing Nothing	.45**	
			Termination	-.05	.16
Task	Social	Doing Nothing	.24*		
		Termination	.38**	.48**	

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

#### Manipulation Check

**Realism.** A one-sample t-test was performed to test participants' perceptions of the vignettes' realism. The comparison value was 4, or the midpoint of the scale. The test of the scale following the equitable vignette ( $M = 6.10$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) was significant,  $t(334) = 39.63$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .82$ . The test for the scale following the underreward vignette ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) was also significant,  $t(170) = 17.90$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .65$ , as was the test for the scale following the overreward vignette ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ),  $t(162) = 12.06$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .47$ , indicating all vignettes were realistic for the U.S. sample. The realism of the two vignettes was compared using a paired-samples t-test. Although both scales tested as quite realistic, the scale following the equitable vignette was significantly more realistic than the scale following the inequitable vignette ( $M = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $t(333) = 13.01$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .34$ .

Koreans viewed both vignettes as realistic as well. The test of the scale following the equitable vignette ( $M = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) was significant,  $t(277) = 27.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .73$ . The overreward vignette ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) was perceived to be realistic,  $t(143) = 5.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$  and the underreward vignette ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) was also perceived to be realistic,  $t(131) = 11.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .51$ . A paired-sample t-test was performed to compare the realism of the two vignettes. Like the Americans, Koreans saw the equitable vignette as more realistic than the inequitable vignette ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ),  $t(275) = 11.84$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .34$ .

**Fairness.** For the U.S. sample, paired-sample t-tests compared the fairness of the vignettes. The equitable vignette ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) was more fair than the underreward vignette ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = .98$ ),  $t(170) = 29.84$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .84$ . and than the overreward vignette. Degrees of freedom range from 61 to 87. ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ),  $t(163) = 27.52$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .82$ . When compared, the underreward and overreward vignettes were not significantly different,  $t(333) = .609$ ,  $p = .54$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ .

The fairness of the vignettes in the Korean data was also compared using paired-sample *t*-tests. The equitable vignette ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) was more fair than the underreward vignette ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(131) = 17.87$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .71$  and the overreward vignette ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ),  $t(143) = 19.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .73$ . When compared with the overreward vignette, the underreward vignette was not significantly different,  $t(274) = -.44$ ,  $p = .66$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ .<sup>2</sup>

*Comparisons of U.S. and Korea.* U.S. participants perceived the equitable situation to be more realistic ( $M = 6.10$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) than Korean participants did ( $M = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $t(611) = 3.74$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ . U.S. participants also perceived the overreward vignette to be more realistic ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) than Korean participants did ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ),  $t(305) = 3.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ . For underreward, there was also a significant difference between U.S. ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) and Korean participants ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $t(301) = 2.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ .

Korean participants ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) perceived the equitable situation to be less fair than U.S. participants ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ),  $t(611) = 3.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . However, Korean participants ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) also perceived the overreward situation to be more fair than did U.S. participants ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ),  $t(306) = -5.72$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ . Korean participants ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) and American participants ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) did not perceive the underrewarded situation differently,  $t(301) = -5.47$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . It seems that the fineness of fairness judgments differs between Korean and American participants in some cases.

## Results

### Overview

To test the hypothesis and the research questions, a three-way ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable (change in satisfaction, intent to do nothing, willingness to terminate). The hypothesis expected a main effect for type of inequity on change in satisfaction such that satisfaction would decrease more in the case of underreward than overreward. The six research questions all queried how Americans and Koreans would differ on type of inequity (underreward/overreward) and friendship dimension (task/social). In other words, the research questions focused on two- and three-way interaction effects among the factors.

### Relationship Satisfaction

A 2 (relationship dimension: social and task)  $\times$  2 (inequity type: underreward and overreward)  $\times$  2 (national culture: U.S. and Korea) ANOVA was conducted on reduction in satisfaction with the relationship when equity level changes. All three main effects were

<sup>2</sup> One-sample *t*-tests were performed to test perceptions of fairness of the vignettes. The comparison value was 4, or the midpoint of the scale; higher than four would indicate the vignette was fair, while lower than four would indicate it was unfair. U.S. participants viewed the equitable vignette as fair ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ),  $t(334) = 35.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .79$ . The inequitable vignettes were viewed as unfair. Following the inequitable vignette, the underreward scale scores ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) were significantly lower than the midpoint,  $t(170) = -21.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .74$ , and the overreward scale scores ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) were also significantly lower than the midpoint,  $t(163) = -17.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .66$ . When a paired-sample *t*-test was performed to compare the fairness of the equitable and the inequitable vignettes, the equitable vignette tested as more fair than the inequitable vignette,  $t(334) = 40.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .83$ .

Koreans also viewed the equitable vignette as fair and the inequitable vignettes as unfair. The scores of the equitable vignette ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) were significantly higher than the midpoint,  $t(277) = 25.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .70$ . Following the inequitable vignette, the underreward scale scores ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) were significantly lower than the midpoint,  $t(131) = -9.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .42$ , and the overreward scale scores ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) were also significantly lower than the midpoint,  $t(143) = -8.70$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .35$ . A paired-sample *t*-test showed that the equitable vignette was more fair than the inequitable vignette,  $t(275) = 26.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .72$ .

statistically significant. Pertaining to the hypothesis, the ANOVA revealed a greater reduction in satisfaction in an underreward situation ( $M = 1.96, SD = 1.44$ ) than in an overreward situation ( $M = 1.44, SD = 1.48$ ),  $F(1, 599) = 21.46, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$ . The data were consistent with the hypothesis, which predicted a greater reduction in an underreward than an overreward situation. See table 3 for equity level means and standard deviations. For relationship dimensions, a greater reduction in satisfaction was observed in the social dimension ( $M = 2.04, SD = 1.59$ ) than in the task dimension ( $M = 1.34, SD = 1.26$ ),  $F(1, 599) = 43.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$ . For culture, a greater reduction in satisfaction was observed among Koreans ( $M = 1.89, SD = 1.58$ ) than among Americans ( $M = 1.55, SD = 1.39$ ),  $F(1, 599) = 8.02, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$ . See Table 4 for relationship dimension means and standard deviations. These main effects were, however, qualified by interactions.

**Table 3: Means of Satisfaction for Equity Level and Culture.**

Culture	Underrewarded relationship		Overrewarded relationship	
	Satisfaction with equity	Satisfaction with inequity	Satisfaction with equity	Satisfaction with inequity
Korea	4.91 (1.02)	2.92 (1.00)	4.82 (1.15)	3.01 (1.16)
U.S.	5.19 (0.91)	3.25 (1.05)	5.12 (0.93)	4.00 (1.12)

Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Table 4.

*Means of Satisfaction for Relationship Dimension and Culture.*

Culture	Social dimension		Task dimension	
	Satisfaction with equity	Satisfaction with inequity	Satisfaction with equity	Satisfaction with inequity
Korea	5.25 (1.17)	2.73 (1.14)	4.42 (0.79)	3.24 (0.94)
U.S.	5.24 (0.93)	3.63 (1.14)	5.06 (0.90)	3.60 (1.16)

Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

**Interactions.** Addressing RQ1, significant interaction effects were observed for inequity type and culture,  $F(1, 599) = 6.78, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$ . Post-hoc comparisons of cell means indicate that the smallest reduction in relationship satisfaction was observed among Americans for underreward situations. More specifically, Americans ( $M_d = -1.13$ ) had lower reduction in satisfaction than Koreans ( $M_d = -1.79$ ) for overrewarding relationships, whereas Koreans ( $M_d = -2.00$ ) and Americans ( $M_d = -1.94$ ) did not significantly differ for underrewarding relationships. The interaction was also significant for relationship dimensions and culture,  $F(1, 599) = 29.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ . Post-hoc comparisons of cell means indicate that the greatest reduction in relationship satisfaction was observed among Koreans for the social dimension of their blended friendship. More specifically, when inequity occurred, Koreans showed a greater reduction in satisfaction in the social dimension ( $M_d = -2.53$ ) than in the task dimension ( $M_d = -1.17$ ), whereas Americans showed a similar level of reduction in satisfaction for both social ( $M_d = -$

1.62) and task ( $M_d = -1.48$ ) dimensions. Other interactions were not statistically significant. The interaction effects were not significant for relationship dimensions and inequity types,  $F(1, 599) = 1.38, p = .24, \eta^2 = .002$  nor (as queried in RQ2) for relationship dimensions, inequity types, and culture,  $F(1, 599) = 0.97, p = .33, \eta^2 = .001$ .

### **Intent to Do Nothing about the Inequity**

A 2 (relationship dimension: social and task)  $\times$  2 (inequity type: underreward and overreward)  $\times$  2 (culture: U.S. and Korea) ANOVA was conducted on intent to do nothing about the inequity. There was no significant main effect for relationship dimension,  $F(1, 603) = 3.68, p = .06, \eta^2 = .006$ . Intent to do nothing was not necessarily greater for the social dimension ( $M = 3.21, SD = 1.20$ ) than for the task dimension ( $M = 2.99, SD = 1.23$ ). For inequity type, however, there was a significant main effect,  $F(1, 603) = 9.67, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ . A greater intent to do nothing was observed among the underrewarded ( $M = 3.24, SD = 1.12$ ) than among the overrewarded ( $M = 2.97, SD = 1.29$ ). There was also a significant main effect for culture,  $F(1, 603) = 19.42, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$ . A greater intent to do nothing was observed among Koreans ( $M = 3.33, SD = 1.11$ ) than among Americans ( $M = 2.92, SD = 1.28$ ). When compared to the scale middle point, however, the mean score of Koreans on intent to do nothing ( $M = 3.33, SD = 1.11$ ) was significantly lower than 4,  $t(276) = -10.17, p < .01, \eta^2 = .27$ . Thus, the interpretation of the findings for intent to do nothing requires caution; comparisons can be made about social *versus* task dimension, overreward *versus* underreward, and Koreans *versus* Americans, while keeping in mind that across all these conditions the participants on the average disagreed with doing nothing about the inequitable relationships. If disagreement with doing nothing about the inequitable relationship indicates intention to do something about the relationship, the finding may be interpreted as greater intention to do something about the inequitable relationship when inequity occurs among the overrewarded rather than among the underrewarded, and among Americans rather than among Koreans.

To address RQ3, a significant interaction effect was observed for inequity types and culture,  $F(1, 603) = 10.54, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ . The cultural difference was observed for underreward situations, but not for overreward situations. Koreans were more likely to intend to do nothing about the underrewarded relationship ( $M = 3.64, SD = .90$ ) than about the overrewarded relationship ( $M = 3.03, SD = 1.20$ ), while Americans had the same level of intent to do nothing for the underrewarded ( $M = 2.93, SD = 1.18$ ) and overrewarded ( $M = 2.92, SD = 1.37$ ) relationships. Relationship dimension and culture also interacted, producing a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 603) = 9.39, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ . Post hoc comparisons showed that Americans ( $M = 2.68, SD = 1.28$ ) and Koreans ( $M = 3.38, SD = 1.04$ ) differed significantly in their reduction in intent to do nothing about the relationship with inequity in the task dimension, while no significant difference was observed between Koreans ( $M = 3.27, SD = 1.16$ ) and Americans ( $M = 3.16, SD = 1.23$ ) for the social dimension. The interaction between relationship dimension and inequity type was not significant,  $F(1, 603) = 0.02, p = .88, \eta^2 = .00$ . The interaction among relationship dimension, inequity type, and culture, as queried in RQ4, was also not significant,  $F(1, 603) = 0.26, p = .61, \eta^2 = .00$ .

### **Willingness to Terminate the Relationship**

A 2 (relationship dimension: social and task)  $\times$  2 (inequity type: underreward and overreward)  $\times$  2 (culture: U.S. and Korea) ANOVA was conducted on willingness to terminate the relationship. There was a non-significant main effect for relationship dimension,  $F(1, 603) = 0.09, p = .77, \eta^2 = .00$ . However, there was a significant main effect for inequity type,  $F(1, 603) = 23.19, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$ , such that underrewarded individuals ( $M = 2.76, SD = 1.19$ ) were more

willing to terminate the relationship than overrewarded individuals ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ). There was also a significant main effect for culture,  $F(1, 603) = 66.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Koreans ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) were more willing than Americans ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) to terminate their inequitable relationship. This finding should be interpreted cautiously because all means were lower than the mid point (4) of the 7-point scale, indicating most participants disagreed with termination as a solution to the inequity problem. This main effect was also qualified by interaction effects.

There was a significant interaction effect for relationship dimension and inequity type,  $F(1, 603) = 5.00$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . In the social situation, underrewarded ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) and overrewarded individuals ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) did not differ, while in the task situation, underrewarded individuals ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) were more willing to terminate than overrewarded individuals ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). As an answer to RQ5, the interaction between inequity type and culture was not significant,  $F(1, 603) = 0.14$ ,  $p = .71$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ . The interaction among relationship dimension, inequity type, and culture, as addressed in RQ6 was also not significant,  $F(1, 603) = 0.19$ ,  $p = .66$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ . Finally, the interaction was not significant for relationship dimension and culture,  $F(1, 603) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .12$ ,  $\eta^2 = .004$ .

### Discussion

The current study investigated cultural differences in responses to inequity in different settings. Previous cross-cultural research on equity has focused on choices between equity and equality principles in reward allocation. This study focuses on the changes in members' satisfaction with equitable *versus* underrewarding or overrewarding relationships, and members' tendencies to do nothing about inequity or terminate an inequitable relationship. The likely responses of Susan to her American coworkers and Young Hee to her Korean coworkers are discussed in the next sections. Results summaries and implications follow for change in satisfaction from equitable to inequitable relationships, intent to do nothing about an inequitable relationship, and willingness to terminate an inequitable relationship.

#### Change in Relationship Satisfaction

In general, satisfaction did decrease between the equitable situation and both types of inequitable situations. The cross-cultural differences in satisfaction decrease were observed only for overreward, but not for underreward. The Koreans' satisfaction decreased more than the Americans' when they were overrewarded. In other words, Koreans were less satisfied than Americans with being overrewarded. Another way of examining the interaction pattern indicates that Koreans' satisfaction decrease level did not differ for underreward and for overreward, while Americans' satisfaction decreased to a greater extent for underreward than for overreward. Previous findings with American participants have shown that while inequity can generate discomfort, people are more uncomfortable with being underrewarded than with being overrewarded (Hegtvedt, 1990). The current research shows that such findings may not generalize to people in other cultures. For Koreans, being overrewarded may indicate relational disharmony as much as being underrewarded does.

Overall, a greater reduction in satisfaction occurred in the social dimension than the task dimension. Compared to Americans, Koreans had greater reduction in satisfaction with inequitable relationships in the social dimension. Americans' and Koreans' reduction in satisfaction did not differ with inequity in the task dimension, however. Alternate interpretation would suggest that while Americans' satisfaction decrease level did not differ between the social dimension and the task dimension, Koreans' satisfaction decreased to a greater extent for social dimension than for task dimension.

The cultural difference in the social dimension of inequitable relationship may indicate that Koreans and Americans may have different expectations about upholding interpersonal harmony in friendships. Americans may not have been as dissatisfied in the social dimension because their expectations for people to maintain interpersonal harmony were not as high as the Koreans'. On the other hand, the lack of cultural difference in the task dimension may be explained by the previous research findings indicating that the Korean workplace has indeed become more Westernized and expectant of proportional rewards (Lee, 1998-99), such that both Americans and Koreans had similar views on conduct in the task dimension of the coworker relationship. An additional consideration toward this point is universally accepted behaviors in organizations across cultures. Unlike interpersonal or social interactions, behaviors related to tasks in organizations are more likely to be determined by economic criteria (Smith & Bond, 1999). Accordingly, cultural differences may be less in the task dimension than the social dimension.

As for the relationship between satisfaction level with inequity and intention to do nothing about inequity, overall, the finding shows that the more satisfied individuals were, the more likely they were to do nothing. This makes intuitive sense because when individuals are satisfied with a relationship, there is no need to do anything.

### **Intent to Do Nothing about the Inequity**

For doing nothing about the inequity, the participants' overall intention was lower than the scale midpoint, 4, which may indicate that the participants did not necessarily prefer doing nothing about the inequity. Broadly interpreted, this may also indicate that they intended to do something about the inequity. For the moderating role of culture in the relationship between inequity types and intent to do nothing, the findings showed that Americans had weaker intent to do nothing (i.e., stronger intent to do something) about the relationship with inequity in the task dimension than Koreans, whereas no cultural difference was found for the social dimension. This result might be explained by their different cultural orientations. American culture is characterized by individualism which highly values personal achievement (Oyserman et al., 2002). If inequity occurs in the task dimension, it will negatively influence personal achievement in the workplace. It may be more acceptable for Americans to cause a fuss by doing something about inequity. Accordingly, Americans may have more motivation to do something and feel justified in doing something to restore the equity in their relationship with coworkers.

With an overrewarding relationship, Koreans and Americans did not differ in their intent to do nothing. On the other hand, Koreans had greater intent to do nothing than Americans in an underrewarding relationship. Alternatively, Americans, compared to Koreans, had stronger intent to do something about the underrewarding relationship. Koreans' greater intent to do nothing about underreward may indicate that for Koreans doing something in an underreward situation could disrupt the social harmony, while for Americans, the need for social harmony is not as prominent. Although Koreans showed a greater decrease in satisfaction (i.e., internal feeling) for underreward than for overreward, they may be less likely to do something overt about underreward than about overreward. Considering that Korean people emphasize indirect communication and rely on the other party's sensitivity and ability to capture the under-the-surface meaning and to understand implicit meaning (Yum, 2000), Koreans may be more likely to do nothing in spite of the decrease in satisfaction. Americans, who rely more on direct and candid communication to get what they need, may not be shy about "rocking the boat" when they are being underrewarded.

Finally, in the task dimension, Koreans' intent to do nothing was positively correlated with willingness to terminate in both over- and underrewarding relationships. For Americans

overrewarded in the social dimension, intent to do nothing was positively correlated with willingness to terminate. The positive correlation between intention to do nothing and willingness to terminate may indicate that doing nothing may underlie one of various ways to terminate the relationship: simply letting it end without confrontation. The positive correlation occurring in the task dimensions for Koreans also shows cultural differences in how people handle inequity in social *versus* task dimensions.

### **Willingness to terminate the relationship**

Most of the participants did not seem to endorse termination as a solution to the problem of inequity. This finding may be interpreted as willingness to continue the inequitable relationships. Despite this, when compared, underrewarded individuals were more willing than overrewarded individuals to terminate their relationships. This bore out more specifically in a task situation, where underrewarded individuals were more willing to terminate than overrewarded individuals. There was no difference in the social setting. This may indicate people are more comfortable ending a work relationship than a social relationship, keeping in mind that no participant seemed very likely to terminate the relationship.

For the relationship between satisfaction level with inequitable relationships and willingness to terminate inequitable relationships, it was found that when underrewarded in both social and task dimensions, Americans were less likely to terminate when they were more satisfied. Overrewarded Koreans in the task dimension were more likely to terminate the more satisfied they were. This may be due to Koreans' inner conflict paralleling the disparate descriptions of their workplaces. They may recognize the benefits of being overrewarded, yet also feel the need to maintain harmonious relationships and not look selfish. They may also feel some guilt at being overrewarded, as suggested by Walster et al. (1973).

### *Future Directions and Limitations*

This study was limited by the use of vignettes. These may not have allowed for the most realistic responses. However, this approach is recommended as a way of dealing with equity questions in cross-cultural settings (Leung & Bond, 1984) in part because it allows for control of the magnitude of the inequity. Because inequity is in the eye of the beholder, it was necessary to create a similar inequitable situation so that participants were responding to similar levels of inequity rather than widely disparate personal experiences of inequity (e.g., broken romantic relationship vs. borrowing a stapler too often).

The measurement used for willingness to terminate the relationship was effective, but it did not provide us with information as to what would cause people to terminate an inequitable relationship. In the future, it would be interesting to use open-ended questioning to find out what strength or type of inequity would cause people to terminate their relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Considering both the increasing amount of time spent in the workplace and the increase in cross-cultural makeup of organizations, (Evans, 2000; Fullerton, 1997; Johnston & Packer, 1987), it is increasingly likely for people from different cultures to interact within organizations, forming interpersonal relationships (e.g., friendship). Susan and Young Hee may eventually run into each other in the same workplace and have to figure out how to interact. These relationships may take on multiple dimensions, involving both task and social aspects, and increasing the difficulties of dealing with inequities as they occur. Increasing the knowledge base about these types of relationships can aid organizations and their members in their day-to-day operations.

## **Appendix A. Vignettes (English Version)**

### **Equitable - Task**

You and Chris are both friends and coworkers. You work in identical positions in the same department of the same company. Not only do you work together, you are also friends outside of the workplace.

At work, you and Chris must jointly come up with a monthly budget report for your company's supply closet. You are supposed to do an inventory of everything in the supply closet and Chris is supposed to do the math to figure out what needs to be replaced and how much the replacements will cost. This arrangement seems to work out fine. You do your part and Chris does Chris's part.

### **Underreward - Task**

You and Chris are both friends and coworkers. You work in identical positions in the same department of the same company. Not only do you work together, you are also friends outside of the workplace.

At work, you and Chris must jointly come up with a monthly budget report for your company's supply closet. You are supposed to do an inventory of everything in the supply closet and Chris is supposed to do the math to figure out what needs to be replaced and how much the replacements will cost. However, sometimes Chris can't seem to get Chris' part done and you end up doing the entire report. You never complain about helping Chris, but simply do the report and move on.

### **Overreward - Task**

You and Chris are both friends and coworkers. You work in identical positions in the same department of the same company. Not only do you work together, you are also friends outside of the workplace.

At work, you and Chris must jointly come up with a monthly budget report for your company's supply closet. You are supposed to do an inventory of everything in the supply closet and Chris is supposed to do the math to figure out what needs to be replaced and how much the replacements will cost. However, sometimes you can't seem to get your part done and Chris ends up doing the entire report. Chris never complains about helping you, but simply does the report and moves on.

### **Equitable – Social\***

You and Chris are both friends and coworkers. You work in identical positions in the same department of the same company. Not only do you work together, you are also friends outside of the workplace.

Outside of work, you and Chris rollerblade together. You often spend time on the weekends rollerblading just for fun and you also do other things together, like going out for a drink after work. You take turns picking each other up to go to the park, which is halfway between your houses. By the same token, you both take turns bringing water and snacks for after your workout.

### **Overreward – Social\***

You and Chris are both friends and coworkers. You work in identical positions in the same department of the same company. Not only do you work together, you are also friends outside of the workplace.

Outside of work, you and Chris rollerblade together. You often spend time on the weekends rollerblading just for fun and you also do other things together, like going out for a drink after work. You often ask Chris to pick you up and drive to a park that is closer to your

house, even though it's quite far out of Chris's way and Chris has to drive through a lot of traffic to get there. Not only that, but you usually depend on Chris to bring water and snacks for after your workout.

**Underreward – Social\***

You and Chris are both friends and coworkers. You work in identical positions in the same department of the same company. Not only do you work together, you are also friends outside of the workplace.

Outside of work, you and Chris rollerblade together. You often spend time on the weekends rollerblading just for fun and you also do other things together, like going out for a drink after work. Chris often asks you to drive and go to a park that is near Chris's house, even though it's quite far out of your way and you have to drive through a lot of traffic to get there. Not only that, but Chris usually depends on you to bring water and snacks for after the workout. \*For the social dimension vignettes in the Korean version, "mountain-climbing" was substituted for "rollerblading" in the English version, because "rollerblading" is far less common than "mountain-climbing" in Korea.

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